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AGAINST MI
12 SPORTS



Pak wants Rahul as PM to weaken Govt: Modi



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by BJP leaders during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Anand, Gujarat on Thursday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ AHMEDABAD/NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday dubbed the Congress party a "disciple" of Pakistan, and targeted Rahul Gandhi saying the neighbouring country was eager to make the 'shehzada' of the grand old party India's next Prime Minister as the country's enemies want a weak Government in the neighbourhood. Modi's comments in an election rally in Gujarat,

linking Congress with Pakistan came a day after Chaudhry Fawad Hussain, a former Minister in Imran Khan's Cabinet in Pakistan, reportedly shared a video featuring Rahul on his social media handle and praised him. "Pakistan is crying because Congress is dying here. You all must have learnt that Pakistani leaders are now praying for Congress. Pakistan is eager to make 'shehzada' (referring to

Rahul) the next PM. This is not surprising because we already know that Congress is Pakistan's 'murid' (follower). The partnership between Pakistan and Congress has now been exposed completely. It shows that the country's enemies want a weak Government in India, not a strong one...A weak Government which was there at the time of 26/11 Mumbai terror attack. They want a corrupt Government which

was there before 2014. But Modi's strong Government neither bows down nor does it stop," Modi said in a rally in Anand in Gujarat. The PM came down more and said unlike in the past when Congress was in power, the "tyres of Pakistan's terror have got punctured" now. "A country which used to export terror in the past, is now struggling to import 'atta' (flour). The hands which used to hold bombs are now holding 'bheekh ka katora' (begging bowl)," he said. People across the world are now saying that India is a global bright spot. India is seen as a 'vishwa bandhu' (global friend) who can resolve conflicts between two countries, Modi said. The PM also reiterated that Congress wants to change India's Constitution to provide reservation of Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Classes (OBC) communities to Muslims. "Congress wants to give reservation to Muslims, the party's favourite vote bank. For that, they want to change the Constitution. I challenge Congress to give in writing that they will not change the Constitution to give reservation to Muslims on religious basis," he said.

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Not at home in Amethi, RaGa may try Rae Bareilly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the suspense over Congress nominees from Amethi and Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, party sources indicated that Rahul Gandhi is likely to contest from the seat he lost last time and face sitting BJP MP and Union Minister Smriti Irani. With Friday being the last date of filing of nominations, the party is expected to announce its candidates from the two prestigious constituencies late at night. Sources said the party has started making preparations for the nomination filing in both the seats in Uttar Pradesh, which have been traditionally held by members of the Gandhi-Nehru family and revealed that the entire Gandhi family, including sitting MP of Rae Bareilly Sonia Gandhi and party chief Mallikarjun

Kharge, is scheduled to travel in Uttar Pradesh in a chartered plane. They added that Rahul is the most likely choice of the party for Amethi which he lost to Irani in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Sources also said since Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has declined to contest from Rae Bareilly, a grandson of former Congress leader and Indira Gandhi's aunt Sheila Kaul may be fielded from Rae Bareilly, earlier represented by Sonia. Sonia has called it a day for electoral politics and has been elected as a member of Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan. People and loyals associated with the Gandhi family are already in Amethi and neighbouring Rae Bareilly and are believed to have prepared the nomination documents for both Rahul as well as Priyanka.

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BJP denies ticket to WFI ex-chief, names his son

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Ending weeks of speculation, the BJP on Thursday denied ticket to sitting MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh who has been embroiled in a sexual harassment controversy and fielded his son Karan Bhushan Singh from Kaiserganj in Uttar Pradesh. For the first time since 2009, the BJP dropped its heavyweight leader and sitting MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh from Kaiserganj. The former president of Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) is currently facing allegations of sexual harassment levelled against him by six women wrestlers. Karan is likely to file his nomination on May 3. The move retains the seat's contest within the family highlighting the influence of the Thakur leader and six-time MP in the region and the party. The party also named Dinesh Pratap Singh as its candidate from Raebareilly, a Gandhi family bastion which has been won by former Congress president Sonia Gandhi for five consecutive times. Sonia, who won from the Gandhi family bastion five consecutive times, was elected to the Rajya Sabha unopposed from Rajasthan earlier this year. The deadline to file nominations for Amethi and Rae Bareilly is on Friday. These



The BJP gives a party ticket to Karan Bhushan Singh, the son of former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Singh

seats are going to polls in the fifth phase, on May 20. Karan Bhushan is the youngest son of Brij Bhushan. Born in 1990, Karan is presently the president of the Uttar Pradesh Wrestling Association. Previously, Karan was the senior vice president of the UP wrestling association. Karan Bhushan is a national-level double-trap shooter. He holds a law degree besides doing a business management course in Australia. He will be making his debut in electoral politics this time.

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Maliwal cries foul as L-G sacks 223 DCW 'illegal' staff

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

With its topmost leader and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal still in Tihar, the AAP has received yet another blow as the Women and Child Development (WCD) Department of the Delhi Government has terminated the services of 52 "illegally" appointed contractual employees of Delhi Commission for Women (DCW). Earlier, Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on April 29, issued an order to discontinue the services of 223 contractual employees from the DCW, calling their appointment illegal. The termination has been carried out on the basis of a report submitted by a committee way back in June, 2017. Earlier, an order issued on April 29 said that the WCD Department had terminated the services of 223 contractual staff, but the department on Thursday issued a statement saying it had directed for the termination of 52 such employees.

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Clandestine 'dole surveys' make poll panel see red



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Afraid controversy over freebies promised by the political parties in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission (EC) took "serious view of activities by political parties and candidates seeking details of voters under the guise of various surveys for their proposed beneficiary schemes" and termed such activities as "corrupt practice of bribery under Section 123(1) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951". In an advisory issued to all national and State level parties, the commission has asked them to immediately cease any

activities "that involve registering individuals for post-election beneficiary-oriented schemes through any advertisements/ survey/App." The advisory came ahead of the third phase of the Lok Sabha Elections 2024, slated for May 7. The commission has directed all District Election Officers to take appropriate actions against any such advertisements within the statutory provisions. The commission noted that during the ongoing elections has come across instances where some political parties and candidates have been engaging in activities that blur the lines between legitimate surveys and partisan efforts to register

individuals for beneficiary-oriented schemes and individual benefits under the guise of conducting surveys or creating awareness about the existing schemes of the Government or creating awareness about the party manifesto regarding prospective individual benefit schemes etc. Highlighting the possible "quid-pro-quo arrangement", the commission said the act of inviting or calling upon voters to register for post-election benefits "may create an impression of the requirement of one-to-one transactional relationship between the elector and the proposed benefit". This also has the potential to generate quid-pro-quo arrangements for voting in a particular way thereby leading to inducement, the poll body added. It added that the potential of quid pro quo for voting and inducements amounts to bribery/corrupt practice. In this regard, the Election Commission directed all District Election Officers to take appropriate actions against any such advertisements within the statutory provisions namely Section 127A of the Representation of People's Act, 1951, 123 (1) of the Representation of People's Act, 1951, and Section 171 (B) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

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Start training cops for new criminal laws' rollout: Centre



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry has said the three new criminal laws, which will be rolled out across India from July 1, are a transition from the colonial legacies towards a system of justice based on the principle of access to justice by all, and has sought the help of all States to train the policemen for their effective implementation. In a communication to all the States and Union Territories (UTs), the Home Ministry also said many new provisions, synchronised with modern-day times and contemporary technologies, were incorporated in the new criminal laws and their aim is to bring an era of ease of policing and ease of

justice. The new laws are the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Act. The laws will replace the colonial-era Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872 respectively. The new laws aim at providing speedy justice to the citizens of the country and will strengthen the judicial and court management system. "The new laws are a transition from the colonial legacies towards a system of justice, based on the principle of access to justice by all... It is the endeavour of the government of India to reach out to all ranks of police and prison officers in the country and make them aware of the positive and advanced changes so as to equip them with the basic knowledge and understanding of various new provisions, which will help them in implementing the same in right earnest and with confidence," the Home Ministry said in its communication. To fulfil this objective, the Home Ministry said it has been striving to educate the police and prison officers about the new laws. The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) has developed the training of trainers' module and various other training programmes for different levels of police and prison personnel on the new criminal laws.

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Biden brands India 'xenophobic' along with China, Japan

PTI ■ WASHINGTON



US President Joe Biden has called two of his QUAD partners — India and Japan — and two of his adversaries — Russia and China — "xenophobic" nations, asserting that none of these countries, unlike the United States, welcome immigrants. "This election is about freedom, America and democracy. That's why I badly need you. You know, one of the reasons why our economy is growing is because of you and many others. Why? Because we welcome immigrants," Biden told his supporters at a fundraiser here on Wednesday evening. "We look to — the reason — look, think about it. Why is China stalling so badly economically? Why is Japan having trouble? Why is Russia? Why is India? Because they're xenophobic. They don't want immigrants," Biden, the presumptive candidate of the Democratic Party, said. "Immigrants are what make us strong. Not a joke. That's not hyperbole, because we have an influx of workers who want to be here and want to contribute," the president said at the Democratic Party fundraiser. India and Japan are members of QUAD — a four-member strategic security dialogue that also includes the US and Australia. Biden hosted Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a State Visit last year while Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited the White House last month for an official visit.

Tiny feet waltz back to school with innocent confidence

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

It was just another start of the day for the school going toddlers and young children on Thursday who a day earlier had been evacuated from their classrooms following a bomb scare across over 100 schools of the Delhi NCR. In the schools which resumed, children appeared to be more confident than their parents when they exchanged the routine 'tata; bye-bye' greetings. Several schools, however, decided to remain closed as part of security measures and a few of them observed a low attendance. The Pioneer reporters visited more than a dozen schools across the

national Capital and observed that students were back to school in their school buses, private vans or parents' pick drop facility. Principal of Kendriya Vidyalaya in Sadiq Nagar, Mamta Singh said, "Our attendance today has not dropped and students are also feeling safe and secure and it is our responsibility to ensure the security of the students". School management had assured parents on Wednesday itself that there is no need to worry. We didn't get anything on our official email ID," she added. The parents came to drop students off at school just like on a normal day without any fears. On Wednesday, 131 schools received bomb threats via email, which led to mass evacuation and panic in the schools of Delhi and Noida.



Photo: Samar Pandey/Pioneer

Ajit Singh, who came to drop his children at Sarvodaya Vidyalaya in Keshav Puram in north Delhi area said, "It is just like any other day, and he as a parent was not

scared at all." He further added that this was only a way to create panic. Sadina Khatoun, a mother of two children, came to drop her

Hoax aimed at mass panic: FIR

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police Special Cell in its FIR registered revealed that the perpetrators of the hoax bomb threat letters received by nearly 200 Delhi schools wanted to "create mass panic and disturb public order. FIR states that the movement of these units to the schools "resulted in massive inconvenience," according to the source. The FIR has been registered at Special Cell Police Station under IPC sections 505 (2) (statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes),

507 (criminal intimidation by an anonymous communication), and 120 (B) (punishment of criminal conspiracy). According to police sources, the investigation will be done by the Counter Intelligence Team Special Cell. The IFSO unit is also trying to find out the origin from where the mail was sent, till now the connection to Russia (IP address) has been revealed as the domain of the email is "mail.ru". The investigating agency is also probing the angle of joint conspiracy between China and ISI to ascertain if there is a larger conspiracy at work in the matter.

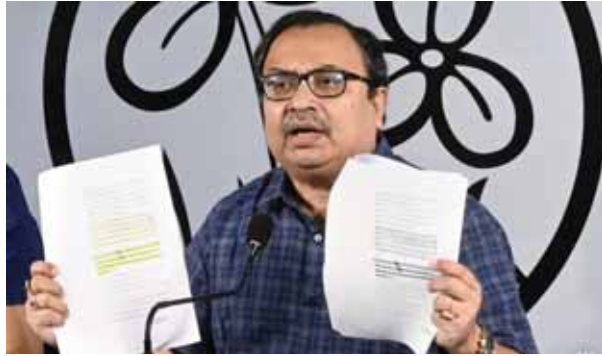
children at the Delhi MCD Primary School in Sukhdev Kunj and expressed that she was not scared and even other students have also turned up in the school. Several schools also sent messages early in the morning to parents not to send their children to school whereas a majority of parents were concerned after the bomb threats. While talking to some parents outside the school, they looked concerned, "My daughter's school did not receive any threat email and school has also convinced the parents about the security of the kids but still as a mother our concern is obvious," said Divya Singh, mother of a class 4 student in The Indian School, Sadiq Nagar, New Delhi.

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TMC, BJP LS candidates from North Kolkata sponsored by saffron outfit: Kunal Ghosh

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Senior Trinamool Congress leader Kunal Ghosh who on Wednesday was removed as party general secretary for jointly hosting a social programme with BJP's Lok Sabha candidate Tapas Roy created a flutter as much in the TMC as in Bengal politics saying there were two BJP nominees contesting from North Kolkata — one was Tapas Roy and the other was Sudip Bandopadhyay who despite being the official TMC candidate was actually being sponsored by the saffron outfit — and that the Bengal Government had information about the school teachers' recruitment scam. "I have nothing to say about the party's decision to remove me as the general secretary ... my concern is only about my party's fate which is why I have to tell the TMC supporters to come out and vote with open mind with the special consideration that they have two BJP candidates contesting from North Kolkata seat" apparently indicating Tapas Roy and Sudip Bandopadhyay. Incidentally Bandopadhyay the TMC's leader in Lok Sabha who is known for his proximity to South Block has not been in good terms with Ghosh and other leaders of North Kolkata. In fact his opponent Tapas Roy left the TMC little more than a month ago and joined the saffron outfit to get nominated for that party opposite Bandopadhyay. Earlier Ghosh was removed from his post after he joined Roy in a programme and called him a "true mass leader" former the dais. Roy a former TMC Minister who holds Bandopadhyay responsible for the raids conducted by the Enforcement Directorate in his house is likely to give the Trinamool Congress a tough challenge from a seat which was once held by late Congress and subsequently TMC leader and former Union Minister Ajit Panja. While the TMC has fielded Sudip Bandopadhyay from North Kolkata Roy is contesting on a BJP ticket opposite him. The Congress on the other hand has nominated its senior leader and Rajya Sabha Member Pradip Bhattacharya. Insofar as Ghosh's statement is



concerned it tends to come as big blow to its leadership it could not have come at a worse time than this when the Mamata Banerjee Government is facing the toughest challenge of its existence in power post the recruitment, ration, cattle and coal scams that have seen a number of its senior leaders including ministers and legislators going to jail. Apart from attacking Bandopadhyay, the rebel TMC leader also said that the TMC Government had information about the teachers' recruitment scam. "The party was well aware of the scam ... that money for school jobs were being collected in the name of Partha Chatterjee way before 2021," Ghosh said adding there were ministers in the Mamata Banerjee Cabinet who were a part of the recruitments scam. "I know a big shot in the Cabinet who was a party to the scam and

who is now roaming about holding his head high instead of being in jail," he told a Bengali television channel adding that there were many people who had collected money for jobs. Recently 25,753 school teachers and non-teaching staff lost their jobs after the Calcutta High cancelled the entire panel on account of the appointment procedure being non-transparent and upon the School Service Commission's failure to furnish the OMR sheets for the entire lot of examinees. Incidentally the High Court is hearing more such cases involving the fate of 25-30,000 teachers in primary level. When asked whether he would continue to remain in the TMC, he said he would till he could before adding, "if for my clean statements I am thrown out of the party like I was thrown out as the spokesperson and general secretary I will continue as a supporter." When asked to comment on Ghosh's statements most TMC leaders remained tightlipped citing their busy electoral schedules. When asked to comment rising CPI(M) face Minakshi Mukherjee said that there was nothing new in Ghosh's statement as "whole Bengal knows that Mamata Banerjee is a creation of RSS and she and Narendra Modi have a big understanding."

BJP dividing people in name of religion, says Omar Abdullah

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and Vice President of the National Conference Omar Abdullah on Thursday accused the star campaigners of the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) of harping on the religion bandwagon to divide the people. He said attempts are being made to spread hatred in this country and that too by the party whose leaders, including its PM (Narendra Modi), never get tired of saying that he (the prime minister) represents all 140 crore Indians. Interacting with the media after filing his nomination papers in the office of the Returning Officer in Baramulla Omar said the Election Commission should take action against the BJP. Responding to a question on Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's comment that cow slaughter will increase if Congress comes to power, Abdullah said the Election Commission should take action against the BJP.



"I do not know why they have a free run from the Election Commission to use religion in the polls. Others are told that they cannot use religion in the elections under the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) for either seeking votes or pitting people against each other," he said. Omar said, "The BJP's star campaigners not only use religion but attempts are also made to divide the people, be it in the name of 'mangalsutra' or land or cow slaughter. Unfortunately, attempts are being made to spread hatred in this country and that too by the party whose leaders, including its PM

(Narendra Modi), never get tired of saying that he (the prime minister) represents all 140 crore Indians. Omar was referring to Modi's allegations at an election rally that if the Congress came to power, it would redistribute the wealth of people to Muslims. "If that is so, then these statements used to spread hatred, especially against the 14 percent Muslim population, are very unfortunate," he said. The National Conference Vice-President filed the nomination papers for a Lok Sabha election after 20 years. He was a member of the 14th Lok Sabha from

2004-2009. "It is also after 10 years that I have filed nomination papers for any election. This tells you about the situation of democracy in J-K. The last assembly elections took place in 2014 and now for 10 years, there have been no assembly elections," he added. The Baramulla Lok Sabha seat is set for a close contest between Omar Abdullah and Chairman of the Peoples' Conference Sajad Lone. PDP has fielded former Rajya Sabha MP Mir Fayaz from the seat. The last date for filing nominations from the seat is May 3, while the polling is scheduled to take place on May 20. Asked about the NC's stand on the issue of the restoration of Article 370, Abdullah said his party's stand has always been very clear against the decision on Article 370. "We are seeking votes from the people against those decisions. It is not that we are alone. Many of our friends are also fighting this fight. God willing, the number of such friends will increase slowly," said Abdullah.

Woman staffer files complaint against Bengal Governor

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

In a damaging development a woman employee of the Governor's House in Kolkata has alleged inappropriate behaviour by Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose. The incident took place on Thursday when the woman approached the nearby Hare Street Police Station alleging she had been misbehaved by the Governor, sources said. In her complaint lodged with the

police she said that "she has been working at the Raj Bhavan since 2019 in various temporary posts ... But recently she was transferred to a particular department ... the Governor allegedly made some proposals to her last week which she ignored ... but on Thursday she was again called by the him ... sensing trouble she requested her supervisor to accompany her ... but when they reached his chamber the Governor asked the supervisor to leave ...

subsequently she was misbehaved against ... following which she lodged this complaint," a police official said. However as the Governor of a State enjoyed some immunities the police were in a fix regarding what was to be done, sources said adding the police administration were taking legal advice regarding the complaint. All the political outfits remained tightlipped on the issue.

How voting percentages of Phase I, II LS polls went up suddenly, Sena(UBT) asks ECI

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Opposition Shiv Sena (UBT) on Thursday questioned the Election Commission of India (ECI) as to why and how the voting percentages of the Phase I and Phase II Lok Sabha polls "went up all of a sudden and that too after so many days". Alluding to the marked 6 to 7 per cent increase in the voting percentages from initial polling percentages released by the ECI initially, Shiv Sena (UBT) spokesperson Sanjay Raut demanded to know from the poll body as to where was the need for it to revise upwards the polling percentages after giving what was said to be the final polling percentages earlier on the web sites of Maharashtra Chief Electoral Officer and ECI websites. "After 11 days from the Phase I (April 19) and a week after the Phase II (April 26) polling, the ECI has released the voting percentages which are much higher than the live data given on the polling dates. Where have these extra votes come from?" Raut asked. Raut said that the voting percentages had changed by 7 to 10 percent in many constituencies, though in Nagpur the percentage had reduced by some percentage points.



"After the low voter turnout which had rattled the ruling BJP, the ECI has now released the increased polling percentages. The figures have aroused suspicion in the minds of the Opposition political parties as well as the people across the country," Raut said. "After the low voter turnout, many people had expressed concerns over the considerable drop in the voting percentages as compared with the polling percentage in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls," the Sena (UBT) spokesperson said. "The fact that the ECI's latest polling percentage data has risen in just 11 days of the first phase of LS polls has nearly equaled the 2019 poll tally has given rise to several questions," Raut said. "We are in a digital India and we are in a digital India. Why

did the ECI take 11 days to give final voting percentages? We can understand a difference of half or one percent increase or decrease in the final calculations. But what we are seeing is a 7 to 10 percent increase in the polling percentages. How can there be such a big increase in the polling percentages? This is difficult to comprehend," Raut said. The ECI had earlier pegged the polling percentage in the first phase polling held on April 19 at 60 per cent and the second phase of the polling held on April 26 at 60.96 per cent. As per the revised data released by the ECI, the voter turnout has gone up from the earlier 60 per cent to 66.14 per cent in the first phase and from the earlier 60.96 per cent to 66.7 per cent in the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls.

Controversy over Kerala murder suspect takes curious turn

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The controversy over Abdul Raheem of Kerala who has been sentenced to death punishment by a Saudi Arabian court in connection with the murder of a 15-year-old paralysis stricken boy took a curious turn by Thursday as certain media houses and self-styled human rights activists started threatening Nusrat Jahan who exposed certain grey areas in the efforts to save the youth. It was widely reported in Kerala media that the intervention of these human rights activists has succeeded in the victim's family members pardoning Raheem and expressing their willingness to accept the blood money of Rs 34 crore as per Sharia law. The Kerala society came together and collected Rs 34 crore through crowd funding which was praised by the secular, socialist and liberal society of the State as the Real Story of Kerala.. Nusrat Jahan announced through her social media post that the claims of certain people that the Saudi Court has agreed to pardon Raheem if he pays blood money was not true. "No court order has been issued in this regard. The family of Raheem got a mail from



the embassy attaché and lawyer of the victim. The Shura court has to take a final decision after contacting each member of the victim's family. The team that claims to work for saving Raheem has failed to show any communication from Saudi Government but they collected Rs 34 crore as blood money," said Nusrat Jahan. She said Saudi Sharia has fixed that no more than 5 million Saudi Riyals (Rs 11.5 million) should be collected as blood money while the team from Kerala has already collected Rs 34 crore and this is a dubious act. According to Nusrat, no final word has come out of the Saudi Court or the Royal Government about the fate of appeal. "There are many unanswered questions in this case. It is not for the embassy staff to issue orders to the family of Raheem. There are officials posted as diplomats who are entrusted with such responsibilities," she said.

Start...

From Page 1 Integration has also been completed with 'Integrated Government Online Training' (iGOT) portal to make these courses available to police and prison personnel. These training modules have been shared by BPR&D with all states and UTs, enabling them to conduct training programmes in their police training institutes. "To further augment and strengthen the exercise of educating our police and prison officers (of all ranks -- aiming at reaching the last person in the hierarchical ladder) about the new laws, we seek your active indulgence and involvement in this endeavour and request you to make appropriate arrangements in your state and UT for providing intensive training to all police and prison personnel without leaving anyone behind. "You will appreciate that unless we equip all our officials with relevant information and knowledge, we will not be able to effectively implement the new laws," the communication said, asking top state officials to personally review the training schedule of all ranks of police and prison personnel about the new laws and ensure that everyone receives adequate briefing about the same.

Maliwal cries foul...

From Page 1 According to an official, 223 posts were "illegally" created but only 52 staffers were hired and the remaining posts were vacant. It is alleged that the former chairperson of the DCW, Swati Maliwal, who is currently Rajya Sabha member, had appointed the staffers without permission, going against the rules. The crackdown is set to become another flashpoint between the Lieutenant Governor's office and the ruling AAP over the administration of the national capital. The development also comes at a time when AAP leader and Kejriwal is in jail after being arrested in connection with alleged irregularities in the capital's now-scrapped liquor policy. Calling the notice to DCW a "Tughlaqi order", Maliwal on X wrote, "LG has issued a Tughlaqi order to remove all the contract staff of DCW. Today, the Women's Commission has a total staff of 90 out of which only 8 people have been provided by the government, the rest are on 3-month contracts." "If all the contract staff is removed, the Women's Commission will be locked. Why are these people doing this? This institution has been built with blood and sweat. Instead of giving it staff and protection, you are

destroying it from its roots?" Maliwal added. The committee was constituted by the then Lt Governor Anil Bajjal to look into the complaints of "irregular and illegally created posts and contractual appointments" in February, 2017 at DCW, said the statement from the WCD Department. "The committee, headed by the then Chief Secretary and comprising Principal Secretary (Finance), Secretary (WCD) and Secretary (Law) as members, after inquiry, had found the appointments and the processes that were followed, to be illegal and had held the appointments to be invalid ab initio", it said. The committee had recommended that the appointment of existing contractual staff engaged without having sanctioned posts, are void ab initio and they cannot be allowed to continue, it said. "However, the DCW and its then chairperson, Swati Maliwal, who in the first instance had appointed these individuals, illegally kept the recommendations of the Committee in abeyance and the same could be moved by the WCD Department only upon her demitting office recently," the statement added. The officials said that currently, 52 contractual staffers were employed.

Pak wants...

From Page 1 The PM also challenged the Congress and the INDIA Bloc to give in writing that it won't give reservation to Muslims "through backdoor by reducing OBC quota" in the states where the party and its allies are in power. "I am challenging the shehzada to give this guarantee. There is no sense in taking the copy of the Constitution on the head and dancing. If you want to learn how to live for the Constitution and die for it, then come to Modi," the PM added. Modi also took a dig at the grand old party over opposition leader Salman Khurshid's niece Maria Alam's call for 'vote jihad'. Alam, a Samajwadi Party (SP) leader, called for a "vote jihad" in favour of the INDIA Bloc candidate from Farrukhabad Lok Sabha seat of Uttar Pradesh. "Now, the INDI alliance calls for vote jihad. This is new, because we have so far heard about 'love jihad' and 'land jihad'." This is said by a person who belonged to an educated Muslim family, not someone who studied in madrasa. I

hope you all know what the meaning of jihad is and against whom the jihad is waged. This is an insult to democracy and not a single Congress leader has condemned it," he said. Modi said such statements prove that intentions of the INDIA Bloc were "dangerous". In another rally at Junagadh in Gujarat, Modi said the ongoing Lok Sabha elections were not for satisfying his personal ambitions, but for fulfilling his "mission." Accusing the opposition Congress of having a "dangerous mentality", Modi said its manifesto is written in the language of Muslim League. Referring to the controversy surrounding Katchatheevu island, the PM said during Congress rule, the Union Government had no idea about the exact number of islands India had. "I then got a satellite survey done and found that we have 1,300 islands. Some of them are as big as Singapore. We will develop some of them for tourism purposes," said Modi.

Clandestine 'dole...

From Page 1 "Therefore, the Commission directs all political parties and candidates or their agents or any other person(s) to immediately cease and desist from any activities that involve registering individuals for beneficiary-oriented schemes through any advertisements (in print or in digital space), pamphlets, websites, web or mobile applications, text or social media platform (WhatsApp, etc.) messages, missed calls, distribution of forms, or by collecting personal data under the pretext of offline survey forms or digital surveys etc," the Commission said. The commission has directed all district election officers to take appropriate action against any such advertisement within the statutory provisions, including section 127A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (which prohibits printing or publishing of any election pamphlet or poster which does not bear the names and addresses of the printer and publisher). The other provisions the EC has asked its officials to use to clamp down on such practices

are section 123 (1) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (corrupt practices), and section 171 (B) of IPC (accepting gratification). The commission also cited examples of activities which "obscure the distinction between authentic surveys and biased attempts to enroll people in programmes for political gain". These include newspaper advertisements calling upon individual voters to register themselves for benefits by giving missed calls or calling a phone number. The Commission also cited the distribution of guarantee cards in the form of pamphlets giving details of prospective individual benefits along with an attached form asking for details of voters such as name, age, address, mobile number, booth number and constituency name. It flagged the distribution of forms seeking details of voters such as name, ration card number, address, phone number, booth number, bank account number, constituency name and number in the name of "socio-economic survey" of prospective beneficiaries for expanding an ongoing Government benefit scheme.

Not at home in Amethi...

From Page 1 The Amethi and Rae Bareilly constituencies go to polls on May 20 in the fifth round of the seven-phase general elections. Sources said official announcement was delayed as Rahul's affirmation came late evening after he and party president Kharge, who were both in Shimoga at a joint poll rally in Karnataka, held discussions over his nomination from Amethi. The Uttar Pradesh leadership of the Congress has already called upon the Gandhi family to contest both the seats traditionally held by their family. The members of the Central Election Committee

have also urged the party leadership to field both Rahul and Priyanka. The Amethi seat has been represented by Rahul from 2004 and he remained the member of Parliament from the constituency for three consecutive terms till 2019. He currently represents the Wayanad constituency in Kerala from where he has contested this time also. The Rae Bareilly constituency was represented by Sonia Gandhi from 2004 to 2024. Prior to that, Sonia Gandhi had represented the Amethi Lok Sabha constituency after she entered politics and contested for the first time in 1999.

BJP denies ticket to WFL...

From Page 1 Days after Karan's election, Olympic medallists Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Malik had threatened protests, claiming the government had promised that Brij Bhushan or his relatives or associates would not govern the sport. Karan is also the president of the Cooperative Village Development Bank in Nawabganj, Gonda. Polling will be held in Kaiserganj in the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections on May 20. Earlier, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh blamed the media for the delay in the announcement of his name as the BJP candidate for the seat. Interestingly, Brij Bhushan has already begun his campaign in Kaiserganj on April 8 with a road show even though the party has not declared his candidature. He was found appealing to voters to fulfil Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream of 'Abki Baar, 400 Paar'. The president of the Wrestling Federation of India for over a decade, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh hit the headlines in 2023, when the country's top wrestlers, including Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat and Sakshi Malik, accused him of sexually harassing women wrestlers and staged a massive protest in the national Capital.

Karol Bagh, and Rajender Nagar, with significant police presence and traffic officers assisting in clearing the roads. Despite the tense situation, the overall attendance remained relatively stable, with an 80 per cent turnout. However, some parents opted to keep their children at home for safety reasons, particularly in the Montessori and nursery classes, resulting in a 40 per cent decrease in attendance for these grades.

Tiny feet waltz back...

From Page 1 Guru Harkrishan Public School was one of the schools which had received bomb hoax mail on Wednesday. In its Shabdara branch students were seen at usual strength just like the regular days but

parents were concerned about school security and raised some security protocols for the educational institutions like CCTV cameras around the entry-exit of the school gates along with security deployment of guards during the entrance of the gates. On the other hand, primary school Konark public school located in the same area showed signs of concern from parents which resulted in a dip in attendance in the

school. Bal Bharti Pusa, Springdales and Salwan Public Schools were also the target of bomb threats via email. Strict security measures were enforced following the previous day's threat. Children were confined to classrooms and restricted from accessing playgrounds, gardens, or the canteen area. The threat to Bal Bharti Public School, Springdales led to heavy traffic congestion in areas like Pusa,

Karol Bagh, and Rajender Nagar, with significant police presence and traffic officers assisting in clearing the roads. Despite the tense situation, the overall attendance remained relatively stable, with an 80 per cent turnout. However, some parents opted to keep their children at home for safety reasons, particularly in the Montessori and nursery classes, resulting in a 40 per cent decrease in attendance for these grades.



Ranjan Dimri

Claims of explosives found in schools false: Delhi Police

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police Special Cell in its FIR registered on Wednesday evening revealed that the perpetrators of the hoax bomb threat letters received by nearly 200 Delhi schools wanted to "create mass panic and disturb public order". At least 125 bomb threat calls were received from different schools from 5.47 am to 2.13 pm on Wednesday, according to an official source, who has access to the FIR. The person said that after receiving the calls, PCR vehicles were rushed to schools, and district police, BDS, MAC, Special

Cell and Crime Control Room, DDMA, NDRF, Fire CATS and several other agencies were alerted. Further, a part of the FIR states that the movement of these units to the schools "resulted in massive inconvenience," according to the source. The officials evacuated the schools in an "elaborate exercise" and carried out anti-sabotage checks across the city, he said. The emails were apparently sent with the "conspiratorial intention of creating mass panic and to disturb the public." "These resulted in massive inconvenience and elaborate exercise across the city in

safely evacuating the schools and carrying out anti-sabotage checks. It appears that the emails used to send the threats were made with the conspiratorial intention of creating mass panic and to disturb the public being made out," the FIR stated. The FIR has been registered at Special Cell Police Station under IPC sections 505 (2) (statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes), 507 (criminal intimidation by an anonymous communication), and 120 (B) (punishment of criminal conspiracy). Additionally, according to police sources, the investiga-



tion will be done by the Counter Intelligence Team Special Cell. The IFSO unit is also trying to find out the origin from where the mail was sent, till now the connection to Russia (IP address) has been revealed as the domain of the email is "mail.ru". The investigating agency is also

probing the angle of joint conspiracy between China and ISI to ascertain if there is a larger conspiracy at work in the matter. Meanwhile, the Delhi Police on Thursday urged the public to not believe in the claims circulating on WhatsApp groups about the bomb threat letters received by over 200 schools in Delhi and adjoining Noida region, calling the claims of explosives being found in the schools "false". Police made an appeal to people to not believe in the audio messages that have surfaced on WhatsApp groups making false claims about the bomb threat that schools

in Delhi-NCR received on Wednesday morning. "Some audio messages are being pushed on WhatsApp and other chat groups that some suspicious objects were found in some schools," a statement issued by the Delhi Police. Further, they said that there is no truth in the claims of actual bombs found in the schools that have been circulating. In some of the audio messages that have been seen spreading such messages, a woman is seen telling mothers that despite the police calling the threats a hoax, an actual bomb has been recovered from the premises of some

schools. "I request all to please convey further that these are false messages. Messages doing rounds are as below," the police said taking note of such WhatsApp messages that will create panic among the citizens. Around 200 schools in Delhi-NCR received an identical threat email Wednesday claiming that explosives had been planted in their premises, triggering massive evacuations and searches as panicked parents rushed to pick up their children. Nothing was found during searches by authorities which later declared it a mass hoax.

AAP forms committee to strengthen coordination with Congress in polls



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP has formed a committee to strengthen coordination with its INDIA Bloc partner Congress for the Lok Sabha polls in Delhi and appointed its MLA Durgesh Pathak as the panel's coordinator. The seven Parliamentary seats in the national Capital will go to polls on May 25 in the sixth round of the seven-phase elections. "The coordination committee has been formed by Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national general secretary (organisation) Sandeep Pathak. Durgesh Pathak has been chosen as its coordinator," the party said on Thursday. The AAP also appointed the leaders for coordination in each parliamentary constituency in Delhi. The responsibility of coordination in New Delhi Lok Sabha constituency has been given to Rajesh Gupta; West Delhi coordination will be looked after by Naresh Balyan; Dinesh Mohaniya will be the coordi-

inator for South Delhi. Pawan Sharma has been appointed coordinator for the Chandni Chowk Lok Sabha constituency; coordination of North West Delhi constituency will be taken care of by Mukesh Ahlawat; Sanjeev Jha will be coordinator for the North East Delhi constituency and Dilip Pandey has been appointed coordinator for East Delhi. Under a seat-sharing arrangement between the two constituents of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), the Congress has fielded candidates from three of the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi. The AAP is contesting the remaining four seats. The arrangement was agreed upon even as the two parties decided to contest the general elections independently in Punjab where the AAP is in power. Meanwhile, Chairman of the Communications Department of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee and ex-MLA Anil Bhardwaj said that a meeting of

the Co-ordination Committee will be held on Friday to draw up a roadmap for the joint campaigns of the INDIA Alliance in all the seven Lok Sabha seats. The programmes will include public meetings and roadshows in all the seven Lok Sabha constituencies, jointly organised by INDIA Alliance. Bhardwaj said that the District presidents of both the Congress and AAP will establish total co-ordination for the smooth campaigns of the INDIA Alliance. He said that the Congress candidates were getting overwhelming support from the voters in their respective constituencies, with the Congress workers doing round-the-clock works to ensure the victory of the Congress candidates. Bhardwaj said that all the three Congress candidates, after filing their nomination papers, will release a Vision Document Manifesto regarding the problems and remedies of their respective Lok Sabha constituencies.

Former Minister accuses Kejriwal of running fraud in name of poor

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Former Delhi Minister Raaj Kumar Anand wrote to the Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena, accusing the Arvind Kejriwal Government for "running a fraud in the name of the poor of Delhi" while calling the AAP Government of "anti-Dalit, anti-Ambedkar character". Anand on Thursday met Saxena at Raj Niwas and handed over a memorandum, seeking more benefits and facilities for upliftment of dalit people. Anand, who has served as the Minister in-charge for Labour, Social Welfare and SC/ST/OBC before resigning, launched a scathing attack on the AAP government and said that having served as the Minister in-charge for Labour, Social Welfare and SC/ST/OBC, I resigned recently in wake of the prevalent excessive corruption in the GNCTD and consequent arrest of Kejriwal," adding that he is uncertain about his resignation being accepted or not due to the Chief Minister being in jail. He accused the government of running "in the name of the poor of Delhi and the incessant lies that were peddled in the Media to cover the wrongdoings". Anand claimed that the Kejriwal government is flouting reservation norms for the scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and other backward classes. "For the past many years, the GNCTD has been deliberately flouting constitutional norms for reservation of seats in Government employment for SC/ST/OBC candidates. Deliberately ad-



hoc, contractual and temporary appointments are made against permanent vacancies in Government so as to circumvent the compulsory reservation rules," he alleged, adding that despite thousands of appointments were made as consultants, experts and fellows, no reservation criteria of the backward classes was followed. "Despite repeated requests to the Chief Minister for sending Dalit pilgrims to Bodhgaya and other places of Buddhist worship like Baba Saheb's Bhim Janmabhoomi and Chaitya Bhoomi, no action has been taken till now even as hundreds of trains have carried devotees to other pilgrimage sites," he claimed, adding that this reflects "the true anti-Dalit, anti-Ambedkar character of Arvind Kejriwal Government". He requested Saxena to expedite this as this Buddhist pilgrimage train will facilitate religious tourism and cultural exchange. He also proposed the provision of professional courses, exam preparations, and financial assistance up to the 12th standard for the children of contractual labourers through the Labour Welfare

Board. "The formation of the Labour Welfare Board is pending and must be expedited to address the welfare needs of labourers effectively," he said. Anand said that an investigation into irregularities in the issuance of ration cards and the alleged malpractices post-surrender of old cards is warranted. Further he proposed the appointment of a Dalit woman as the Chairperson of Mahila Aayog to ensure inclusive representation and address the concerns of marginalised women effectively. Further he said an amount of Rs 4271.37 crore, collected as Cess, is lying in the Construction Workers Labour Welfare Fund, only Rs. 8.72 Cr. have been utilised as Welfare Expenditure. "While no efforts were made by the Department for the welfare of the most marginalised real labour, the Delhi Government spent Rs. 458.08 Cr. during FY 2021-22 on ghost beneficiaries, in return of kickbacks. Once this scam came into public, the expenditure reduced to negligible levels," he asserted. In his letter, he said that money from the SC welfare fund has remained unspent and has even been diverted for other activities and urged for a thorough investigation in the matter. He also claimed that due to the cessation of loans and other facilities for SC and labour classes, coupled with the mismanagement of funds within Delhi SC/ST/OBC/Min. & Handicapped Finance & Development Corporation Limited has led to a dire financial crisis and the suicides of two employees.

AIIMS in Trans Yamuna, flats for slum dwellers priorities, says BJP East Delhi pick

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

BJP candidate from East Delhi Lok Sabha seat Harsh Deep Malhotra on Thursday said a mega hospital on the lines of AIIMS in the trans-Yamuna area and flats for slum dwellers will be among his priorities, if he wins the election. Malhotra, who is pitted against AAP's Kuldeep Kumar, a reserved candidate, believes voters of the constituency will prefer merit over caste. "We will try to give a central government's hospital on the line of Safdarjung or AIIMS to east Delhi so that the people of the area get better treatment as private hospitals are very expensive and everyone cannot afford it. I think this is very important. My aim would be to provide flats to the people living in slums under the Prime Minister's 'jahan jhuggi wahan makan' scheme. You find drain water on the roads everywhere in such areas. With this scheme, they would get better homes, roads, and drinking water for a better life. Malhotra, a former mayor, said. The 62-year-old alleged that the Arvind Kejriwal government has done nothing to clean Yamuna River despite taking Rs 3,000 crore from the central government. "Today, the condition of the Yamuna is such that we cannot go to the river to celebrate our festivals. This is also one of my priorities, since the Yamuna is a symbol of our culture," Malhotra, who was born in Shahdara and has been with the BJP since 1994, said. The former ABVP member

said there should be a big college in the area and metro connectivity should be improved. Malhotra, who owns a printing press, asserted that caste will not be a factor in who wins the election as he believes that people will choose "merit" over any factional loyalty. "The AAP's candidate is an MLA from Kondali and he has not given even basic amenities to the people of the area. The condition of roads is very bad. He has been exposed and people of the national capital do not care about the caste of the candidate. They will vote on merit only," he said. Malhotra also alleged that the bail pleas of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, his deputy Manish Sisodia, and former minister Satyendra Jain were rejected because they are corrupt. "The liquor policy had to be scrapped since there was a huge corruption in it. For the last two years, I have been asking questions to the CM and his ministers that if the policy was right, then why they took it back. The commission of liquor vendors was two per cent. Why was it increased to 12 per cent?" he asked. Asked if he thinks that Kejriwal's jailing may help generate a wave of sympathy in favour of the party, Malhotra said none of the AAP MLAs can face the public and give an account of their work. "... Not even a single person has the calibre to go in front of people and tell them what they have done in the last 10 years. Where are these MLAs?" he said, as he accused the party of indulging in nepotism in politics.

Have trust in EC to deal with deepfakes in polls: Court

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday reposed its trust in the Election Commission of India (ECI) to deal with the issue of deepfake technologies being used in the Lok Sabha poll campaign, saying it cannot devise a policy in the middle of elections. The high court directed a lawyers' organisation to give a representation to the ECI on its plea seeking directions to the poll panel for formulation of guidelines to prevent the misuse of deepfake videos. The court also asked the ECI to expeditiously decide by May 6 the representation to be given by the petitioner, keeping in mind the urgency of the issue involved. A bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora disposed of the petition, saying it cannot devise a policy in the mid-



dle of elections. The court said only the methodology has changed and previously also rumours used to be spread about politicians. To this, the petitioner's counsel responded that deepfake content is a lot more vicious and faster. The court said it trusts the

ECI, which is a constitutional body, to act on the matter. "We can't devise a policy today in the midst of elections. Once it is entrusted with the ECI, the court's interdiction at this stage will not be proper. At this moment, courts will not give any direction. You'll have to live with

it. All of this is to be done before the elections. At the 11th hour, courts cannot interfere," the bench said. "At this moment it will not be proper for the court to intervene with the jurisdiction of the ECI. Let us trust the ECI," it said. The court was hearing a plea by Lawyer's Voice, an organisation seeking directions to the ECI to formulate and implement the necessary guidelines and/or executive action which was necessary to address the public harm and democratic crisis caused by the pervasive use of deepfake technologies in the 2024 election campaign. The plea also sought a direction to several social media platforms to take down and block deepfake content or those concerning political candidates or public figures on their respective platforms until the declaration of poll results.

During the hearing, the counsel for the ECI submitted that in case a comprehensive representation is filed by the petitioner with the commission, it will be decided in accordance with law on or before May 6 and that any appropriate steps which have to be taken, shall also be taken by them. The ECI counsel also informed the court that the deepfake videos of Home Minister Amit Shah, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, actors Aamir Khan and Ranveer Singh, as referred to in the petition, have been taken down and criminal complaints have been filed and the accounts from which the videos were posted have been disabled. To this, the bench said that the accounts which are repeatedly posting fake videos must be acted against and their names should also be put in public domain.

UP STF arrests man for posting deepfake video of Yogi on X

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A man was arrested on Thursday in Uttar Pradesh's Noida by the Special Task Force (STF) of UP Police for allegedly posting an AI-generated "deep fake" video on X (formerly Twitter) of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. Additional Director General of Police (UP STF) Amitabh Yash said that the video was used to spread misleading facts, strengthening anti-national elements, "On May 1, an AI-generated deep fake video of the Uttar Pradesh chief minister went viral after it was posted on X from a handle. The video was used to spread misleading facts, strengthening anti-national elements," ADGP Yash said. He said that it was after the



deep fake video was uploaded via a Twitter handle with the ID @shyanguptarpw that the post went viral which spread false information and incited anti-national sentiments. He said an FIR on Wednesday under the Indian Penal Code sections 468 (forgery for cheating), 505(2) (statement conducting to public mischief) and under provisions of the Information Technology

Act was lodged at the Noida Cyber Crime police station as the Noida unit of the STF started investigating the matter. "On Thursday, accused Shyam Kishor Gupta was arrested and further legal proceedings are being carried out at the local cyber crime police station in Noida," ADGP Yash, who is also the ADG (law and order) for the Uttar Pradesh police, said. In the deep fake video of Yogi, the Chief Minister is talking about the Pulwama attack and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's jibe at Congress on 'magalsutra'. Further, ADGP Yash said that Shyam Gupta is a resident of Noida's Barola and claims to be the president of 'Rehri-Patri' (street vendors) welfare association on his X profile.

India slams US body religious freedom report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday slammed the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and said it continues to publish its propaganda on the country "masquerading" as part of an annual report.

In a sharp reaction to the USCIRF's latest report that has criticised India for alleged violations of religious freedom, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the organisation is known to be a "biased" entity with a political agenda.

"The US Commission on International Religious Freedom is known as a biased organisation with a political agenda. They continue to publish their propaganda on India



after the USCIRF released its 2024 annual report and recommended designating 17 countries, including India, as Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs), for "engaging in or tolerating particularly severe violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief".

The USCIRF report alleged that the government imposed "discriminatory nationalist policies", "perpetuated hateful rhetoric" and "failed to address communal violence" among minority communities.

The report also cited various instances, including Manipur violence, Haryana violence, and several Kashmiri leaders and separatists being detained when the Supreme Court, last year, upheld the government's 2019 decision to scrap Article 370 that granted special status to the then state of Jammu and Kashmir.

India has lodged a strong protest with China for carrying out construction activities in the Shaksgam valley, in an "illegal" attempt to alter the situation on the ground.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on Thursday the Shaksgam valley is a part of India and New Delhi never accepted the so-called China-Pakistan boundary pact of 1963 through which Islamabad "unlawfully" attempted to cede the area to Beijing.

The Shaksgam valley is a strategically key region that is part of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

"We have consistently conveyed our rejection of the same. We have registered our protest with the Chinese side against illegal

India protests against China's illegal construction in Shaksgam Valley

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

attempts to alter facts on the ground," Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing. "We further reserve the right to take necessary measures to safeguard our interests," he said.

The terse response came in the wake of China building roads in PoK near Siachen. The new road is part of the Chinese efforts to enhance infrastructure development in occupied Kashmir north of Siachen. The road lies in Shaksgam Valley. Satellite pictures show the road in Shaksgam Valley, a part of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) ceded to China in 1963, branches out from an extension of Highway G219 in China's Xinjiang and disappears into mountains at a place (coordinate: 36.114783; 76.671051) approximately 50 km north of India's northernmost point, Indira Col in Siachen Glacier. Last year, India also lodged strong diplomatic protests with Beijing for showing Aksai Chin plateau as its official territory.

No political clearance sought or issued: MEA on Prajwal trip

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



amid an escalating political row over alleged sexual harassment of several women by JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna who is not in the country, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Thursday said Revanna travelled to Germany on a diplomatic passport and he did not seek political clearance for the trip.

On Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's demand for revocation of Revanna's diplomatic passport, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said such action can be taken only on the directions of a court.

Revanna, the grandson of former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, is said to have left India on April 27, a day after voting for the Lok Sabha elections took place in his Hassan constituency.

The Janata Dal (Secular) has already suspended the Hassan MP from the party. "No political clearance was either sought

that the JD(S) leader used to travel abroad. Asked about whether the MEA may consider revocation of his passport in view of the allegations of sexual harassment against him, Jaiswal did not give a direct reply.

"As regards the possible revocation of the passport of the individual, I would refer you to the relevant provisions of the Passport Act 1967. A direction should come from a court for revocation of passport. We are not in receipt of any directions from any court in this regard," he said.

Jaiswal said Revanna travelled to Germany on a diplomatic passport and that he did not seek any political clearance for the trip.

The MEA spokesperson noted that parliamentarians are entitled to have diplomatic passports.

"The matter is being investigated and we will be doing whatever is needed to be done," he said in reply to another question.

Indian Bank Zonal Office: Delhi South 17, Parliament Street, 2nd Floor, Allahabad Bank Building, New Delhi-110001
Corporate Office: 254-260, Arvvi Shanmugam Salai, Royapettah Chennai-600014

APPENDIX- IV-A [See proviso to rule 8 (6)] Sale notice for sale of immovable properties

E-Auction Sale Notice for Sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8 (6) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower (s) and Guarantor (s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the possession of which has been taken by the Authorized Officer of Indian Bank being Secured Creditor, will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" on 22.05.2024, for recovery dues due to the Indian Bank, Secured Creditor. The details of borrowers/mortgagors/guarantors are appended as under:

For Property mentioned as Sno.1	For Property mentioned as Sno.2	For Property mentioned as Sno.3	For Property mentioned as Sno.4	For Property mentioned as Sno.5
Borrower Name M/s Sily Mart Prop. Mr. Ankit Singh	Borrower Name M/s Mansi Manufacturing Company, Prop. Mr. Vinay Sirohi	Borrower Name M/s M K Trading Co Prop : Mr. Jai Kishan Basoia	Borrower Name M/s R S Traders, Prop : Rakesh Bajaj s/o Shri Basdev Bajaj	Borrower Name M/s Tecknolusion Automation Services, Prop : Mr. Gorav Singh
Guarantor Name NA	Guarantor Name Mr. Satender Singh Sirohi Mr. Suraj Garg	Guarantor Name Mr. Vija Pal Mr. Jai Kishan Basoia	Guarantor Name Mrs. Sudha Bajaj w/o Mr. Rakesh Bajaj	Guarantor Name Mrs. Savitri Devi w/o Sh. Digamber Singh, Mrs. Neemal w/o Sh. Gorav Singh
Mortgagor Name Mrs. Nirupama Tomar	Mortgagor Name Mr. Satender Singh Sirohi	Mortgagor Name Mr. Jai Kishan Basoia s/o Late Mr. Gopi Ram	Mortgagor Name Mr. Rakesh Bajaj s/o Mr. Basdev Bajaj, Mrs. Sudha Bajaj w/o Mr. Rakesh Bajaj	Mortgagor Name Mrs. Savitri Devi w/o Sh. Digamber Singh
Branch Dilshad Garden, Delhi	Branch Jasola	Branch Lajpat Nagar	Branch Malviyanagar	Branch SD Enclave
Total Dues Rs. 12.18 Lakh as on 10.06.2022 + Interest & other expenses till realization of Bank's dues in all accounts	Total Dues Rs. 18.36 Lakh as on 28.09.2020 + Interest & other expenses till realization of Bank's dues in all accounts	Total Dues Rs. 42.88 Lakh as on 17.07.14 + Interest & other expenses till realization of Bank's dues in all accounts	Total Dues Rs. 23.62 Lakh as on 18.06.2022 + Interest & other expenses till realization of Bank's dues in all accounts	Total Dues Rs. 25.23 Lakh as on 02.03.2023 + Interest & other expenses till realization of Bank's dues in all accounts

The specific details of the property intended to be brought to sale through e-auction mode are enumerated below:

Serial No.1	Serial No.2	Serial No.3	Serial No.4	Serial No.5
Detailed description of the Property Shop no.6, at Basement Plot no.A-13, Durga Tower RDC, Raj Nagar District Centre, Ghaziabad-201002 (UP); Area: 11.64 Sqmts	Detailed description of the Property H. No. 794 (Entire House), Old No. 506, Arthala, Mohan Nagar, G.T. Road, Situated at Abadi of Village Arthala, Pargana, Tehsil- Dadri, Distt. Ghaziabad, U.P.-201007, Total Plot Area 32 Sq Mtrs & Covered Area 40.12 Sq Mtrs	Detailed description of the Property Residential Free Hold Property Bearing Plot No. 382-A, situated in village - Joor Bagh, Abadi known as Tri Nagar, Delhi - 110035	Detailed description of the Property Shop Bearing No. B-3, on basement having covered area of 319 Sq ft. in Sushant Vyapar part of Old Plot No. 21, Kharsa No. Kendra situated in the residential colony known as Sushant Lok - I, near Raj Teri House, Jawahar around village Sarhau Sukhrall Colony, Parvatiya Colony-II, Chakarpur Salokhra Kanhai & Nanglia Road, NIT Faridabad, Wazirabad Tehsil & District Gurgaon/Haryana - 122002.	Detailed description of the Property House No. 848/1, Gali No. 6, (old house no. 745), Northern part of Old Plot No. 21, Kharsa No. 57/13 (B-0), MCF 909/846, Block-B, near Raj Teri House, Jawahar around village Sarhau Sukhrall Colony, Parvatiya Colony-II, Chakarpur Salokhra Kanhai & Nanglia Road, NIT Faridabad, Wazirabad Tehsil & District Haryana - 121005
Latitude : 28.40239, Longitude : 77.26264	Latitude : 28.673977, Longitude : 77.391797	Latitude : 28.675278, Longitude : 77.159016	Latitude : 28.460696, Longitude : 77.083163	Latitude : 28.367358, Longitude : 77.280453
Type of Possession Physical Possession	Type of Possession Symbolic Possession	Type of Possession Physical Possession	Type of Possession Physical Possession	Type of Possession Symbolic Possession
Encumbrances on property Not known to the Bank	Encumbrances on property Not known to the Bank	Encumbrances on property Not known to the Bank	Encumbrances on property Not known to the Bank	Encumbrances on property Not known to the Bank
Reserve Price Rs. 10.50 Lakh	Reserve Price Rs. 16.00 Lakh	Reserve Price Rs. 41 Lakh	Reserve Price Rs. 12.50 Lakh	Reserve Price Rs. 35.00 Lakh
EMD Amount Rs. 1.05 Lakh	EMD Amount Rs. 1.60 Lakh	EMD Amount Rs. 4.10 Lakh	EMD Amount Rs. 1.25 Lakh	EMD Amount Rs. 3.50 Lakh
Bid incremental amount Rs. 0.10 Lac	Bid incremental amount Rs. 0.10 Lakh	Bid incremental amount Rs. 0.10 Lakh	Bid incremental amount Rs. 0.10 Lakh	Bid incremental amount Rs. 0.10 Lakh
Date and time of e-auction 22.05.2024, 11am to 5pm	Date and time of e-auction 22.05.2024, 11am to 5pm	Date and time of e-auction 22.05.2024, 11am to 5pm	Date and time of e-auction 22.05.2024, 11am to 5pm	Date and time of e-auction 22.05.2024, 11am to 5pm
Property ID No. IDIB30276717611	Property ID No. IDIB30103379442	Property ID No. IDIB30013614708	Property ID No. IDIB34004246	Property ID No. IDIB3216307652
AO Contact: Sh. Rajesh Chourasia Ph: +91-8676831831	AO Contact: Md. Zafar 9971911220	AO Contact: Mr. Puneet Kumar Ph: +91-9582315830	AO Contact: Ms. Kavita Kapoor Ph: +91-958899028	AO Contact: Sh. Rajesh Chourasia Ph: +91-8676831831
Br Manager Contact: Sh. Prabhat Verma: Ph: +91-834090276	Br Manager Contact: Ms. Sweety Singh: Ph: +91-9835458276	Br Manager Contact: Ms. Aparna Jha: Ph: +91-9817856056	Br Manager Contact: Ms. Sweta Priyadarshini: Ph: +91-9818741048	Br Manager Contact: Ms. Tanya Arora: Ph: +91-8295306517

Bidders are advised to visit the website (www.mstco.commerce.com/auktion/home/bapi) of our e-auction service provider MSTC Ltd to participate in online bid. For Technical Assistance Please call MSTC HELPDESK No. 033-23400020/23400021/23400022 and other help line numbers available in service providers help desk. For Registration status with MSTC Ltd, please contact ibapiop@mstco.commerce.com and for EMD status please contact ibapifm@mstco.commerce.com.

For property details and photograph of the property and auction terms and conditions please visit: https://bapi.in and for clarifications related to this portal, please contact help line number 18001025026 and 011-41106131.

Bidders are advised to use Property ID Number mentioned above while searching for the property in the website with https://bapi.in and www.mstco.commerce.com.

Date : 30.04.2024
Place : New Delhi

Authorised Officer

Admiral Swaminathan takes charge as Navy Vice Chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan on Wednesday assumed charge as Vice Chief of Navy here. He was commissioned into the Indian Navy in July 1987 and is a specialist in Communication and Electronic Warfare, navy said here. He is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Khadakvasla; the Joint Services Command and Staff College, Shrivenham, United Kingdom; the College of Naval Warfare, Karanja; and the United States Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, USA.

Swaminathan's educational qualifications include a BSc degree from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; MSc in



Telecommunications from Cochin University of Science and Technology, Kochi; MA in Defence Studies from King's College, London; MPhil in Strategic Studies from Mumbai University; and PhD in International Studies from Mumbai University.

In another appointment, Air

Command (TC) on Monday. Air Marshal N Kapoor was commissioned into the Fighter stream of the Indian Air Force on 06 December 1986. He is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Defence Services Staff College and National Defence College. A Qualified Flying Instructor and a Fighter Combat Leader, he has more than 3400 hours of flying experience.

During his illustrious career, the Air Marshal has held numerous field and staff appointments. His operational tenures include being the Commanding Officer of a fighter squadron in the Central Sector, Station Commander of a flying base in the Western Sector and Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief (AOC-in-C) Training

Every Indian is votebank of Congress, claims Kharge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday said when the elections are over, people will only remember him as the PM who indulged in "divisive and communal speeches filled with lies" to avoid an inevitable defeat.

Noting that the PM in his letter to NDA candidates had claimed that reservation will be taken away from SC, ST and OBC and given to the

Congress "votebank", Kharge said, "Our votebank is every Indian — the poor, the marginalised, the women, the aspirational youth, the labour class, the Dalits and the Adivasis."

In a letter to the prime minister, Kharge urged Modi to seek votes on the performance of his government over the last ten years instead of indulging in "hate speeches". The Congress president's remarks comes days after Modi levelled various charges against his party in his letter to NDA candidates after the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls.

Women sarpanchs set to shine on global stage at UN

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI



Supriya Das Datta, Sabhadhipati of Sepahijala Zilla Parishad in Tripura, utilises her Diploma in Pharmacy to champion women's participation in decision-making and advocate for essential childcare facilities while Kunuku Hema Kumari, Sarpanch of Pakeru Gram Panchayat in West Godavari, Andhra Pradesh, leverages her Master's Degree in Technology to bridge access to vital healthcare services through organising medical camps.

Commission on Population and Development (CPD57) which started from April 29th April, 2024.

It symbolises India's groundbreaking approach to empowering Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in local government to advance Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) given that India leads the world with 1.4 million women constituting 46 per cent of local elected officials.

Secretary Vivek Baradwaj who will lead the delegation of these women from the grassroots level will discuss strategies derived from India's PRLs to foster gender equality and women's empowerment, focusing on poverty reduction and inclusive development.

Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, will inaugurate the event, emphasizing the crucial role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRLs) in advancing gender equality.

The insights shared by Supriya, Kunuku Hema Kumari, and Neeru Yadav will highlight the transformative impact of women's leadership in enabling inclusive development and promoting women and girl-friendly governance. If Supriya will dwell on how she has been active in promoting child-care facilities to create a conducive work environment for women, Kunuku Hema Kumari will talk about her initiatives in establishing linkages between front-line health workers and women and girls in need of health services through her public outreach efforts.

KVB Karur Vysya Bank The Karur Vysya Bank Ltd., Asset Recovery Branch, No.6, 3rd Floor, Opp: Metro Pillar No. 80, Pusa Road, Karolbagh, New Delhi-110 005

Possession Notice

Issued under Rule 8(1) of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002

WHEREAS,

The undersigned being the Authorized officer of THE KARUR VYSYA BANK LIMITED under the Securitization & Reconstruction of Financial Assets And Enforcement of Security Interest (Second) Act, 2002 (Act 54 of 2002) and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice dated 28-12-2023 calling upon the borrower (1) **M/s Aloka Breweries Private Limited** (CIN U15530DL2016PTC290755)-a private limited company incorporated under provisions a companies Act, 2013), Having its office at: 476, FIE Ground Floor, Patparganj Industrial Area Delhi - 110092 ALSO AT: D-102, Third Floor, Street no. 5, Laxmi Nagar, New Delhi - 110092; (2) **Mr. Abhishek Jain** (DIN - 07516098) (Director) R/o G-11 Laxmi Nagar, Shakarpur Baramad, Shakarpur, East Delhi, Delhi - 110092; (3) **Mr. Kunal Chauhan** (DIN - 07425833) (Director) R/o D-373, Laxmi Nagar, Shakarpur Baramad, Shakarpur, East Delhi, Delhi - 110092; (4) **Mr. Subash Chand Jain** (Guarantor) R/o G-11 Laxmi Nagar, Shakarpur Baramad, Shakarpur, East Delhi, Delhi-110092; (5) **Mr. Gajender Singh** (Guarantor) R/o D-373 Laxmi Nagar, Shakarpur Baramad, Shakarpur, East Delhi, Delhi - 110092; (6) **Mr. Lal Ji** (Guarantor) R/o H. No-154A, Lalita Park, Laxmi Nagar, Shakarpur, Gandhi Nagar, East Delhi, Delhi- 110092; (7) **M/s J C Associates** (Guarantor) represented by its Partners Mr. Abhishek Jain and Mr. Gajender Singh having business address at F-14, Subash Chowk, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi - 110092 to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs.1,55,22,714.57/- (Rupees One Crore Fifty Five Lakhs Twenty Two Thousand Seven Hundred Fourteen and Paise Fifty Seven Only) within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

The borrower having failed to repay the full demand notice amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section (4) of section 13 of Act read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on this the 30th day of April of the year 2024.

The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of THE KARUR VYSYA BANK LIMITED for an amount of Rs.1,60,55,963.57 as on 31.03.2024 (Rupees One Crore Sixty Lakh Fifty Five Thousand Nine Hundred Sixty Three and Paise Fifty Seven Only) and interest thereon.

The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

SCHEDULE A
Description of the Immovable Property

Entire Residential Cum Commercial Property Out of Kharsa No. 72 Property No. G-15 admeasuring approx. 97.46 sq meters G-Block Laxmi Nagar, Shakarpur Khas, Delhi - 110092 and bounded as under - North: 145 Feet South: Property of Others East: Property of Others West: Property of Others

Place: Delhi
Date: 30-04-2024

Sd/- Chief Manager & Authorized Officer
THE KARUR VYSYA BANK LIMITED

RJD stands for Rishwathkhor Jungleraj Dal: Nadda

PTI ■ ARARIA (BIHAR)

Launching a frontal attack on the RJD, which is an alliance partner of the INDIA bloc in Bihar, BJP national president J P Nadda on Thursday said the party led by Lalu Prasad stands for 'Rishwathkhor Jungleraj Dal'. Addressing a public rally in Araria Lok Sabha seat in support of BJP candidate Pradeep Kumar Singh, Nadda accused the opposition coalition of "protecting" corrupt people, whereas Prime Minister Narendra Modi was "striving hard" to end corruption in the country.



Araria will go to polls in the third phase on May 7. "A majority of the leaders of the INDIA bloc, including those of the Congress and RJD, are either in jail or out on bail. PM Modi wants to end corruption but the INDIA bloc leaders call for protecting the corrupt. RJD, whose leaders are on bail, means corruption. R stands for 'Rishwathkhor' (bribery), J for 'Jungleraj' and D means 'Dal' (slough of mud)," he said. "On one side, we have a PM who is working for the country and on the other, you have the INDIA bloc, a 'parivar bachao, dynasty bachao' alliance," he alleged.

Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, RJD's Lalu Prasad and Tejashwi Yadav, all are out on bail, Nadda claimed.

"Parties of the 'ghamandiya alliance' are all 'parivarvadi' (dynastic)... Look at Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and Mehbooba Mufti, Mulayam Singh Yadav and Akhilesh Dimple, Lalu-Rabri-Tejashwi-Tej Pratap-Misa Bharti, Mamata Banerjee and Abhishek, KCR-KTR-Kavita, Karunanidhi-Stalin-Udayanidhi... Congress has Sonia-Rahul-Priyanka... All of them are dynasts," the BJP national president alleged.

"Corrupt leaders of INDIA bloc who are in jail include Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, and other AAP leaders Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain," he added. Reiterating that the BJP-led NDA will win 400-plus Lok Sabha seats, including all 40 in Bihar, Nadda asserted that the eastern state has developed only under NDA rule, with a six-lane highway being built from Varanasi and Kolkata which will pass through the state.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi's only aim is welfare of every person from the Dalit, tribal and backward sections of the society. The NDA government has brought a large section of the country's poor above the poverty line in the last 10 years. But INDIA bloc leaders want to give reservation on religious lines. The Congress is giving tickets to those belonging to 'tukde-tukde gang,'" Nadda added. "India was the 11th largest economy when PM Modi came to power and now the country is the fifth largest economy, leaving behind United Kingdom and many other countries. We will be the third largest economy by 2027," he said.

दि बाजपुर को-आपरेटिव शुगर फैक्ट्री लि.
आररारि बाजपुर, जिला-उदयमसिंह नगर (उत्तरप्रदेश)
फाईल नं. 2024-25/166 ई-निविदा सूचना दिनांक: 02.05.2024

कौनो निविदा में विनिम्न सामग्री की आपूर्ति/सिवायों तथा आररारि बाजपुर हेतु 12.00 लाख बरक की दर ईंधन/कोयला (मोलसेस/थेन बेस) की आपूर्ति/सिवायों/उपकरणों से निवाक 03.05.2024 सांघ 4.00 बजे से दिनांक 15.05.2024 सांघ 4.00 बजे तक ई-निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है।

अधोस्तराफी को कोई एक अथवा समस्त निविदाएं बिना कारण दर्शाते निरस्त करने का अधिकार सुरक्षित है। निविदा प्रपत्र का मूल्य ₹ 2360/- जीएसटी सहित देय होगा। उक्त ई-निविदा www.uktdenders.gov.in द्वारा आमंत्रित की जाती है।

ई-निविदा सूचना www.bazpursugar.com तथा विस्तृत निविदा प्रपत्र www.uktdenders.gov.in से डाउनलोड की जा सकती है।

प्रशासक / जिलाधिकारी

PUBLIC NOTICE

Smt. Simri Kalyal wife of Shri Rajeev Kalyal resident of CO-133, Ptampura, Delhi-110034 is daughter of my client Smt. Kamlesh Chhabra wife of Late Shri Krishna Lal Chhabra resident of 155, Tagore Park, Delhi-110009. He said Smt. Simri Kalyal, her husband and children have become disobedient and are harassing my said client for their greed from last several years. Therefore, my above said client Smt. Kamlesh Chhabra has severed all kinds of relationship with his daughter Smt. Simri Kalyal, husband and children of said Smt. Simri Kalyal and has disowned them and debarred them from inheriting any kind of movable and immovable property owned by my above said client. Any person dealing with them will do so at their own risk.

FANISH K. JAIN ADVOCATE
E No D-369/36/10/847, BASEMENT
SARASWATI VIHAR DELHI-110034

Public Notice of Bank of Baroda

This is to inform the general public that Bank of Baroda, Maurya Enclave Branch, Delhi intends to accept the under mentioned property standing in the name of Mr. Sanjiv Anand (Present owner), and intending purchaser i.e., (1) Mr. Madan Lal S/o Mr. Prahlad Rai & (2) Mr. Sachin Garg S/o Mr. Madan Lal, as a security for a loan/credit facility requested by one of its customers. In case anyone has got any right/title/interest/claims over the under mentioned property, they are advised to approach the Bank within Seven days along with necessary proof to substantiate their claim. If no response is received within Seven days, it is presumed that the property is free of any charge/claim/encumbrance and Bank shall proceed with the mortgage. Details of Property: A Freehold Residential Property No. C-205, area measuring 325 Sq. Yds. (i.e. 271.73 Sq. Mtrs.), Block-C, Situated at Defence Colony, New Delhi-110024.

East: 20 Fts Wide Road
West: 40 Fts Wide Road
North: Property No. 204
South: Property No. 206
Branch Details/Contact No.
Maurya Enclave Branch, Delhi
Phone No: 011-27318741, 43 & 9780433525
Sanjeev Gupta (Advocate) 9811154597

PUBLIC NOTICE

All the general public is informed that my client Monika Baweja daughter of Mr. Ramesh Chander and wife of Mr. Manish Baweja and resident of 76-77, UGF, Z Block, Dayal Sar Road, Metro Pillar number 690, Uttam Nagar, West Delhi-110059. If anyone does any transaction of money or any other kind with my client's husband Mr. Manish Baweja then they should do so at their own risk. My client Monika Baweja will not be held responsible for any of the transactions done by Mr. Manish Baweja.

Sandeep Detha (Advocate) Chamber No K-28 Tis Hazari Court Delhi-110054

SRF LIMITED
Regd. Office: The Galleria, DLF Mayur Vihar, Unit No. 236 & 237, 2nd Floor, Mayur Vihar Phase, Noida Link Road, Mayur Vihar Phase I Extn, Delhi-110091
Corporate Office: Block-C, Sector 45, Gurugram, Haryana-122003
Tel. No (Regd office): (+91-11) 49482870; Fax: (+91-11) 49482900
E-mail: cs@srf.com, Website: www.srf.com; CIN: L18101DL1970PLC005197

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that Share Certificates pertaining to shares of the Company detailed below have been reported lost and request(s) for issue of duplicate Certificates in lieu thereof have been received by the Company :-

Sl. No.	Folio No.	Name of the Share Holder / Legal Heir (Claimant)	Cert.No.	Dist.No.	Lost Shares
1	SRF0035875	VIKRAM SINGH	521934-6	25113044-118	75
			1126747	308715474-6673	1200
2	SRF0155640	AJAY KRISHNA MISHRA	377781	17176478-527	50
			1131396	310598522-721	200
3	SRF0111209	PRASHANT KOCHHAR	1125392	308262062-261	200
		MANISH KOCHHAR	90241764	2682101-25	25
			90241764	3628987-97	11
			90241764	5848076-89	14
4	SRF0049504	PREMKUMAR GOGINENI	1130142	310056358-7157	800

Any person having any claim/objection in respect of the above requests should lodge such claim/objection with the company at its Corporate Office within 15 days of the publication of this notice, failing which the company will consider to give effect to the above requests.

Public is hereby cautioned against dealing with the aforesaid share certificates.

for SRF LIMITED
Sd/-
RAJAT LAKHANPAL
Sr. VP (Corporate Compliance) & Company Secretary

Place: Gurugram
Date: 02-05-2024

FORMAT C-7 (FOR POLITICAL PARTIES TO PUBLISH IN NEWS PAPERS, SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS & WEBSITE OF THE PARTY)

(As per the Commission's directions issued in pursuance of the order dated 13.02.2020 of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in contempt petition(C) no. 2192 OF 2018 WP (C) no. 536 of 2011)

Name of the Political Party : Indian National Congress
Name of the Election : General Election Lok Sabha 2024
Name of State/UT : Delhi
(1) Name of the Constituency : North - West Delhi
Name of the Candidate : Dr. Udit Raj

s.no.	1	2	3
Criminal antecedents			
a	Nature of Offences	1. Criminal U/S 188/269/283 IPC R/W SEC 3 Epidemic Diseases Act R/W 51(b) Disaster Management Act. 2. Criminal U/S 188 IPC 3. Criminal U/S 153 IPC R/W61(D) IT ACT	
b	Case no.	1. FIR NO. 150/21 Dated 12/08/2021 PS-Parliament Street 2. FIR NO. 12/24 Dated 22/02/2024 PS-Parliament Street 3. FIR NO.158/2021 PS- Kotwali Sadar, Unnau	
c	Name of the Court	1. Case FIR No 150/2021 was pending in the Court of Ms. Anamika, MM, PHC but vide order dated 28/02/2024 the case was transferred for the MP/MLA Court Rouse Avenue and Vide order dated 05/03/2024 Ld. Principal District Judge sent the same to Delhi High Court for the assignment in MP/MLA Court but till date no court has been assigned for the adjudication of the case. 2. Charge-sheet has not been filed in Case FIR No.12/2024 PS-Parliament Street and matter is pending investigation at PS - Parliament-street. 3. Charge has not been framed in case FIR no. 158/2021 PS - Kotwali Sadar.	
d	Whether Charges have been Framed or not (Yes/No)	NO	
e	Detail of punishment undergone, if any	N/A	
f	Any other information required to be given	The above-stated cases are false, fabricated and politically motivated.	
2	The reasons for the selection of the candidate. Selection shall be with reference to the qualifications, achievements and merit of the qualifications, achievements and merit of the candidate, and not mere "winnability" at the polls (not more than 100 words)	Dr. Udit Raj is former IRS and his vast Knowledge and experience in Public service and impeccable character were inter-alia , reasons for his selection as Candidate for North-West Constituency.	
3	Reasons as to why other individuals without criminal antecedents could not be selected as candidates (not more than 100 words)	Dr. Udit Raj is former member of Parliament and Common People of North-West Delhi Constituency loved his works for the welfare of the Common people and hence on the demand of the people of North-West Delhi, he was preferred over other candidates.	

(2) Name of the constituency : North - West Delhi
Name of the Candidate : Dr. Udit Raj

In the case of election to council of states of states or election to Legislative Council by MLAs, mention the election concerned in place of name of constituency.

Signature of Office bearer of the political Party
Name and designation
Davinder Yadav
President

PUBLIC NOTICE

To be known to all that I, Madan Lal Kukreja S/o Late Shri Sawan Lal Kukreja R/o DDA Janta Flat No. B-2, First Floor, Pocket O-17, Dilshad Garden, Delhi-110095, has applied for conversion of the DDA Janta Flat No. B-2, First Floor, Pocket O-17, Dilshad Garden, Delhi-110095, from lease hold to free hold in the NDA. The original Demand Letter of the above flat has been lost. An NCR to this effect has been lodged in P.S. Crime Branch in vide S.O.No. 430/2014 LR.No.169/2882/2024 dated 15.05.2024. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection of found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above address/Phone No. 9910902889 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objections with respect to the property, may write to the undersigned or write to, Mr. Director (LAB) or Director (H)-3, D Block, 3 Floor, Vikas Sadan, INA, New Delhi.

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is hereby inform to general public at large that my client Mrs. Preksha Gupta D/o Late Anita Gupta and Late Rakesh Kumar Gupta R/o F-26/113, Sector 7, Rohini, Delhi-85, is the owner of the property i.e. office no. 320, measuring 400 sq. ft., situated at Agarwal Modern Bazaar, Lawrance Road, Delhi-110035, by virtue of the regd. Sale deed vide Regn. No.11,114 in book no.1, Vol. No.2965 Page No.14 to 26 dated 26.07.2010 in the office of the S.R. V/A, Ptampura, Delhi and there is no dispute/litigation pending in any court of law in respect of the said property. The original sale deed of the property was kept by father of my client, who expired suddenly on 21/08/2019, the said documents are not traceable/ misplaced. If any person find the said document then return the same to my client and if person having any type of claim/right/interest over the said property may inform to my client in writing within 15 days from the date of publication of this public notice, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all types of encumbrances, lien etc. and the certified copy issued by the sub registrar office shall be treated as original sale deed in future.

PARDEEP BANSAAL
Advocate D-5388/2019

PUBLIC NOTICE

My clients Vinod Singh S/o Sh. Suresh Pal Singh and Smt. Rosini Devi W/o Sh. Vinod Singh both R/o B-11, Gali No. 3, Phase-10, Shiv Vihar, Karawal Nagar, North-East, Delhi-110054, having severed relation with their daughter Annu, due to her bad behaviour, this conduct and solemnized her marriage as per her choice and debarred from all movable-immovable properties, anybody deal with her own his risk and consequences. My clients shall not be responsible for the same.

(S.K. GILL) ADVOCATE Ch. No. E-419, 4th Floor, KKD Court Shahdara, Delhi-110032

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby informed that my client Mr. Babu Lal Gupta S/o Late Shri. Ram Chander Gupta, R/o A-4/195, Pocket-A-4, Sector-4, Rohini, Delhi-85 is the absolute owner of the property. My Client's nephew, Mr. Rajesh Gupta & his wife Mrs. Bhavna Gupta are unlawfully using his residential address. If anybody dealing with them, then, neither my client nor his property should be held accountable for their unlawful act, in the future.

Yogander Singh (Advocate)
(Enrl. No. 01/28/1996)
M.No. 9990274933

PUBLIC NOTICE

To be known to all, **VEDNA RAGHU WANGSI W/O SH. VINEK RACHUWANGSI R/O FLAT NO.276, TOWER-4, SUPREME ENCLAVE, PLOT NO.14, MAYUR VIHAR PH-1, DELHI-110059** owner/purchaser of FLAT NO. 276, TOWER-4, SUPREME ENCLAVE, PLOT NO.14, MAYUR VIHAR PH-1, DELHI-110059 has applied for conversion of the aforesaid flat from lease hold to free hold in DDA. The original document i.e. Allotment Form Possession Letter issued by the DDA above said flat has been lost. An NCR in No. 1587/2024 dated 01/05/2024 with respect to this effect has been lodged in P.S. Crime Branch, Delhi. Any person(s) claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above address/Phone No. 981047617 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objection with respect to this property, may write to the undersigned or write to, Mr. Director (LAB) or Deputy Director (Group Housing) or Director (Group Housing), Delhi Development Authority, Vikas Sadan, New Delhi-110023.

Naveen Aggarwal (Advocate)
Ch. No. M-7, Near S.B. Western Wing, Tis Hazari Court, Delhi-54

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is to inform to the public at large that Mr. Jeevan Singh has acquired Plot No. A-5A & 5B, area measuring 300 sq. yds., Kharsa No-2577 Village Matla, District Jhansi, U.P. measuring 1100599 sq. yds. G.P.A. of 12.01.2000 executed by Mr. Dalip Kapoor and Mr. Pardeep Kapoor along with A/S and will for area 150 Sq. yds., and G.P.A. of 12.01.2000 executed by Mr. Dalip Kapoor and Mr. Pardeep Kapoor for area 150 Sq. yds.. Now Mr. Jeevan Singh is the undisputed owner of above said property.

Naveen Aggarwal (Advocate)
Ch. No. M-7, Near S.B. Western Wing, Tis Hazari Court, Delhi-54

Public Notice

This is to inform the general public that Mrs. Kamla Devi, Mr. Rohit Dubeey, & Mrs. Priyanka Dubeey are the legal heirs of Mr. Balram Dubeey as per SMC share with Mr. Balram was the owner of Land measuring 50 Sq. Yds. out of Kharsa No. 227, situated in Village Sadarpur, Tehsil Dabri Dist. Gurgaon, Haryana. Mr. Balram Dubeey died on 22.12.1999. Do. No. 4519 executed by Mr. Harpal Singh in favour of Mr. Balram Dubeey/Unfortunately, Balram Dubeey died on dated 27.06.2019 and left behind Mrs. Kamla Devi, Mr. Rohit Dubeey, & Mrs. Priyanka Devi, Mr. Rohit Dubeey, & Mrs. Priyanka Dubeey. Mr. Rohit Dubeey & Mrs. Priyanka Dubeey intend to transfer the ownership by way of Sale Deed of above mentioned property to Mr. Ajay Kumar Mahto & Mrs. Renu Devi. Subsequently, Mr. Ajay Kumar Mahto & Mrs. Renu Devi are in the process of mortgaging the property with the State Bank of India (SBI). (Formerly Fullerton India Home Finance Co. Ltd./Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 07 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 07-days period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of the client.

If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 07-day period by contacting Law Veritas North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-4/A4, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301. Landline: +91202-3101663; e-mail: accounts@lvnorth.in

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is to inform to the public at large that M/s. Amero Buildcon has acquired Property area measuring 665 sq. mtrs. + 460 sq. mtrs. + 2000 sq. mtrs. total area measuring 3125 Sq. Yards, Plot No. 00028, Kharsa No. 113/m, Mirzapur Park, Gurgaon, Haryana. The said Property was acquired by M/s. Amero Buildcon and Sale Deed dated 04.11.2023 executed by Mr. Narender Kumar and Sale Deed dated 04.11.2023 executed by Mr. Gulshan Bhat, Now M/s. Amero Buildcon is the undisputed owner of above said property.

OR

Any person / firm / institution / company having any claim or right in respect of the said Property by way of inheritance, share, sale, agreement, lease, license, gift, possession, legal heirs, partners or encumbrance houseowner or otherwise is hereby required to intimate in writing to the undersigned within 07 days from the date of publication of this notice of his/her/their share or claim, if any, with all supporting documents at below mentioned address. After expiration of notice period, the claims, if any, of such person shall be treated null and void and also treated as waived and not binding on our client.

Advocate (Advocate) OFFICE: 26/161, LGF, Vikram Vihar Lajpat Nagar 4, New Delhi, 110024.

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is to inform to the public at large that Mr. Jeevan Singh has acquired Plot No. A-5A & 5B, area measuring 300 sq. yds., Kharsa No-2577 Village Matla, District Jhansi, U.P. measuring 1100599 sq. yds. G.P.A. of 12.01.2000 executed by Mr. Dalip Kapoor and Mr. Pardeep Kapoor along with A/S and will for area 150 Sq. yds., and G.P.A. of 12.01.2000 executed by Mr. Dalip Kapoor and Mr. Pardeep Kapoor for area 150 Sq. yds.. Now Mr. Jeevan Singh is the undisputed owner of above said property.

Naveen Aggarwal (Advocate)
Ch. No. M-7, Near S.B. Western Wing, Tis Hazari Court, Delhi-54

UMMEED HOUSING FINANCE PRIVATE LIMITED

Corp. Off: Unit No.809-815, 8th Floor, Tower-A, Emaar Digital Greens, Golf Course Extn. Road, Sector 61, Gurugram-122102-Haryana
CIN: U65922HR2012PLC007884

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform & notify the public about the relocation of Noida, Branch of Ummeed Housing Finance Pvt. Ltd. effective from 02.08.2024.

From Ummeed Housing Finance Pvt. Ltd.
R.C. Market, 1st Floor, Dabri main Road, Opposite Salarpur, Bhanje, Noida - 201304 (U.P.)

To Ummeed Housing Finance Pvt. Ltd.
2nd Floor, Om Complex, Naya Bans, Village, Sector - 15, Noida-201301, Uttar Pradesh.

For more details, Please Contact :
Ummeed Housing Finance Pvt. Ltd.
Toll Free :1800 - 212- 6127

Kotak
Kotak Mahindra Bank

NOTICE

Locker hired by Mr. Sekhawat Ali having address at 222-488, Kaifa Road Near Lalten Factory Ward No 48 Ghaziabad-201001 with Ghaziabad Branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank. Situated at 30, 31 Navvug Market, Ghaziabad, U.P. 201001 remains un-operated and rent due for the last 8 years.

All the 3 letters sent to Mr. Sekhawat Ali calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned unserved and he is not contactable.

It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Mr. Sekhawat Ali within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on August 01, 2024 at around 12 p.m

Office of the City Magistrate/Marriage Officer
Gautam Budh Nagar
No.323/ST-CM (Marriage Registration)/2024
Date: 22 April, 2024

NOTICE

A notice of intended marriage has been received from Mr. Denis Campbell S/o Mr. Samuel Campbell R/o P-1203, Supertech Ecociti, Sector-137 Noida Gautam Budha Nagar (U.P.) and Ms. Swati Shastri D/o Late Mr. Jagdish Prasad Shastri R/o 2C/87, M/S Vrindavan Yojana-2, Raebareli Road, Lucknow-226025 in the office of the undersigned. Therein, may file objections to it on any day upto 21-05-2024 in the office of the undersigned.

Deputy Collector/City Magistrate/ Marriage Officer Noida
Gautam Budh Nagar

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that my client Vijay Mehta is in process to purchase the Property bearing No. 1215 Old & New No. IX, 5455, area measuring 59 sq. yds. out of Kharsa No. 262 and 264 situated near Mahabharat Seelampur, Rajghat Pura No. 02, Gandhi Nagar, in the area of Village Seelampur, Jhansi Shahdara, Delhi-110031 (taking loan from DCB Bank) from Ksh Vandana Singh having acquired the same vide Deed dated 24.02.2020 executed by Mr. Subodh Kumar and Indra W/o pertaining to the said property, an FIR has already been lodged for that on dated 30/4/2024.

All persons having any claim/objection or in respect of the said property, or any part thereof, by way of inheritance, sale, lease, mortgage, registered or otherwise, gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangements, tenancy, partnership, joint possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise, however, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documents, if any, within 7 days from the date mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, (such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned).

Kamal Kant Gupta (Advocate)
Unit No. FF-2, First Floor, Mahalaxmi Metro Tower S-2, Vasthali, Gurgaon, U.P. Mob. 9810083351

Public Notice

This is to inform the general public that Mr. Nareesh Kumar Gupta is the sole owner of Property bearing No. 5771, built on plot no. 5B-B, area measuring 368.89 sq. yds. out of Kharsa No-4514/43, situated in the area of village Jhimli Tahipur, in the abadi of Shandara, Industrial area (Dilshad Garden City, West Block) Jhansi Shahdara Delhi. This ownership was legally acquired through a Sale Deed dated 31.05.2005 executed by Mr. Sanjay Laxminis in favour of Mr. Nareesh Kumar Gupta in respect of property.

Mr. Nareesh Kumar Gupta now the process of mortgaging the aforesaid Property with SMFI India Credit Co. Ltd. (Formerly Fullerton India Home Finance Co. Ltd.) Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 14 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 14 days period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client.

If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 14-day period by contacting Law Veritas North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-4/A4, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301. Landline: +91202-3101663; e-mail: accounts@lvnorth.in

Kotak
Kotak Mahindra Bank

NOTICE

Locker hired by Mr. Kishan Lal Chadha having address C-22 Meerut Road Ghaziabad - 201003 with Ghaziabad branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank. Situated at 30, 31 Navvug Market, Ghaziabad, UP. 201001, remains un-operated and rent due for the last 8 years.

All the 3 letters sent to Mr. Kishan Lal Chadha calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned unserved and he is not contactable.

It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Mr. Kishan Lal Chadha within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on August 01, 2024 at around 12 p.m

Kotak
Kotak Mahindra Bank

NOTICE

Locker hired by Mr. Bhushan Lal having address at B-126 Gagan Enclave Amrit Nagar Ghaziabad - 201001 with Ghaziabad branch of Kotak Mahindra Bank. Situated at 30, 31 Navvug Market, Ghaziabad, UP. 201001, remains un-operated and rent due for the last 8 years.

All the 3 letters sent to Mr. Bhushan Lal calling upon him to clear dues and to operate the locker has returned unserved and he is not contactable.

It is hereby informed that despite this notice if dues not cleared and locker is not operated by Mr. Bhushan Lal within 90 days from the date of this notice, break open of the said locker will be done on August 01, 2024 at around 12 p.m

SALE NOTICE

The under mentioned Assets will be sold through auction as "AS IS WHERE IS BASIS" and "AS IS WHAT IS BASIS" for recovery of dues as per court orders, in the following cases:-

Case Details	Asset Details
ICICI Bank Vs. Jitendara Bhati And Others, CS(Comm) 2690/21	Vehicle No. UP16FT8014, Make and Model- Ashok Leyland Partner, Manu Year- 2018

Auction Date: May 15, 2024 From 11:00 am to 2:00 pm.
Place of Auction: Mahakal Parking yard, Kharsa No 527 Village Bantaha Near Indane Gas Plant Loni Ghaziabad - UP, 201102
Contact Person: Swapnil Upadhyay (8126013708)/ Rohit Shrivastava (8657476284)

Terms of Sale

The particulars of the said asset specified herein above have been stated to the best of the information and knowledge of the undersigned, who shall however not be responsible for any error, misstatement or omission in the said particulars. The interested participant/s are therefore requested, in their own interest, to satisfy himself / themselves / itself with regard to the said asset and other relevant details pertaining to it before submitting the bids. All bidders are required to come at auction site with original KYC documents to participate in the auction. Successful bidder shall have to deposit sale amount within 5 days from the approval date by the way of pay order/demand draft/RTGS/NEFT. The intending bidders may visit at ICICI Bank Ltd, Shal tower Plot no. 23, New Rohtak Road Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005 for details and inspection of the said hypothecated vehicles.

APPENDIX IV-A

Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property

E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 8(6) and Rule 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described Immovable Property mortgaged to Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd. [CIN : L65922DL2005PLC136029] ("Secured Creditor"), the constructive possession of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of the Secured Creditor, will be sold on "as is where is", "as is what is" and "whatever there is" basis on 20.05.2024 at 04.00 P.M. to 05.00 P.M., for recovery of Rs. 22,14,128/- (Rupees Twenty Two Lakh Fourteen Thousand One Hundred Twenty Eight only) pending towards Loan Account No. HHLRND00027821, by way of outstanding principal, arrears (including accrued late charges) and interest till 26.04.2024 with applicable future interest in terms of the Loan Agreement and other related loan document(s) w.e.f. 27.04.2024 along with legal expenses and other charges due to the Secured Creditor from RITURAJ SINGH and SUMAN GOEL.

The Reserve Price of the Immovable Property will be Rs. 23,60,000/- (Rupees Twenty Three Lakh Sixty Thousand only) and the Earnest Money Deposit ("EMD") will be Rs. 2,36,000/- (Rupees Two Lakh Thirty Six Thousand only) i.e. equivalent to 10% of the Reserve Price.

DESCRIPTION OF THE IMMOVABLE PROPERTY

FLAT NO. B-23/14 ADMEASURING 86.04 SQUARE METERS ON 1ST FLOOR, AREA ADMEASURING 29.24 SQ. MTRS, SITUATED AT BLOCK - F, SECTOR - 05, SAHARANPUR ROAD, GHAZIABAD - 201102, UTTAR PRADESH.

For detailed terms and conditions of sale, please refer to the link provided on the website of the Secured Creditor i.e. www.indiabullshomefinance.com; Contact No: 0124-6910910, +91 7065451024; E-mail id: auctionhelpline@indiabulls.com For bidding, log on to www.auctionfocus.in

Sd/-
Authorized Officer
Indiabulls Housing Finance Limited

Date: 26.04.2024
Place: GHAZIABAD

FORM NO. URC-2

Advertisement giving notice about registration under Part I of Chapter XXI of the Act [Pursuant to section 374(A) of the Companies Act, 2013 and Rule 4(1) of the Companies (Authorised to Register) Rules, 2014]

1. Notice is hereby given that in pursuance of sub-section (2) of section 366 of the Companies Act, 2013, an application is proposed to be made after fifteen days hereof but before expiry of thirty days hereinafter to the Registrar at Central Registration Centre (CRC) Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA), Plot No. 6, 7, 8 Sector 5, IIT Manesar, District Gurugram (Haryana), Pin Code-122050 that PACCOPELLI FASHION HOUSE LLP (LLP, PAN: AA1-4232), a LLP may be registered under Part I of Chapter XXI of the Companies Act, 2013, as a company limited by shares.

2. The principal objects of the company are as follows: To carry on the business of manufacturers, importers and exporters, wholesale and retail dealers of men, women and children clothing and wearing apparel of every kind, nature and description including shirts, bush-shirts, pyjama sets, vests, underwear, suits, foundation garments for ladies dresses, brassiers, maternity belts, knee caps, coats, panties, nighties and so on.

3. A copy of the draft memorandum and articles of association of the proposed company may be inspected at the registered address at 312-B, Pocket-C, Phase-II, East Delhi, Mayur Vihar, Delhi, India, 110091.

4. Notice is hereby given that any person objecting to this application may communicate their objection in writing to the Registrar at Central Registration Centre, Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA), Plot No. 6, 7, 8, Sector 5, IIT Manesar, District Gurugram (Haryana), Pin Code-122050, within twenty one days from the date of publication of this notice, with a copy to the company at its registered office.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Voter inertia

Low turnout in early phases of Lok Sabha polls is a cause of concern for parties, EC and democracy

The lukewarm voter response in the first two phases of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections raises several questions about the underlying reasons for their apathy. Is the weather a deterrent, or is it disillusionment with governance, scepticism towards nominees/parties, or lack of faith in electoral procedures like Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)? Indeed, there is a pressing need to rekindle voter enthusiasm and participation in the electoral process. An initial speculation regarding low turnout often points to adverse weather conditions. The scorching heat can indeed discourage voters, especially in regions prone to extreme climates. However, while the weather may play a role, it is seldom the sole determinant of voter participation. A more substantial factor contributing to voter apathy lies in the prevailing disillusionment with governance. Citizens, disappointed by unfulfilled promises, rampant corruption and inefficient administration, often perceive their votes as inconsequential. This disenchantment can lead to voter inertia, where individuals feel disengaged from the political process altogether. Also, scepticism towards parties and their nominees exacerbates voter apathy. In an era marked by populism, polarisation and political opportunism, many voters struggle to identify with candidates or parties that truly represent their interests. The prevalence of dynastic politics and candidate selection based on nepotism only deepens this distrust. The leaders' conduct leaves much to be desired. Many times, they switch sides making a mockery of the voters' decision. Sometimes even the party the voters voted for joins hands with its arch-rival. In such scenarios, voters have reasons to feel cheated.



As if all this were not enough, there are doubts about the efficacy of the electoral process itself. Many people are given to doubt the machinery employed, including the EVMs. The introduction of EVMs was hailed as a milestone in ensuring transparent and efficient elections. However, over time, scepticism and conspiracy theories surrounding EVMs have proliferated, eroding public trust in the process. Allegations of tampering, malfunctioning machines and lack of transparency in EVMs handling have sowed the seeds of doubt in the minds of voters. Their perceived vulnerability to hacking or manipulation, coupled with the absence of a paper trail for verification, has fuelled apprehensions about the sanctity of elections. In such an environment, restoring faith in electoral procedures becomes imperative to bolster voter confidence. The situation turned so grave that the matter was taken to the Supreme Court. On this front, introducing measures such as VVPATs alongside the EVMs can go a long way in rebuilding voters' trust. Indeed, it would take an effort by the Election Commission as well as the political class to instil a sense of confidence among people that their vote is sacrosanct. By demonstrating integrity and a genuine commitment to serving the public interest, political parties can rebuild the trust with for-now disillusioned voters.

PICTALK



People visit the seafront on a hot summer day, in Mumbai

Upholding the Fourth Estate in digital age



SANTOSH MATHEW

In an era marred by misinformation, censorship and threats to journalists, the celebration of press freedom assumes greater significance than ever before

Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a Government without newspapers, or newspapers without a Government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter - Thomas Jefferson

Every year on May 3rd, the world comes together to celebrate World Press Freedom Day, a day dedicated to honouring the fundamental principles of press freedom, defending the independence of the media and paying tribute to journalists who risk their lives to report the truth. In an era marked by misinformation, censorship and threats to journalists worldwide, this day holds more significance than ever. Press freedom is the cornerstone of democracy. It empowers citizens by providing them with access to diverse viewpoints and information, enabling them to make informed decisions. A free press serves as a watchdog, holding Governments and powerful entities accountable for their actions. It acts as a voice for the voiceless, bringing attention to social injustices and human rights violations. Despite the crucial role they play, journalists around the world face numerous challenges in their pursuit of truth. They encounter threats, harassment and violence, both online and offline. Many journalists risk imprisonment or even death for daring to report on sensitive issues. Censorship, propaganda and attacks on press freedom have become increasingly prevalent, hindering the ability of journalists to fulfil their vital role in society. World Press Freedom Day. Since 1993, it has been observed globally to honour a declaration made by African journalists in Windhoek, Namibia, in 1991. It commemorates press freedom principles and acknowledges journalists' courage. UNESCO awards the Guillermo Cano Prize to those preserving press freedom. While technology has revolutionised the way information is disseminated, it has also presented new challenges for press freedom. Social media platforms have become powerful tools for



spreading information, but they have also been weaponised to spread misinformation and silence dissenting voices. Journalists must navigate through a digital landscape fraught with fake news and online harassment, often at great personal risk. India, home to one of the world's largest and most vibrant media landscapes, has faced scrutiny in recent years regarding its press freedom record. According to the World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), India's ranking has seen fluctuations. In the 2023 index, India was placed at 163 out of 180 countries, indicating significant challenges to press freedom within the country. "When asked to bend, the media crawled. And when asked to crawl, it cringed." This statement was made by Advani in the context of the Indian media's behaviour during the Emergency period (1975-1977), imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. During this time, press freedom faced severe restrictions, with journalists being arrested, newspapers censored and the Government exerting tight control over media outlets.



PRESS FREEDOM IS THE CORNERSTONE OF A DEMOCRACY. IT EMPOWERS CITIZENS BY PROVIDING THEM WITH ACCESS TO DIVERSE VIEWPOINTS AND INFORMATION, ENABLING THEM TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS

Advani's quote reflects his criticism of how certain sections of the media capitulated to Government pressure and failed to uphold journalistic integrity and independence. It suggests that instead of resisting unjust demands or censorship, some media outlets complied with the Government's wishes, even to the point of degradation. This quote serves as a reminder of the importance of a free and independent press in holding those in power accountable and safeguarding democracy. It highlights the need for journalists to remain vigilant in upholding the principles of press freedom, especially in times of political turmoil or authoritarian rule. British politician Edmund Burke is often credited with coining the term in the late 18th century, referring to the gallery of the House of Commons as the fourth estate, symbolising the press's influence on political affairs. The term "fifth estate" underscores the transformative role of social media in democratising access to information, enabling individuals to participate in public discourse and challenging established institutions and power structures. Social media platforms

empower users to share news, opinions and perspectives instantaneously, bypassing traditional gatekeepers of information. On World Press Freedom Day, we must reaffirm our commitment to defending press freedom and protecting journalists worldwide. Governments must uphold the principles of free speech and ensure the safety of journalists within their borders. Civil society plays a crucial role in advocating for press freedom and holding those who seek to suppress it accountable. Media organisations must continue to strive for independence, transparency and ethical journalism, even in the face of adversity. World Press Freedom Day is also a day to celebrate the courage and resilience of journalists who risk their lives to report the truth. It is a day to honour those who have faced persecution, imprisonment and even death for their commitment to upholding the principles of press freedom. Their dedication serves as a reminder of the invaluable role journalists play in safeguarding democracy and promoting transparency. (The writer is an associate professor, views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EMPOWERING VISUAL NARRATIVES

Madam — Apropos the news article, "A picture is worth a thousand words," published on May 1, this is my response. The depiction of sexual violence against women in the media often portrays them as helpless victims, reinforcing stigma and shame. Ankita Anand, a survivor herself, challenged this narrative by spearheading a campaign urging media outlets to rethink their imagery. Instead of portraying women as passive victims, she advocated for images that reflect their resilience and agency. Anand's efforts, along with initiatives like the image bank by the Hri Institute, mark a significant step in reshaping visual narratives around gender-based violence.

Through campaigns like "I Never Ask For It," survivors are reclaiming their stories, using mediums like textiles to challenge societal attitudes towards gender-based violence. These initiatives underscore the transformative power of imagery in shaping public perception and fostering empathy. Ultimately, the portrayal of sexual violence in the media should prioritise dignity and empowerment, amplifying the voices of survivors and challenging ingrained biases. It's a collective responsibility to ensure that visual narratives reflect the strength and resilience of those affected, rather than perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Rian Mehta | Chandigarh

CHINA'S SHADOW POLITICS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Why is the BJP avoiding China in campaigning?" published on May 1, this is my response. The discourse surrounding China in Indian politics is a delicate dance where words and actions are carefully measured. While the former Army Chief's blunt assessment of China as India's primary threat is refreshing, it also underscores the gravity of the situation. The recent revelations about the India-China confrontation shed light on systemic failures and diplomatic intricacies shaping bilateral relations.

Zara Khan | Mumbai

India's semiconductor mission



Apropos the news article, "Semicon ecosystem: A revolution in India," published on May 1, this is my response. The surge of semiconductor development in India marks a pivotal juncture in our technological evolution. As our reliance on technology deepens, so does the significance of these minuscule chips, which power everything from smartphones to space missions. India's strategic vision to foster a robust semiconductor ecosystem is commendable, as evidenced by ambitious projects and partnerships aimed at reducing import dependency and fostering innovation. Initiatives like the India Semiconductor Mission and skill development programmes underscore a concerted effort to nurture indigenous talent and infrastructure. Geopolitical shifts, especially amidst the China-US trade tensions, offer a timely opportunity for India to emerge as a preferred destination for semiconductor manufacturing.

However, challenges persist, particularly in bridging the skill gap and accessing advanced technology. Collaborations with global leaders and initiatives to attract talent back to India are steps in the right direction. The road ahead is promising, with India poised to not only meet its self-sufficiency goals but also emerge as a global leader in semiconductor innovation, contributing significantly to economic growth.

Advait Rao | Bengaluru

The Government's cautious approach, aiming for diplomatic disengagement while hinting at alternative alliances reflects the complexity of the issue. However, the opacity surrounding critical events like the Kailash Heights incident raises questions about political oversight and decision-making during times of crisis. As the election rhetoric tiptoes around recent confrontations, focusing instead on historical grievances, individuals like Naravane risk overshadowing the valorous efforts. Amidst the political manoeuvring, one thing remains clear: addressing the China challenge requires strategic foresight and resolute action.

DANCE UNITES PEOPLE

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Celebrating the Universal Language of Dance," published on April 30, this is my response. Dance is a lot more than just body movements. It is a universal language that speaks to the soul. By using dance as a tool for change, you can turn your passion into a powerful force for social good.

The wonderful aspect of dance is its ability to speak volumes without uttering a single word.

It is a great way to share one's passion for dance, impart new skills and foster a sense of unity. One of the greatest strengths of dance is its finesse and ability to touch people emotionally. Remember, every little step counts when it comes to making a difference through dance. Dance comes in many forms, from ballet to hip-hop and from contemporary to folk. A talented dancer will naturally embrace all these styles and weave them into choreography. This not only enriches the dancer's performance but also acknowledges the global tapestry of dance. A dance community is a great space for everyone, regardless of their age, race and gender. After all, diversity is the lifeblood of creativity. Said John Dryden, the literary critic and an accomplished poet from England: "Dancing is the poetry of the feet."

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Time to curb fake videos in elections

A deepfake video of Union Home Minister Amit Shah sparks outrage during the Lok Sabha election campaign



VIVEK SHUKLA

The ongoing Lok Sabha election campaign has suddenly taken a very ugly turn after a fake video involving Union Home Minister Amit Shah has surfaced. Accusations and counter-accusations are common during campaigns and are not considered harmful. However, it is unacceptable for anyone or political party to resort to using 'deep fake' technology to release fake videos against their opponents to win elections. In a recent case, the country's Home Minister, Amit Shah, has become a victim of 'deep fake' technology. Amit Shah delivered a speech at a BJP election rally in Siddipet, Medak district of Telangana on April 25. The video of this speech was allegedly tampered with and shared on social media. Fact checks have proven this video to be completely fake.



In this fake video, Amit Shah is allegedly seen announcing the abolishment of reservations for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Now, imagine if someone could abolish the reservations provided to the

above-mentioned classes in the country. It is an impossible thing. In reality, an old video of Amit Shah has been edited, in which he was talking about ending Muslim reservations. In this original video, ST and SC have been added in place of Muslims. However, the question arises as to how the fake video may look exactly like the real one. Fake videos are created with the help of software. As we know, the use of machine learning and artificial intelligence tools has increased in the market these days. In this technology, the tone and voice of a person are captured with the help of machine learning.

In fact, with the help of new technology, the face of a person who is not even a part of that video is fitted into the video. It is difficult to tell the difference between real and fake in a video manipulated through this technique. Whoever leader or political party created and released fake videos showing Amit Shah announcing the abolishment of reservations, how serious an act they have committed to spreading hatred in society. A complaint has been lodged by Prateek Karpe, an office bearer of BJP's Mumbai unit, at Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) Cyber Police Station. The complaint states that a deepfake video of Amit Shah was created, posted and shared on the internet, to defame BJP leader Amit Shah. The complainant also requested the police to immediately remove the fake video and register a case against those accused who allegedly shared it to create enmity and hatred among various castes. Based on the complaint, a case has been registered against the social media handle of Maharashtra Youth Congress and 16 others under various sections of the IPC and IT Act at Bandra-Kurla Cyber Police Station in Mumbai.

Of course, technological development has taken place rapidly in the world in the last few decades. The increasing use of digital platforms has made life easier and faster, but along with this benefit, some serious risks related to cyber security are also coming to the fore. With the boundless nature of cyberspace, the threats associated with it and the deceitful methods and tools of cyber criminals, the trend of cyber-attacks is constantly changing. Apart from this, terrorism and fundamentalism are also finding shelter in cyberspace. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Cybersecurity is no longer limited to the digital world. It has become a matter of national security." Cyberspace has become the new battleground. The Government must take strict action against these elements. Meanwhile, one only hopes that the authorities concerned would curb the menace of deep fake videos sooner rather than later with an iron hand.

(The writer is a senior journalist and author of two books; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The mastery of emotions is a pivotal factor in shaping success and fulfilment



SAKSHI SETHI

In a busy world, as individuals navigate through various personal and professional challenges, their ability to understand and manage emotions plays a critical role in determining success, well-being and overall fulfilment. It is the emotions that shape how individuals interact, communicate, lead and innovate, thereby ultimately driving organisational success and fostering a positive work culture. Often it is found that much of an individual's behaviour is the result of emotions. However, these emotions are not a great guide to how one should behave in challenging situations. That is why identifying and working through them helps make better decisions. Feelings and needs are intertwined and knowing one helps an individual understand the other. It is the feelings that are the gateway into what health needs are thereby, promoting the individual to take appropriate action and enabling the self to grow and heal. If one is not in touch with their feelings, one may end up not knowing what they need which may further lead to indecision or emotional outbursts and the same is being faced in today's scenario be it the corporate world or the world of education.

The importance of emotional intelligence cannot be overstated in this fast-paced and interconnected world. At the workplace, what forms the utmost need is the combination of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, effective communication and a supportive work environment. By implementing such strategies, organisations can foster a culture where employees feel empowered to manage their emotions positively, leading to increased productivity, job satisfaction and overall well-being. Emotional intelligence positively correlates with job satisfaction. Employees with higher emotional intelligence are more satisfied with their jobs, as it fosters purpose, belonging and commitment.



Employees with high emotional intelligence excel in interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution and adaptability, while emotionally intelligent leaders inspire trust, motivate teams and cultivate a positive work environment. By promoting emotional well-being, organisations optimise employee performance and achieve better business outcomes. Recognising the importance of emotional well-being, organisations implement initiatives to support employees' mental health be it wellness programmes, counselling services or flexible work arrangements. Stress-reducing activities, workload management, work-life balance and emotional validation can reduce absenteeism, turnover and healthcare costs, promoting a healthier and more resilient workforce.

Organisations should look for silver linings or alternative perspectives that can help reframe the situation in a more positive light, for emotionally intelligent employees can bounce back from failures, learn from setbacks and thrive in the face of uncertainty. By practicing self-compassion, focusing on strengths and investing in ongoing learning and skill development to enhance competence and confidence, can an individual effectively manage challenging emotions in the workplace and foster a more positive and productive work environment.

Remember, a workplace that acknowledges and supports the emotional needs of employees can promote mental health, reduce stress and prevent burnout. Emotions are not only inevitable but the most essential ingredient in the workplace. Recognising them and then cultivating them can lead to a more engaged, collaborative and resilient workforce which will ultimately contribute to the organisation's success and sustainability.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

AFSPA repeal: A step towards 'Naya Kashmir'



ABHINAV NARAYAN

Amit Shah's proposal to repeal AFSPA in J&K could restore normalcy, but it must consider the broader implications and evolving security of the region



Recently, the Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that the Centre will consider the removal of AFSPA in J&K. This statement assumes significance as it reflects the Government's vision towards J&K and most importantly Prime Minister's promise of Naya Kashmir. Soon, after the Lok Sabha elections, the focus will be panned towards J&K as the Union Territory is scheduled to go for polls in September this year. After abrogating article 370, the Government seems to be turning towards solving another long-standing conundrum in J&K- AFSPA. At the security and strategic level, this attempt will accelerate the cleaning of Pakistan's propaganda by cleaning up their psychological warfare designs in J&K and will provide full throttle for holistic development. Before the Government sets its approach, it must see the bigger picture first.

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act gives sweeping powers to armed forces (which also extends to CAPF under Section 2) and most significantly provides them legal immunity for their actions under Section 7 of the act. However, the Supreme Court in 2016 struck down this blanket protection from prosecution. The Supreme Court said "It does not matter whether the victim was a common person or a militant or a terrorist, nor does it matter whether the aggressor was a common person or the state. The law is the same for both and is equally applicable to both". The sweeping powers under Section 4 of the act include -1. Arrest without warrant, -2. Fire (After due warning) upon or use other kinds of force even if it causes death, against the person who is acting against law or order in the disturbed area for the maintenance of public order. -3. To enter and search any premises in order to make such arrests, or to recover any person wrongfully restrained or any arms, ammunition or explosive substances and seize it. -4. Stop and search any vehicle or vessel reasonably suspected to be carrying such person or weapons. The AFSPA debate stems from two perspectives first is security necessity and second is cases of extrajudicial killings in the Northeast. The most debatable part is the second one which has made this act controversial. In 2004, a thorough review of the act was done by the Justice Jeevan Reddy Commission which concluded that the act should be repealed and observed that "agitations such as in Manipur and elsewhere are merely the symptoms of a malaise, which goes much deeper" and called on the Government to address the "core issues". However, the importance of National security somehow gets shadowed by a few cases of misuse of the act.



THE IMPOSITION OF AFSPA IN THE STATE OR UT ITSELF EXPLAINS THAT THE STATE HAS ALMOST LOST ITS CAPACITY TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION AND WHEN THE STATE LOSES ITS CAPACITY, IT MEANS THAT THE ADVERSARY OR ANY ADVERSE SITUATION WILL SOON GRIP THE STATE, LEADING TO MAYHEM AND A BREAKDOWN OF NATIONAL SECURITY

Call for AFSPA comes under extraordinary situations which if not controlled or mitigated can result in serious consequences from the genocide of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990, 1986 Kashmir riots killing 2000 2000 people primarily Hindus, Sopor firings in January 1993 killing 40 people to Bij Behara firings in October 1993 killing 60 people. Such horrifying incidents need stringent measures in place and a certain amount of free pass to operate efficiently. "We feel that by revoking special legal provisions, which are in place here, definitely our operational capabilities will be compromised," General Officer Command (GOC) of Army's Srinagar-based 15 Corps Lieutenant General Syed Ata Hasnain said in 2011. To deal with a situation that is spiralling out day by day in a state requires effective operational dominance over the adversary which can only be possible if armed forces can freely operate. The imposition of AFSPA in the state or UT itself explains that the state has almost lost its capacity to deal with the situation and when the state loses its capacity then it means that the adversary or any adverse situation will soon grip the state leading to mayhem and breakdown of national security. Such situations of

breakdowns are not ordinary and demand extreme measures and interventions to normalise and any constraints in intervention will affect the normalisation process therefore to let "normalisation" progress an effective emergency response mechanism is required which AFSPA provides. A call for the removal of AFSPA should only come when the security environment is significantly improved or secured as hurried removal might bring back the old situation. The case of a fresh wave of radicalisation in 2018 in J&K after the killing of terror poster boy Burhan Wani is one incidence where a cautious decision must be made to decide the removal of AFSPA. AFSPA is not immune; it has its limitations and misuses. For example, the Nagaland case in 2021 of killing innocent 14 civilians or the 1995 Kohima Massacre where 16th Rashtriya Rifles fired upon civilians mistaking the sound of the tyre bursting for a bomb attack killing 7 and injuring 36. The free pass or the freeness in the name of operational efficiency or capabilities has also led to some serious consequences which are eroding the primary objective of the act. The AFSPA Act is in place to mitigate the extreme situation in the state and to aggravate it. Such incidents aggravate the situation and further complicate the situation in a state. Therefore, these immunities either required a removal or needed a proper check to put caution in the exercise of powers by the armed forces which later was done by the Supreme Court in 2016. AFSPA cannot stay for long as extraordinary or exceptional situations are temporary and once under control, AFSPA could be withdrawn. If it goes beyond necessity, then AFSPA's presence would hinder the normalisation process. The normalisation process does not

only include fighting with the adversary it also includes the restoration of a peaceful and harmonious environment. A state of being normal is only when the state begins to function without any constraints, fear and anxiety. AFSPA being in place distorts the state of being "normal" and rather heightens the anxiety and fear which in the long run affects the democratic ecosystem and governance in a state that might further lead to socio-political instability if overlooked. The case of J&K ever since the removal of Article 370 has significantly improved there was a 66 per cent drop in terror cases in J&K. The union territory has also seen a significant drop in terror recruitment under Army's Operation Sahi Raasta. According to reports only seven youth joined terror groups last year. As the security environment in J&K is significantly improved, a call for the removal of AFSPA is well reasoned. Now, the CAPF presence would easily tackle any security situation if arises as the substantial threat of terror now seems to be subsiding. Like the Government withdrew AFSPA from Punjab in 1997 it should soon take a call on J&K as well, though few CAPF presence can be there considering bordering areas the operation of the act must be withdrawn. The removal of AFSPA will facilitate and exhort confidence and peace among people. Most importantly, eliminates the sense of fear and accelerates the pace of normalisation and developmental processes at socio-political levels. The Prime Minister's promise in Naya Kashmir lies beyond the security to society and politics which will only strengthen after the removal of AFSPA.

(The author is an Advocate based out of New Delhi, views are personal)

Engaging in the theatrics of India's electoral carnival

In the realm of political theatre, candidates await their turn in the merry-go-round of power, setting the stage with tension and anticipation

In anticipation of the 18th Lok Sabha elections in India, political parties have fervently engaged in pre-electoral activities, including candidate selection, issue advocacy and public discourse—all these, much before the official announcement by the Election Commission (scheduled from April 19 to June 1, 2024). Of particular significance is the burgeoning cohort of 18 million first-time voters, who observe the electoral spectacle with keen interest as parties vie for their support by proffering ambitious pledges. Within this theatrical milieu, the composition of the Lok Sabha, comprising 543 parliamentary constituencies nationwide, assumes paramount importance. Each constituency plays a pivotal role in



RAJDEEP PATHAK

electing a singular representative, who assumes the mantle of voicing their constituents' concerns within the Lower House of Parliament. Thus, amidst the cacophony of democratic fervour, the formation of the (18th) Lok Sabha emerges as a focal point, embodying the democratic ethos and the intricacies of electoral representation within India's diverse polity - as we witness this chaotic carnival

(read dance) of democracy. Now picture this: Rallies echoing with rehearsed oratory; meetings buzzing with the monotonous drone of 'scripted' discourse; and the landscape littered with towering hoardings and captivating advertisements—all vying for attention like desperate contestants in a reality TV show. Each candidate, eagerly awaits their fate in this grandiose spectacle, hoping to shine bright enough to avoid being relegated to the shadows of political obscurity. But, as they say, once a politician, always a politician. This grand orchestra of democracy will see nearly a billion people herded like cattle into over a million polling booths, expected to cast their votes in a choreographed char-

ade to determine the future Government. In the realm of electoral politics, politicians assume the role of adept illusionists, skillfully concocting promises tailored to captivate the electorate. Through artful rhetoric, they conjure visions of development and inclusivity, appealing to voters' emotions despite the potential disparity with reality. Parties engage in a theatrical spectacle, donning elaborate garb and competing for attention with promises of infrastructure, welfare and prosperity. However, voters' decisions ultimately reflect both their susceptibility and the manipulative prowess of politicians. This electoral charade underscores the complex interplay between rhetoric, perception

and voter agency in contemporary democratic processes. Here past performances matter. Enter the Narendra Modi Government, riding high on the waves of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas', with a later addition of 'Sabka Prayas'. Since 2014, the Modi administration has been pulling rabbits out of hats faster than a magician—from electrifying villages to construction of toilets across the country in a bid to make India defecation-free, to digitising governance (Digital India), Startup India and standing up for the people and the world during emergencies like Covid19. Of course, like any good magic show, there's always a healthy dose of criticism to keep things interesting - after all, what's a politi-

cal spectacle without a little touch of drama? India's diplomatic endeavours have bolstered its global stature, marked by strategic alliances with major powers and initiatives like the International Solar Alliance, etc., fostering collaboration in trade, technology and sustainable development. Concurrently, domestic developments such as Ayushman Bharat for healthcare, Saubhagya for rural electrification, Jan-Dhan Yojana for financial inclusion and so on, underscore efforts toward inclusive progress. Nonetheless, socio-economic disparities persist, emblematic of the ongoing challenges amidst India's democratic evolution on the world stage. The Indian electoral process is characterised by extravagant

rallies, serving as vibrant showcases of democracy where ordinary citizens are swept into the extraordinary theatre of politics. Whether attendees arrive voluntarily or are transported en masse, these gatherings epitomise the essence of democratic engagement. Amidst a backdrop of waving flags and resonant slogans, the democratic spirit radiates, offering a glimpse of both the triumphs and tribulations of competing political factions. Central to this spectacle, is the tireless efforts of party workers, orchestrating the mobilisation of supporters for these occasions. One cannot forget that in this grand symphony, the Election Commission stands as the linchpin, ensuring the sancti-

ty of free and fair elections despite recurrent criticisms. Imagine the stalwart veterans anxiously clinging to their phones, praying for one more display of their experience in the political limelight, while the current faces (read chosen MPs) pace like restless lions in the corridors of authority, fearing either the sweet embrace of reselection or the bitter sting of rejection. But there's nothing to fear. For in the unpredictable world of politics, one never knows when the pendulum of fortune will favourably swing back. So, let us Vote so that the elected parties work to fulfil their manifesto.

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

Police dismantle pro-Palestinian demonstrators' encampment

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

Police removed barricades and began dismantling a pro-Palestinian demonstrators' fortified encampment early Thursday at the University of California, Los Angeles, after hundreds of protesters defied orders to leave. Some people were detained, their hands bound with zip ties.

The action came after officers spent hours threatening arrests over loudspeakers if people did not disperse. A crowd of more than 1,000 had gathered on campus, both inside a barricaded tent encampment and outside it, in support. Protesters and police shoved and scuffled as officers encountered resistance. With police helicopters hovering, the sound of flash-bangs, which produce a bright light and a loud noise to disorient and stun people, pierced the air. Protesters chanted, "Where were you last night?" at the officers, in reference to Tuesday night, when counter-protesters attacked the encampment and the UCLA administration and campus police took hours to respond.

Tent encampments of protesters calling on universities to stop doing business with Israel or companies they say support the war in Gaza have spread across campuses nationwide in a student movement unlike any other this century. The ensuing police crackdowns echoed actions decades ago against a much larger protest movement protesting the Vietnam War. In the Mideast, Iranian state television carried live images of the police action, as did Qatar's pan-Arab Al Jazeera satellite network. Live images of Los Angeles also played across Israeli television networks, as well.

California Highway Patrol officers poured into the campus by the hundreds early Thursday. Wearing face shields and protective vests, they stood with their batons protruding out to separate them from demonstrators, who wore helmets and gas masks and chanted, "You want peace. We want justice." Police methodically ripped apart the encampment's barricade of plywood, pallets, metal fences and trash dumpsters.

Will Israel end war without group's destruction?



Demonstrators gather on the UCLA campus, after nighttime clashes between Pro-Israel and Pro-Palestinian groups, on Wednesday. AP/PTI

Beirut (AP): Hamas on Thursday was considering the latest proposal for a cease-fire with Israel that the United States and other mediators hope will avert an Israeli attack on the Gaza town of Rafah. But chances for the deal are entangled with the question of whether Israel can accept an end to the war without reaching its stated goal of destroying Hamas.

The stakes in the cease-fire negotiations were made clear in a new UN report that said if the war in Gaza stops today, it will still take until 2040 to rebuild all the homes that have been destroyed by nearly seven months of Israeli bombardment and ground offensives in the territory.

It warned that the impact of the damage to the economy will set back development for generations and will only get worse with every month fighting continues. Hamas has insisted it won't sign onto the deal without assurances that, if it eventually releases all its hostages, Israel will end its

onslaught in Gaza and pull its troops out of the territory.

The proposal that US and Egyptian mediators have put to Hamas -- apparently with Israel's acceptance -- sets out a three-stage process that will bring an immediate six-week cease-fire and partial hostage release but also negotiations over a "permanent calm" that includes some sort of Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, according to an Egyptian official.

If Israel does agree to end the war in return for a full hostage release, it would be a major turnaround. Since Hamas' bloody Oct. 7 attack stunned Israel, its leaders have vowed not to stop their bombardment and ground offensives until the militant group is destroyed. They also say Israel must keep a military presence in Gaza and security control after the war to ensure Hamas doesn't rebuild.

Publicly at least, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to insist that is the only acceptable endgame.

He has vowed that even if a cease-fire is reached, Israel will eventually attack Rafah, which he says is Hamas' last stronghold in Gaza. He repeated his determination to do so in talks on Wednesday with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was in Israel on a regional tour to push the deal through.

The deal's immediate fate hinges on whether Hamas will accept uncertainty over the final phases to bring the initial six-week pause in fighting -- and at least postpone what it is feared would be a devastating assault on Rafah, Gaza's southernmost town where some 1.4 million Palestinians have taken refuge.

Egypt has been privately assuring Hamas that the deal will mean a total end to the war. But the Egyptian official said Hamas says the text's language is too vague and wants it to specify a complete Israeli pull-out from all of Gaza. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to talk about the internal deliberations.

Trump calls judge 'crooked' after facing warning of jail time

AP ■ WAUKESHA

Donald Trump returned briefly to the campaign trail Wednesday and called the judge presiding over his hush money trial "crooked" a day after he was held in contempt of court and threatened with jail time for violating a gag order. Trump's remarks at events in the battleground states of Wisconsin and Michigan were being closely watched after he received a USD 9,000 fine for making public statements about people connected to the criminal case. In imposing the fine for posts on Trump's Truth Social account and campaign website, Judge Juan M. Merchan said that if Trump continued to violate his orders, he would "impose an incarceration punishment." "There is no crime. I have a crooked judge. He's a totally conflicted judge," Trump said speaking to supporters at an event in



Waukesha, Wisconsin, claiming again that this and other cases against him are led by the White House to undermine his campaign. The gag order bars him from making public statements about witnesses, jurors and some others connected to his hush money case. Trump is still free to criticise Merchan. The former president is trying to achieve a balancing act unprecedented in American history by running for a second term as the

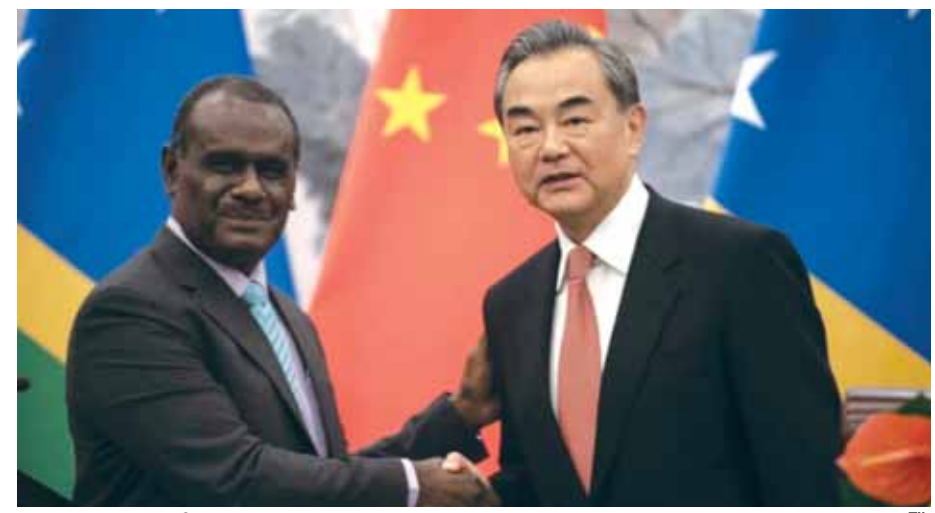
presumptive Republican nominee while also fighting felony charges in New York. Trump frequently goes after Merchan, prosecutors and potential witnesses at his rallies and on social media, attack lines that play well with his supporters but that have potentially put him in further legal jeopardy. Trump insists he is merely exercising his free speech rights, but the offending posts from his Truth Social account and campaign website were taken down. Merchan is weighing other alleged gag-order violations and will hear arguments on Thursday. Trump has often called this case and other criminal cases against him "election interference," saying they keep him from campaigning for the presidential election in November. Attendees agreed he is being unfairly prosecuted, contending the trial and gag order were designed to distract him. "It's a trial looking for a crime," said Ray Hanson, of

Hartford. Hanson said he expected Trump's lawyers would "keep him in line" so he doesn't violate the gag order, as much as he likely wants to talk about the trial. Manhattan prosecutors have argued Trump and his associates took part in an illegal scheme to influence the 2016 presidential campaign by purchasing and then burying negative stories. He has pleaded not guilty. Trump's visits to Wisconsin and Michigan mark his second trip to the swing states in just a month. For the previous rallies, the former president largely focused on immigration, referring to people who are in the US illegally and who are suspected of crimes as "animals." Meanwhile, Democrats are hoping to remind voters ahead of these visits about Trump's position on abortion, which Trump has been openly concerned about being a political liability for him and Republicans.

Solomon Islands lawmakers elect former Foreign Minister as new prime minister

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Solomon Islands lawmakers on Thursday chose former Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manale as the new prime minister of the South Pacific island nation that has grown closer to China in recent years. The withdrawal of pro-Beijing former Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare from the contest to remain head of the government to make way for Manale as their party's candidate is an indication the country could follow a similar direction. The prime minister was chosen in a secret ballot of 49 lawmakers who won general elections on April 17. Governor General David Vunagi said Manale received 31 votes. Sogavare had hoped to become the first Solomons prime minister to maintain power in consecutive four-year terms following the election. During his previous term, China's influence increased more in the Solomons than anywhere else in the South Pacific.



Jeremiah Manale with Chinese official. File

Sogavare switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to Beijing and struck a secret security pact that has raised fears of the Chinese navy gaining a foothold in the region. Meg Keen, the director of the Pacific Islands program for

Lowy Institute, a Sydney-based international policy think tank, said Manale will be a "less fiery and combative leader for the West to manage but he will continue to pursue close relations with China." "As the former foreign min-

ister he helped broker the security deal with China that panicked the West. But he is also a seasoned diplomat with experience at the UN and in western countries -- he's no stranger to western engagement," Keen said in an email.

Over 40% of Americans see China as enemy: Report

AP ■ WASHINGTON

More than 40 per cent of Americans now label China as an enemy, up from a quarter two years ago and reaching the highest level in five years, according to an annual Pew Research Center survey released Wednesday.

Half of Americans think of China as a competitor, and only 6 per cent consider the country a partner, according to the report. The findings come as the Biden administration is seeking to stabilise US-China relations to avoid miscalculations that could result in clashes, while still trying to counter the world's second-largest economy on issues from Russia's war in Ukraine to Taiwan and human rights. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen have both recently visited China in the administration's latest effort to "responsibly" manage the competition with Beijing. Despite those overtures, President Joe Biden has been

competing with former President Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee in November's election, on being tough on China. The Pew report, which is drawn from an April 1-7 survey of a sample of 3,600 US adults, found that roughly half of Americans think limiting China's power and influence should be a top US foreign policy priority. Only 8 per cent don't think it should be a priority at all. For the fifth year in a row, about eight in 10 Americans report an unfavourable view of China, the Pew report said.

"Today, 81 per cent of US adults see the country unfavourably, including 43 per cent who hold a very unfavourable opinion. Chinese President Xi Jinping receives similarly negative ratings," the report said. About eight in 10 Americans say they have little or no confidence in Xi to do the right thing regarding world affairs. About 10 per cent said they have never heard of him.

American attitudes toward China have turned largely critical after the US launched a trade war against China in 2018 and since the emergence of COVID-19, which was first reported in China.

Beijing's human rights record, its closeness to Russia and its policies toward Taiwan and Hong Kong also have left Americans with negative views of the country, according to Pew's previous analyses.

At the same time, the US government has been overt about competing with China on economic and diplomatic issues.

Following that, 42 per cent of Americans say China is an enemy of the US, the highest level since 2021, when Pew began asking the question. The share is much larger among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents, Pew said, with 59 per cent of them describing China as an enemy, compared with 28 per cent of Democrats and those leaning Democratic.

Norway to increase defence spending

AP ■ COPENHAGEN

The Norwegian centre-left government said on Thursday that it wants to add 7 billion kroner (USD 630 million) to the Scandinavian country's armed forces over the next 12 years amid increased tensions in the region. The announcement came on top of plans announced last month of a "historic increase" of 600 billion kroner (USD 54 billion) in the oil-rich country's defence budget over the same period.

"We must increase the operational capability of the Armed Forces," Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store, citing heightened tensions in the region as the reason for the boost.

Gahr Store said on Thursday that the combined budget increase meant that Norway would be able to reach NATO's goal of military spending of 2 per cent of each member country's GDP this year.

In 2024, the Scandinavian country's defence budget is expected to increase to 104 billion kroner (USD 9.4 billion). Finance Minister Trygve Slagsvold Vedum called it "a strong growth" and said it was "a necessary investment to strengthen our freedom."

Gahr Store heads a coalition that includes his own social democratic Labour party and the left-leaning Centre Party. He is expected to win support for the proposal in the 169-seat Storting assembly. No date for a vote was set.

On Tuesday, party leaders in the Norwegian parliament announced that the Scandinavian country was donating 7 billion kroner to Ukraine as part of a five-year support package. That comes on top of the 75 billion kroner (USD 6.8 billion) which Norway already has said it will donate, making it one of the world's biggest donors to war-torn Ukraine.

Georgia parliament cancels session after huge protests

AP ■ TBLISI (GEORGIA)

The parliament of Georgia cancelled its Thursday plenary session following massive protests against a proposed law that critics fear will stifle media freedom and endanger the country's bid for membership in the European Union. The parliament's announcement said the cancellation was connected to damage the building suffered during Wednesday protests in which police used water cannon, tear gas and pepper spray against the tens of thousands of demonstrators. The legislature on Wednesday approved a second reading of the bill that would require media and non-commercial organizations to register as "pursuing the interests of a foreign power" if they receive more than 20% of funding from abroad. The third and final reading was expected in mid-May and it was not clear if the cancellation of Thursday's session would affect the bill's progress. The



ruling Georgian Dream party withdrew a similar proposal last year after large crowds protested. Protesters denounce the bill as "the Russian law" because neighboring Russia uses similar legislation to stigmatize independent news media and organizations critical of the Kremlin. Eighty-three of Georgia's 150 lawmakers approved the bill in its second reading, while 23 voted against it. Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, increasingly at

odds with the governing party, has criticized the bill and vowed to veto it if it is passed by Parliament. But the governing party can overrule the veto and ask the parliamentary speaker to sign the bill into law. The EU's foreign policy arm earlier this month also criticized Georgian Dream's decision to reintroduce the law, which it said "raises serious concerns" around media freedom in the country -- something it called "crucial for the EU accession process."

New form of mpox that spreads easily found in Congo's biggest outbreak

AP ■ CONGO

Congo is struggling to contain its biggest mpox outbreak, and scientists say a new form of the disease detected in a mining town might more easily spread among people.

Since January, Congo has reported more than 4,500 suspected mpox cases and nearly 300 deaths, numbers that have roughly tripled from the same period last year, according to the World Health Organisation. Congo recently declared the outbreak across the country a health emergency. An analysis of patients hospitalised between October and January in Kamituga, eastern Congo, suggests recent genetic mutations in mpox are the result of its continued transmission in

humans; it's happening in a town where people have little contact with the wild animals thought to naturally carry the disease.

"We're in a new phase of mpox," said Dr. Placide Mbala-Kingebeni, the lead researcher of the study, who said it will soon be submitted to a journal for publication. Mbala-Kingebeni heads a lab at Congo's National Institute of Biomedical Research, which studies the genetics of diseases. The lesions reported by most patients are milder and on the genitals, Mbala-Kingebeni said, making the disease trickier to diagnose. In previous outbreaks in Africa, lesions were mostly seen on the chest, hands and feet. He also said that the

new form seems to have a lower death rate.

In a report on the global mpox situation this week, WHO said the new version of the disease might require a new testing strategy to pick up the mutations.

With experts pointing out that fewer than half of people in Congo with mpox are tested, Mbala-Kingebeni said: "The risk is that unless patients themselves come forward, we will have a silent transmission of the disease and nobody will know."

Mbala-Kingebeni said most people were infected via sex, with about a third of mpox cases found in sex workers. It was not until the 2022 global emergency of mpox that scientists established the disease

was spread via sex, with most cases in gay or bisexual men. In November, WHO confirmed sexual transmission of mpox in Congo for the first time.

There are two kinds, or clades, of mpox, which is related to smallpox and endemic to central and west Africa. Clade 1 is more severe and can kill up to 10 per cent of people infected. Clade 2 triggered the 2022 outbreak; more than 99 per cent of people infected survived.

Mbala-Kingebeni and colleagues said they have identified a new form of clade 1 that may be responsible for more than 240 cases and at least three deaths in Kamituga, a region with a significant transient population travelling elsewhere in Africa and beyond.

2 years after SC draft leak, abortion consuming US politics and courts

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Two years after a leaked draft of a US Supreme Court opinion signalled that the nation's abortion landscape was about to shift dramatically, the issue is still consuming the nation's courts, legislatures and political campaigns -- and changing the course of lives.

On Wednesday, a ban on abortion after the first six weeks of pregnancy, often before women realise they're pregnant, took effect in Florida, echoing laws in two other states.

In Arizona, meanwhile, lawmakers voted to repeal a total ban on abortion dating back to 1864, decades before Arizona became a state. Also this week, the Kansas Legislature increased funding for anti-abortion centres, while advocates in South Dakota submitted the required number of signatures for a ballot measure to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution. The status of abortion in states across the

country has changed constantly, with lawmakers passing measures and courts ruling on challenges to them. Currently, 14 states are enforcing bans on abortion at all stages of pregnancy, with limited exceptions. Most Democratic-led states, meanwhile, have taken steps to preserve or expand access.

"Some of it's exactly what we knew would happen," said David Cohen, a professor at the Thomas R. Kline School of Law at Drexel University who studies abortion policy, "and others have been big surprises that have put, frankly, the anti-abortion movement on their heels."

Although more than 20 states have begun enforcing abortion bans of varying degrees since the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in June 2022, studies have found that the number of monthly abortions nationally is about the same -- or higher -- than it was before the ruling.

Asked to weigh in on the emotional debate, voters have supported the position favoured by abortion rights advocates on

all seven statewide ballot measures since then. The Supreme Court's decision in the Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization case was released officially on June 24, 2022, upending nearly 50 years of abortion being legal nationwide. But the world caught a glimpse of it about six weeks earlier, on May 2, after a news outlet published a leaked draft.

"With the Dobbs decision, the will of the people is now able to be adhered to," said Stephen Billy, vice president of state affairs for Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America. He said abortion rights supporters have amplified uncertainty in laws -- especially over whether abortion is allowed in medical emergencies. "They've tried to sow political division just to advance their policy agenda," he said.

At the time Politico published the leaked draft, Amanda Zurawski was undergoing fertility treatment and was about two weeks away from learning she was finally pregnant.

Senior PML-N leader signals possibility of early elections

Bid to pave way for Nawaz Sharif's fourth stint as PM

PTI ■ LAHORE

A senior leader of the ruling PML-N party has hinted at the possibility of fresh elections in Pakistan within the next two years to pave the way for Nawaz Sharif to secure a record fourth term as prime minister, according to a media report on Thursday.

Senior Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Javed Latif's comments came during an interview with a private TV channel.

Nawaz Sharif, 74, was all set to become prime minister for the fourth time but his party failed to get a clear majority in the National Assembly on its own in the February 8 general elections.

In a surprise move, he allowed his 72-year-old younger brother and the incumbent party president Shehbaz Sharif — who is considered the favourite of the military establishment — to lead a six-party coalition government at the Centre.

Latif said whether the elections take place in two or five years, Nawaz Sharif, the PML-N supremo will take the reins of power for the fourth time. He hinted that early elections could be in the cards within the next two years to pave the way for Nawaz Sharif's fourth stint as the country's prime minister. The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

Pressed to explain how Nawaz Sharif could reclaim the top spot within two years, especially with his brother currently occupying it, Latif said it would be possible through elections. "The elections can happen tomorrow," he said.

Nawaz Sharif returned to Pakistan from London in October 2023 after ending his nearly four-year-long self-imposed exile, hoping to be the prime minister again. He predicted that even those who once obstructed Nawaz Sharif's path to a fourth term as premier would now rally



behind him.

He pointed out that a party with a two-thirds majority often struggles to complete its term. The senior PML-N politician warned that the withdrawal of support from even one coalition party could jeopardise the current government's survival. Latif is the only remaining active party member who continues to take swipes at his own party's central government. Given the track record of his colleague Rana Sanaullah — who, after throwing jobs at his own party's central government, promptly joined the same Cabinet he accused of being chosen by the establishment — many in the party view his criticism of the party as Latif's desperate attempt to bargain for a position in the government, the paper said.

A source within the Prime Minister's Office revealed that Sanaullah was brought into the cabinet to exert control over him. The source said he was a senior party leader and president of Punjab, adding that any action against him—even if approved by Nawaz Sharif—could have been harmful to the party's interests.

When questioned about whether Rana Sanaullah and Ishaq Dar's appointments were decisions made by Shehbaz Sharif, he said he was not at liberty to divulge any specifics, noting that in the PML-N party, Nawaz Sharif remains the founder and his decisions reign supreme.

He said that Latif, inspired by Rana Sanaullah, might have chosen to go all out. He added that it was up to Nawaz Sharif to assess his party leaders who deviated from the party line.

Pak Military aware of its constitutional limits: Army chief

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Pakistan Army chief General Asim Munir on Thursday said the military was "well aware" of its constitutional limits and expected others to uphold the Constitution, amid allegations of the powerful army's involvement in politics and interference by the intelligence agencies in the working of the judiciary.

The general, who was the chief guest at a passing out parade, said that those who flout the clear restrictions imposed on freedom of expression in the Constitution cannot point fingers at others.

"We are well aware of our constitutional limits and expect others to uphold the Constitution," Gen Munir said while addressing the Pakistan Air Force's passing out parade at the Asghar Khan Academy in Risalpur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

"Article 19 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan clearly defines the limits of freedom of speech and expression of opinion," he said. His remarks came two days after Pakistan's Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa said that pushing the judiciary towards taking a certain action was akin to interference in the judicial process. The top judge was referring to a letter written by six Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges on March 25, alleging interference of agencies in their matters. The apex court took suo motu notice of the letter and later several bar councils also filed petitions and they were made parties to the case.

The powerful army, which has ruled Pakistan for more than half of its 75-plus years of existence, has hitherto wielded considerable power in matters of security and foreign policy. However, the military has denied meddling in the coun-



try's politics.

Gen Munir lauded the PAF for patrolling the airspace in all kinds of difficulties, terming the shooting down of an Indian fighter jet in February 2019 as a great example of the same.

"You are the centre of our hopes, the guardian of the skies and the guarantors of regional unity," the army chief told the cadets. Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman shot down the Pakistani F-16 jet during an aerial combat before his MiG 21 Bison aircraft was hit on February 27, 2019. He was captured by the Pakistani Army and later released on the night of March 1.

Without naming any country, Gen Munir highlighted that the arms race posed a risk of disturbing the region's balance of power.

"Specific technologies, including artificial intelligence, robotics and quantum computing, are changing the use of air power as well as expanding its scope," he noted. Gen Munir also pledged Pakistan's "moral, political and diplomatic support" to the Kashmiri people.

Verdict reserved on petition seeking transfer of Imran Khan's wife

Islamabad (PTI): A top court in Pakistan on Thursday reserved its verdict on the petition filed by former prime minister Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi requesting her transfer to the high-security Adiala Jail, where her husband is incarcerated. The 71-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Khan has been lodged at Adiala Jail at Rawalpindi after conviction in multiple cases while Bushra Bibi, 49, is currently jailed at Bani Gala — Khan's home in Islamabad — which was turned into a sub-jail since the couple was sentenced in the 'un-Islamic nikah' case in February. After hearing the arguments from both sides, Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) reserved the verdict in the petition requesting Bushra Bibi's transfer from the Bani Gala sub-jail to the Adiala jail, The News International said.

Former first lady's lawyer Usman Gul said the process of declaring the residence as a sub-jail was completed within a few hours. The court said that the Adiala Jail Superintendent had informed that they could not accommodate Bushra Bibi as the jail was already overcrowded. "Apparently, it was already decided that she had to be transferred to Bani Gala," it added. Justice Aurangzeb posed an array of questions on declaring Bani Gala a sub-jail, asking the state counsel if its notification was prepared in a minute. The News International said further quoting the proceedings. "Don't you feel it was already decided that Bushra Bibi had to be transferred (home)? How many women have been brought to Adiala jail, after sending Bushra Bibi home?" he inquired.

The IHC judge questioned if the 141 women brought to the jail after that had lesser rights. "Why don't you send the other women home as well?" he asked. Responding to the judge, the government's lawyer said Bushra was transferred to Bani Gala due to a threat to her in jail. Justice Aurangzeb said he would be overjoyed if he was "willingly" confined to his house and questioned how a prisoner's property could be made a sub-jail without their consent.

Pak witnessed 77 militant attacks in April: Report

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Following a brief lull in March, militant attacks in Pakistan surged once again in April, as the country experienced 77 verifiable attacks last month, a security assessment report by an Islamabad-based think-tank said.

Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) in a report said the attacks, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa particularly bearing the brunt, resulted in 70 fatalities, including 35 civilians and 31 members of security forces, Dawn News reported on Thursday.

It said four militants were killed, and 67 individuals — 32 civilians and 35 security personnel — were injured in the attacks. In comparison, March saw 56 militant attacks, resulting in 77 fatalities and 67 injuries. This indicates a 38 per cent increase in the number of militant attacks, although there was a nine per cent decline in deaths, with no change in the number of injuries. The security report also underscored

the efforts of the country's security forces in thwarting numerous potential attacks during the month. At least 55 suspected militants were killed and 12 others arrested, including individuals involved in the Basmah suicide attack, marking a 55 per cent increase in militant deaths compared to March.

The report further said that 73 per cent of the total number of militant attacks reported in April took place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including the tribal districts of the province. Fifty-six attacks were reported in the province during the previous month. The attacks killed 43 people — 26 members of security forces and 17 civilians, the report said. The number of the injured stood at 32, with 19 members of security forces and 13 civilians with injuries. Within KPK, mainland districts saw more attacks and fatalities than tribal districts (formerly Fata). Mainland KPK witnessed 31 attacks, resulting in 25 fatalities and 10 injuries.

The southern districts of DI Khan, Lakki Marwat, Bannu, and Tank were the most affected, with D.I. Khan and Lakki Marwat facing seven militant attacks each, Bannu facing six, and Tank experiencing two attacks. Together, these districts accounted for 71 per cent of the attacks in mainland KPK. Additionally, Peshawar faced four attacks while Swat, Swabi, Charsadda, Shangla, and Battagram experienced one attack each.

In the tribal districts of KPK (formerly Fata), PICSS recorded at least 25 attacks, resulting in 18 fatalities and 22 injuries. North Waziristan, Bajaur, and South Waziristan were the most affected districts, with nine, five, and four attacks reported, respectively. According to the report, Balochistan faced 16 attacks, resulting in 21 fatalities, including 17 civilians and four security personnel, with 31 individuals injured. Most of these attacks occurred in the province's Baloch belt, particularly in the south and southwest.

Bad weather returns to UAE, several flights cancelled

PTI ■ DUBAI

Heavy rains and thunderstorms lashed the UAE on Thursday, leading to the cancellation of several international flights, two weeks after Dubai was hit by unprecedented storms that paralysed the emirate for days.

On Wednesday, the country's National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority (NCEMA) elevated the readiness and preparedness levels of the national system to deal with the situation. While these rains are expected to be less severe than the unprecedented downpour that hit the country last month, the public is urged to take precautions.

On April 14-15, extreme rainfall battered regions of the Arabian Peninsula, with Dubai experiencing the heaviest rains on record since 1949.

Dubai-based Emirates airline announced the cancellation

of several flights on Thursday due to bad weather across the UAE as movements at Dubai International Airport (DXB) were reduced.

"Customers arriving or departing from Dubai airport on 2 May can expect some delays as flights are rescheduled," Emirates said in a statement. The following flights have been cancelled on May 2: EK 123/124 — between Dubai and Istanbul, EK 763/764 — between Dubai and Johannesburg, EK 719/720 — between Dubai and Nairobi, EK 921/922 — between Dubai and Cairo, EK 903/904 — between Dubai and Amman, and EK 352/353 — between Dubai and Singapore (EK353 departing 3 May, 12.30 am — UAE time). The airline has also waived rebooking charges to help stranded passengers.

"Based on the expected weather conditions, the Ministry of Interior recommended, in coordination with NCEMA,

activating remote learning on Thursday and Friday for all educational institutions, with decisions to be made by the competent authorities at the federal level and officials of local emergency management teams, in coordination with the Ministry of Education and the Emirates Schools Establishment," it said on Wednesday.

As heavy winds and light rains lashed across the main cities, residents appeared more equipped to ride it out. Remote work systems were advised for all government and private sectors on Thursday and Friday, except for vital jobs that require presence at the workplace and those involved in response and recovery efforts.

The Ministry of Interior, in coordination with NCEMA, also decided to close all roads leading to areas prone to flash floods, water accumulations, and dams during the weather conditions.

Microsoft to invest USD 2.2 bn in Cloud and AI services in Malaysia

AP ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Microsoft is investing USD 2.2 billion over the next four years in Malaysia's new cloud and artificial intelligence infrastructure as well as partnering with the government to establish a national AI centre, its CEO Satya Nadella said on Thursday. It marks Microsoft's single largest investment in Malaysia, as the tech giant seeks to bolster support for AI development in the region and worldwide. "We are committed to supporting Malaysia's AI transformation and ensure it benefits all Malaysians," he said. "Our investments in digital infrastructure and skilling will help Malaysian businesses, communities and developers apply the latest technology to drive inclusive economic growth and innovation across the country."

Nadella on Tuesday also announced a USD 1.7 billion investment in cloud and AI ser-

vices in Indonesia during his visit there as part of his Southeast Asia tour. On Wednesday, he said Microsoft will build its first regional data centre in Thailand.

In April, the tech giant similarly unveiled a USD 2.9 billion investment in Japan and USD 1.5 billion in G42, an AI firm in Abu Dhabi.

Microsoft also pledged to provide AI training for 2.5 million people in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam by 2025.

Nadella earlier met Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who said the investment will be the key support pillar for the government's goal to enhance AI capacity in Malaysia.

The new investment will include AI training for another 300,000 people, the establishment of a national AI centre of excellence, enhancing the nation's cybersecurity capabilities and supporting the growth of Malaysia's developer commu-

nity, Anwar said on Facebook. Microsoft runs one of the world's largest cloud computing operations and has taken a leap into artificial intelligence through its partnership with OpenAI, developers of ChatGPT. Since then, Microsoft has integrated an AI assistant into its Microsoft Edge browser, named Copilot, helping lift its profits by 20 per cent in the first quarter.

Microsoft sees Southeast Asia, with its population of over 600 million people, as a growing market and potential location for more AI product development. A study held by global consulting firm Kearney said AI could contribute nearly USD 1 trillion to Southeast Asia's GDP by 2030. Indonesia is expected to capture USD 366 billion of the total and Malaysia USD 115 billion. Microsoft said in a statement that the investment in Malaysia will build on its 2021 program to support inclusive economic growth.

Death toll jumps to 48 in southern China's highway collapse

AP ■ BEIJING

The death toll climbed to 48 on Thursday as search efforts continued in southeastern China after a highway section collapsed in a mountainous area, sending more than 20 cars down a steep slope. Officials in the city of Meizhou said three other people were unidentified, pending DNA testing. It wasn't immediately clear if they had died, which would bring the death toll to 51. Another 30 people had non-life-threatening injuries. The collapse happened about 2 am on Wednesday after a month of heavy rains in a mountainous part of Guangdong province. Vehicles fell down the slope and sent up flames as they caught fire. The search was still ongoing, Meizhou city Mayor Wang Hui said at a late-afternoon news conference. No foreigners have been found among the victims, he said.

Russia proposes UN resolution on banning weapons in space

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

Russia has circulated a UN resolution calling on all countries to take urgent action to prevent putting weapons in outer space "for all time" a week after it vetoed a US-Japan resolution to stop an arms race in space.

The Russian draft resolution, obtained Wednesday by The Associated Press, goes further than the US-Japan proposal, not only calling for efforts to stop weapons from being deployed in outer space but for preventing "the threat or use of force in outer space," also "for all time." It says this should include deploying weapons "from space against Earth, and from Earth against objects in outer space." Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia told the Security Council when he vetoed the US-Japan draft that it didn't go far enough in banning all types of weapons in

space. The vetoed resolution focused solely on weapons of mass destruction including nuclear arms, and made no mention of other weapons in space.

It would have called on all countries not to develop or deploy nuclear arms or other weapons of mass destruction in space, as banned under a 1967 international treaty that the US and Russia ratified, and to agree to the need to verify compliance.

Before the US-Japan resolution was put to a vote on April 24, Russia and China proposed an amendment that would call on all countries, especially those with space capabilities, "to prevent for all time the placement of weapons in outer space, and the threat of use of force in outer spaces."

The vote was 7 countries in favour, 7 against, and one abstention and the amendment was defeated because it failed to

get the minimum 9 "yes" votes in the 15-member Security Council required for adoption. US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield told the council after the vote that Russian President Vladimir Putin has said Moscow has no intention of deploying nuclear weapons in space.

"Today's veto begs the question: Why? Why, if you are following the rules, would you not support a resolution that reaffirms them? What could you possibly be hiding," she asked. "It's baffling. And it's a shame."

Putin was responding to White House confirmation in February that Russia has obtained a "troubling" anti-satellite weapon capability, although such a weapon is not operational yet. Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said after casting the veto that the US-Japan resolution cherry picked weapons of mass destruction.

Lanka continues to service loans despite default

Colombo (PTT): Sri Lanka has maintained strict financial discipline while taking unpopular decisions to facilitate economic recovery and continues to service its multilateral debt despite the default announced in 2022, state minister of finance Ranjith Siyambalapitiya said on Thursday. He said USD 2.5 billion debt in 2022 and USD 2.6 billion debt in 2023 had been repaid to multilaterals such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Only the bilateral external debt payments had been suspended with the announcement of the debt default in mid-2022.

"We have maintained strict financial discipline while taking unpopular decisions to facilitate economic recovery," Siyambalapitiya said. Meanwhile, the official sources said the talks with sovereign bondholders to restructure about USD 46 billion debt are being continued.

Ukrainian soldiers say rear defensive lines barely exist amid Russian advance

AP ■ KHARKIV

During pitched battles with far better-armed Russian forces, Ukrainian soldier Batyars' unit has few options. Devastating Russian aerial glide bombs that can drop up to 1.5 tons of explosives out of range of most of Ukraine's air defences are gnawing away at his men's positions in a new tactic.

Yet, to retreat carries no promise of safety — the rear defensive lines meant to give them cover barely exist, he said. Lack of ammunition is forcing the outnumbered Ukrainian soldiers to pull back, one village after another, including three surrendered on Sunday, as intense fighting roils the countryside surrounding Avdiivka nearly three months after the strategic city fell to Russia.

"It's necessary to increase the pace of building fortifications

... so that when we retreat, we will retreat to a prepared position," said Batyars, a unit commander who gave only his military call sign in line with brigade protocols. "These fortifications are not enough."

Facing an outcry after Avdiivka's fall, Ukraine is rushing to build concrete-fortified trenches, foxholes, firing positions and other barricades on the front lines. But relentless Russian shelling, lack of equipment and crippling bureaucracy plague construction across the vast 1,000-kilometre (600-mile) front, even as a new Russian offensive looms, according to a dozen Ukrainian soldiers, government officials and construction company directors interviewed by The Associated Press.

The much awaited aid package passed by the US Congress last month is expected to help Ukraine close the firepower

gap. But until replenishments arrive, which could take weeks, Russia will continue to exploit Ukraine's weaknesses.

DIG AND FIGHT

Ukraine has allocated nearly 38 billion hryvnias (USD 960 million) to build an extensive fortification network this year. Soldiers across the front line maintain that should have happened last year, when Ukraine had the upper hand in the fighting, not in the heat of battle now.

Besides trenches and other barricades, the layered system includes mines and anti-tank obstacles known as "dragon's teeth", normally built in advance of fighting.

Russia's preparedness paid off during Kyiv's failed counter-offensive last summer: Ukraine's momentum was slowed in the Zaporizhzhia region by Moscow's extensive fortifica-

tions.

But Ukraine was slow to follow suit; it was not until this spring, when weather conditions improved, that any real progress was made. In March, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced Ukraine was building 2,000 kilometres (1,240 miles) of fortifications across three lines of defence.

"There was an absence of responsibility. ... People didn't understand that fortifications can save your life if you do it in advance," said Oleksandr, a deputy infantry commander with the 47th brigade in the Avdiivka area who gave only his first name in line with military rules. "Many people thought we ... wouldn't need to prepare such lines. They didn't expect a new Russian offensive." Unlike Russia, Ukraine does not have the option of forcing thousands of prisoners to do the work. That means

Ukrainian soldiers on the front lines must both fight and dig their own trenches. "It's very hard to do both," Oleksandr said.

Building the second line, 2 to 5 kilometres behind the front line and within range of Russian artillery, is the responsibility of Ukraine's poorly-resourced engineering force. The third line, at a greater distance from battle, is constructed by companies under military contracts.

The reasons for Ukraine's lack of preparedness are rooted in the years after independence when it began downsizing its military because it couldn't afford to maintain the large force inherited from the Soviet Union. Its engineering regiments were dismantled until there were only a handful left. Equipment, including excavators and plows so direly needed now, were sold off.

"We entered the war with nothing," said a serviceman in Ukraine's engineering force, who spoke on condition of anonymity to talk openly about the lack of preparation. When he arrived to build fortifications in Ukraine's east in October, all his unit had were ageing equipment from the 1960s and shovels, he said. "Accordingly, that's the kind of trenches we made."

DISCONNECTED PITS

Ukraine's lack of adequate defensive lines has helped Russia make significant military gains, and constant enemy fire hinders building.

Five commanders in Avdiivka and Chasiv Yar, which have been under relentless Russian assault, said without well-prepared positions they were unable to gain a foothold in unfamiliar terrain and defend without suffering huge losses. In Chasiv Yar, a strategic hill-

top town in Donetsk, the lack of fortifications helped turn the tables in Russia's favour.

In mid-March, Ukraine's 67th brigade was rotated in to hold positions roughly 3 kilometres from the town. "I would be hard-pressed to describe them as 'positions'," said a Ukrainian serviceman who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the failings candidly.

He expected dugouts, a labyrinth of trenches and firing positions, but what he found were a series of pits, barely large enough to hide in during artillery barrages.

Under fire, "soldiers would climb out of pits and start digging in each other's direction so that there is at least some connection between them," he said. The soil was so sandy that whenever shells struck, the trenches they dug crumbled. With nowhere to take cover and no means to match the

Russian barrages, they retreated 2 kilometres back. Over 100 Ukrainian soldiers were killed or are missing, he said.

"We lost department commanders, platoon commanders, company commanders and sergeants," he said. "That is, we lost the entire skeleton of the brigade."

TIME, MONEY, PRESSURE

To rush building across the third line, construction companies were awarded contracts without the usual bidding process. "There was no time," said Kharkiv Gov. Oleh Syniehubov. The move speeded things up but raised concerns of potential corruption — a worry Syniehubov asserted was overstated. "Believe me, we have so many checks-and-balances and government agencies overseeing the building, it is impossible to steal something," he said.

Stock markets rebound as GST revenues hit record in April

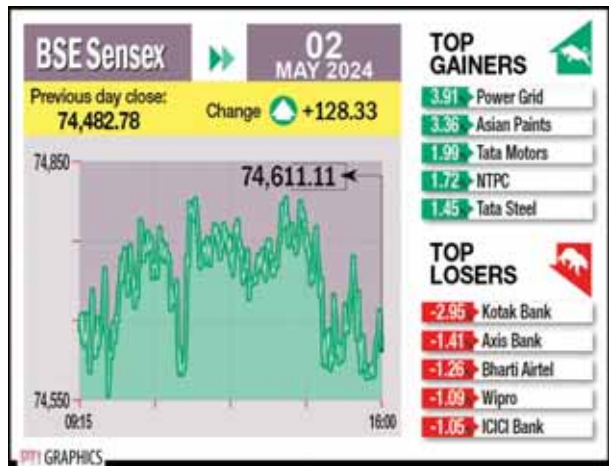
PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stock markets rebounded on Thursday with benchmark Sensex closing higher by 128 points as record GST collections in April, positive manufacturing data, and foreign fund inflows boosted investor sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 128.33 points or 0.17 per cent to settle at 74,611.11. During the day, it jumped 329.65 points or 0.44 per cent to 74,812.43. The NSE Nifty went up by 43.35 points or 0.19 per cent to 22,648.20.

From the Sensex basket, Power Grid, Asian Paints, Tata Motors, Tata Steel, NTPC, Sun Pharma, Mahindra & Mahindra, HDFC Bank, Tata Consultancy Services and JSW Steel were among the major gainers.

Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bharti Airtel, Axis Bank, Wipro, ICICI Bank and IndusInd Bank were among the laggards.



Goods and Services Tax collections grew 12.4 per cent to a record high of Rs 2.10 lakh crore in April, aided by strong economic momentum and increased domestic transactions and imports, the finance ministry said on Wednesday.

The GST collections have breached the Rs 2 lakh crore mark for the first time in April this year, it said in a statement.

India's manufacturing sector activity moderated in April but still recorded the second fastest improvement in operating conditions in three-and-a-half years supported by buoyant demand, a monthly survey said on Thursday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell from 59.1 in March to 58.8 in April, signalling the

second-best improvement in the health of the sector for three-and-a-half years.

In Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction. In Asian markets, Hong Kong settled with gains while Seoul, Tokyo and Shanghai ended lower. European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street ended mixed on Wednesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.02 per cent to USD 84.29 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 1,071.93 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. Domestic equity markets were closed on Wednesday on account of Maharashtra Day. Snapping its two-day winning run, the BSE benchmark declined 188.50 points or 0.25 per cent to settle at 74,482.78 on Tuesday. The NSE Nifty dipped 38.55 points or 0.17 per cent to finish at 22,604.85.

India among fastest growing markets with potential to be among top 10: Airbnb CBO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India is one of the "fastest-growing markets" for online accommodation hosting platform Airbnb and the country has the potential to be among its top 10 global markets in the coming years, according to its Chief Business Officer Dave Stephenson. The company is investing in India to tap the opportunity of a rapid rise in tourists travelling to foreign destinations as well as domestic places that are rapidly growing post-pandemic and where 90 per cent of its first-time bookers are Gen Zs. "It (India) is one of our growth markets and we see a huge opportunity for growth in India in the future. In India, nights booked grew by almost 30 per cent YoY (Year-on-Year) in 2023 compared to 2022, which is a positive sign," Stephenson told PTI. For Airbnb, India is going to be "a large travel market", where it has seen a "strong desire" among the "Indian travellers to venture overseas as well as explore domestic destinations, especially those off the beaten path", he said. Though, Stephenson did not any specific growth numbers



but said India is a "focus area" and "is one of our fastest-growing countries". When asked as whether India figures among Airbnb's top 10 markets globally, Stephenson replied in negative. Further he said, "It should be one of the top 10 markets. It is getting to be a large travel market and we definitely think it can be. That would be the goal." Airbnb is investing specifically in India, where a number of tourists travelling to foreign destinations as well as domestic places are on the rise post-pandemic and is supporting them to stay in its range of "inexpensive homes all the way to luxe homes". It has witnessed a whopping 75 per cent jump in international group travel bookings from India, where families/friends are going abroad for vacations. It has added features like the collaborative wishlist, where

it is helping these groups find a perfect place.

"Indians are inspired by Cricket and Bollywood, and they want to explore the world. If they stay domestically, they are going to places like Goa and enjoying. But also, if they have the opportunity to travel abroad, they love to go to Italy and places that they're inspired by from the movies," he said.

Currently, 90 per cent of its first-time bookers are Gen Zs. Moreover, Airbnb is supporting the inbound flow of international travellers coming to India. Airbnb is "working closely with the government in their vision to make India one of the most sought-after tourist destinations in the world", Stephenson said.

It has partnered with the Ministry of Tourism and curated a dedicated microsite which spotlights heritage stays across India. It has also partnered with state governments of Goa, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Maharashtra, among others, to promote lesser-known destinations and conduct capacity-building workshops, he said.

SK Finance files draft papers with Sebi to garner ₹2,200 crore via IPO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Vehicle finance and business loans-focused non-bank lender SK Finance has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to garner Rs 2,200 crore through an initial share sale.

The proposed initial public offer (IPO) is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 500 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of up to Rs 1,700 crore by promoters and investor shareholders, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) filed on Wednesday.

As a part of the OFS, Norwest Venture Partners X-Mauritius and TPG Growth IV SF PTE Ltd will offload shares worth Rs 700 crore each, Evolve Coinvest I will divest shares to the tune of Rs 75 crore and Evolve India Fund III Ltd will sell shares worth Rs 25 crore.

Additionally, promoters - Rajendra Kumar Setia and Rajendra Kumar Setia HUF - will offload shares aggregating to Rs 180 crore and Rs 20 crore, respectively. The Jaipur-based SK Finance plans to utilise proceeds from the fresh issue for augmenting the capital base to meet future business requirements of the company towards onward lending and for general corporate purposes.

The NBFC has been operating in two verticals - vehicle financing and financing for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). It has a presence across 11 states and one union territory through 535 branches as of December 2023.

According to a Crisil report, the overall vehicle financing segment in India stood at around Rs 11.85 lakh crore as of fiscal 2023, marking a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of around 11 per cent from fiscal 2019 and going forward, the outstanding credit is expected to grow at a CAGR of 16-18 per cent from fiscal 2023 to fiscal 2027 to reach Rs 21 lakh crore.

Earlier this year, SK Finance raised Rs 1,328 crore from investors. Motilal Oswal Private Equity pumped in Rs 415 crore for a minority stake in the NBFC.

Kotak Mahindra Capital Company Ltd, Jefferies India Private Ltd, Motilal Oswal Investment Advisors Ltd and Nomura Financial Advisory and Securities (India) Private Ltd are the book-running lead managers to the issue.

Digital payment has transformed financial landscape: Airtel Payments Bank CEO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Airtel Payments Bank CEO Anubrata Biswas is optimistic that the payments bank momentum in India will yield strong growth horizons and opportunities in the coming years, supported by financial inclusion imperatives and rapid pace of economic and digital growth.

In an interview to PTI, Biswas said FY24 has been a "remarkable year" for Airtel Payments Bank, which has been growing in double digits across all key metrics such as users, revenue, and profits. "We are still closing the books (for the fiscal) but as we stand today, we are going to see high double-digit growth rates on revenue, profit and users continue," he said.

Airtel Payments Bank has nearly 500,000 banking points spread across the country, today.

It offers end-to-end digital banking solutions, along with a bouquet of digital financial services - insurance, lending, and investment solutions. Airtel



Payments Bank has three clear segments when it comes to serving customers across geographies - the urban digital, the rural underbanked, and industries, and businesses.

Earlier this year, Airtel Payments Bank had cited a strong growth trajectory for the December 2023 quarter with revenues at Rs 469 crore, up 47 per cent year-on-year, while net profit stood at Rs 11 crore, up 120 per cent over the year-ago period. Biswas asserted that the momentum on digital banking is here to stay.

"We have sustained momentum on digital

banking in India which is a growing spectrum of urban users wanting a secondary digital banking option for their payment and transaction needs. This is a business where we have seen dramatic surges over 3-6 months, which has driven up revenue..." he said.

Airtel Payments Bank is dominant in rural markets, he said, adding that "rural and urban combined, we are now opening a million bank accounts a month".

"The momentum is structural which means we are very bullish about the next few years as well," Biswas said.

Whether the pace of new account openings accelerated at the fag end of the fiscal in the backdrop of the recent Paytm Payments Bank crisis, he said while on B2B and rural side of the business, the momentum has broadly been the same, there has been a significant uptick and uplift on the digital side from urban customers.

The uptick has been "very significant" in the number of new customers applying online for opening bank accounts, and offerings like FASTag.

Consumers looking at digital banking options is itself a 100 million opportunity, he said.

"In India, digital payments has come, deepened and transformed the financial landscape. The time for digital banking has now come... People will use digital bank accounts to make payments, feel safe, and then look at many other second order needs," he said.

Biswas said he is optimistic about the prospects of market growth in FY25 and for coming years.

"The digital banking opportunity, to our mind, is

itself a 100 million user opportunity... The entire financial inclusion and digital inclusion market is actually a 500 million user opportunity... It will need several large banks with several different models because India is a large country, and it will need a variety of ways in which consumers will be served given India's aspirations for a USD 7-trillion economy in the coming years, and the growth targets beyond," he said.

So, while the banking momentum will remain strong, Biswas said, the payments bank momentum - given the unique positioning of it as a regulated fintech - is going to have "even stronger growth horizons and opportunities."

"As consumers come to our platform and start using products and services, the opportunities remain for deepening both revenue as well as the user base itself, and equally on the rural consumer side. On the B2B side, we have just started... And there are a range of digital B2B opportunities, as well," he said.

Federal Bank Q4 profit rises marginally to ₹906 crore

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Federal Bank on Thursday reported a marginal rise in March quarter net profit at Rs 906 crore, impacted by pension provisions. In the year-ago period, profit was Rs 903 crore. In the full fiscal year FY24, profit increased to Rs 3,720 crore from the year-ago's Rs 3,010 crore.

The private sector lender said it is yet to send the names of potential candidates to succeed MD&CEO Shyam Srinivasan. His term ends in September this year.

In the March quarter, its core net interest income rose 15 per cent to Rs 2,195 crore on the back of a 20 per cent credit growth and narrowing of net interest margin to 3.21 per cent from 3.36 per cent in the year-ago period.

Speaking to reporters, Srinivasan said the bank would want the risk adjusted NIM calculated after including the credit costs to sustain between

3.20-3.25 per cent going forward.

It is targeting a loan growth of 18 per cent in FY25, and hopes that the 18 per cent growth in deposits in FY24 will keep pace.

In the March quarter, it was hit by a Rs 162 crore provision towards pension which hurt the overall net profit, Srinivasan said.

On the asset quality front, the fresh slippages came down to Rs 352 crore from the quarter-ago's Rs 479 crore and Rs 436 crore in the year-ago period, resulting in improvement in gross non performing assets ratio to 2.13 per cent as on March 31, 2024. Its overall capital adequacy stood at 16.13 per cent as on March 31, 2024.

Amid speculation over the next candidate to succeed Srinivasan, the incumbent MD and CEO said there is a board search panel on the job and that it will be submitting a list of candidates in the next few weeks.

China, Hong Kong account for 56 per cent of India's total imports of electronics, telecom, electrical products: GTRI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's imports of electronics, telecom, and electrical products soared to USD 89.8 billion in 2023-24 and over half of these imports are sourced from China and Hong Kong, economic think tank GTRI said in its report.

China dominates with a commanding 43.9 per cent share of India's imports in electronics, telecom, and electrical sectors, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said.

The data highlights a deep-seated dependency on these two countries that has seen a dramatic escalation over the years, it added.

It said that reducing this dependency is crucial, not merely to boost economic resilience but to safeguard India's digital and technological sovereignty in a



world that is becoming ever more interconnected.

"These sectors are integral to the daily lives of millions, enhancing communication, commerce, and information access. However, India's heavy dependence on imports, especially from China, presents formidable challenges to the nation's strategic autonomy and economic security," the report said.

GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said that this profound

reliance on Chinese imports exposes severe vulnerabilities within India's supply chain and underscores the pressing necessity for strategic diversification of sources and enhancement of domestic production capabilities.

In the electronics segment, the report said that integrated circuits have experienced a significant import growth from USD 166.1 million during 2007-2010 to USD 4.2 billion in 2020-2022.

These circuits are critical for powering a wide range of electronic devices, from computers to smartphones, illustrating a deepening technological dependency on China, with their market share increasing from 19.2 per cent to 33.4 per cent.

Similarly, communication devices, including phones and other wireless devices, have also seen a significant increase in imports, rising to USD 3.691 billion with over half of the market now dominated by China.

"Diodes, transistors, and similar semiconductor devices have seen their imports skyrocket from USD 113.3 million to USD 2,334.8 million, with the Chinese market share jumping to 67.5 per cent, indicating a significant dependency on Chinese semiconductor technology," it said.

Paul John Nirvana bags Gold medal in London competition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

John Distilleries Ltd's Paul John single malt whiskey 'Nirvana' has been awarded "Gold" medal in the prestigious London Spirits Competition 2024. JDL's two other offerings - Roulette London Dry Gin and Paul John XO Brandy - have also won 'Silver' medals. JDL is the only Indian company to have been awarded in three different categories - whiskey, gin and brandy.

"We are honoured to have been awarded at the London Spirits Competition. It is indeed a privilege to be appreciated for the quality of our products," said JDL Chairman and Managing Director Paul P John.

JDL is one of the most awarded Indian companies internationally as it has bagged various prestigious awards in the events like the



International Wine and Spirit Competition, the World Whiskey Awards and the San Francisco World Spirits Competition.

The London Spirits Competition, organized by the Beverage Trade Network, aims to recognise and promote spirits brands that resonate with consumers and offer value for both trade buyers and end consumers. Judging criteria include quality, value for money, and packaging appeal.

Rupee falls 3 paise to settle at 43.46 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee stayed range-bound and closed 3 paise lower at 83.46 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday amid a strong American currency and rising crude oil prices in global markets.

Forex traders said positive sentiment in the domestic equity markets and the inflow of foreign capital capped a sharp fall in the domestic currency.

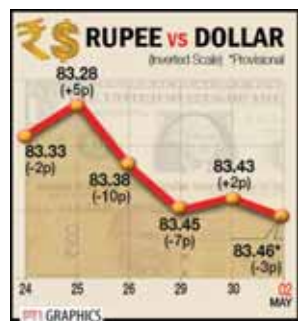
At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened strong at 83.41 and touched the intra-day low of 83.49 against the greenback.

The local unit finally settled at 83.46 (provisional) against the dollar, down 3 paise from its previous close.

The rupee had settled 2 paise higher at 83.43 against the dollar on Tuesday, a day after losing 7 paise on Monday.

The foreign exchange market was closed on Wednesday on account of Maharashtra Day. On Wednesday, the US Federal Reserve decided to maintain the status quo on the benchmark interest rates, in line with the market expectations.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the rupee fell on disappointing PMI data from India. "However, positive domestic markets... Cushioned the downside." Meanwhile, India's manufacturing PMI fell to 58.8



in April 2024 from 59.1 in the previous month.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), however, recorded the second fastest improvement in operating conditions in three-and-a-half years supported by buoyant demand, a monthly survey said on Thursday.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on dismal PMI data and expectations of a recovery in the US dollar amid further delay in rate cut by Fed. However, weak crude oil prices and positive domestic markets may support the rupee at lower levels," Choudhary said, adding, "USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.25 to Rs 83.70".

Analysts also said market participants are expected to keep a close watch on the US non-farm payroll data to be released on Friday. Besides, weekly unemployment claims, trade balance and factory order data from the US may provide further cues.

American Express will open its campus in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

American Express will open its state-of-the-art campus in India, reaffirming the company's commitment to the country. Spanning nearly one-million square feet, this new facility exemplifies a forward-thinking approach to workplace design, sustainability, health, and wellness for its colleagues. Colleagues will begin moving

to the new facility, located in sector 74A Gurugram, in phases, starting at the end of May 2024.

The campus reflects American Express' dedication to fostering a dynamic work environment. The facility has received Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certification for Building Design and Construction (BD+C) Core and Shell Development.

Jindal Stainless to operate stainless steel melt shop in Indonesia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Jindal Stainless, on Wednesday, announced its entry into a joint venture with a Singapore-based company to develop and operate a stainless steel melt shop (SMS) in Indonesia. The company further announced that it will invest around rupees 1,900 crores to expand its downstream lines in Jajpur and Odisha to increase their melting capacity. Jindal Stainless will also acquire a 54% equity stake in Chromeni Steels Private Limited (CSPL).

Abhyuday Jindal, Managing Director of Jindal Stainless, said, "With these acquisitions and investments, they have orchestrated a clear growth



become one of the leading players in the world." He further added that this is a plug-and-play model, and there will be good growth in three years.

The company also addressed that although Jindal Stainless already has a facility in Indonesia, this will be a completely separate facility that will be operational in 2 years. The government of Indonesia promotes Foreign Direct

Investment (FDI) and they would get a secure availability of raw materials and increased production efficiency in Indonesia.

"The Government of Indonesia has banned the export of nickel ore and is promoting investments into downstream facilities through long-term tax holidays. The acquisition of Chromeni supports our strategy to increase cold rolled products in our product mix," said the CEO & Wholtime Director, Tarun Kumar Khulbe. Anurag Mantri, Executive Director & Group CFO, said these investments will especially contribute to the overall balancing of their downstream cold-rolled capacities, bringing them closer to the global benchmarks.



Travel Across Enchanted Landscapes

At an exhibition celebrated as Earth Day last month we stepped into a world where art embraces nature, says SAKSHI PRIYA

Imagine wandering into a world where art reflects the vibrant spirit of nature, capturing its rhythmic seasons and climates with elan. This is the essence of 'Paradise Regained,' an exhibition at Palette Art Gallery which celebrated Earth Day with a stunning display of landscape. In a harmonious blend of acclaim for nature and artistic mastery, the title of the exhibition draws inspiration from renowned English poet John Milton's epic poem by the same name; indeed, a fitting tribute to Earth Month in April. Curator Uma Nair explains the choice, stating, "April is Earth Month, and landscapes are the most important part of the Earth. 'Paradise Regained' thus becomes a powerful symbol, not only honouring the artistic legacy but also emphasising the critical role landscapes play in our world." The exhibition featured works by 10 exceptional artists, each offering a unique perspective on the beauty and importance of landscapes. It was in fact a symphony of artistic interpretations. Each artist, with his or her unique style and vision, came together to paint a mesmerizing portrait of nature in all its splendour. Sanam Narayanan's work invites us into a fantastical realm. His paintings, meticulously crafted on canvas with rice paper as the base, depict houses adorned with Kerala's verdant foliage. The technique of pointillism is used to create a captivating sense of depth and detail, highlighting the soil conditions and the ethereal mist that seem to cling to the trees. This interplay of imagination and reality creates a truly magical experience. Umesh PK's landscapes are



incomparable odes to nature's multilayered beauty. His brushstrokes transport us to a world where nature thrives, and constantly remind us of power to captivate. His pieces are a subtle testimony to the delicate balance between humans and nature, an stark pointer to the connection we humans often tend to overlook or forget. Paramjit Singh, a veteran artist with over six decades of experience, showcases his love for nature with vibrant oil paintings. His landscapes are pathways that draw the viewers in and invites them to explore a kingdom in which flowers reign supreme. Each piece reflects a lifetime dedicated to the artistic exploration of the natural world. The beauty of 'Paradise Regained' is transcendental and is etched in one's memory beyond the initial visual impact. Each artist offers a window to his or her creative process and evokes artistic emotions through art. Sanket Viramgami's intricate miniature landscapes offer a glimpse into the future world, like postcards from an imagined future. Jyodip Acharjee presents a stark contrast

with his geometric interpretations of landscapes, offering a fresh perspective of familiar scenes. Shaji Appukkuttan transports viewers to the lush, tropical forests of Kerala, so lifelike they almost seem to breathe. His detailed artwork captures the essence of a vibrant ecosystem. Curator Uma Nair describes artist Prasad KP as "the greatest discovery" by the Gallery. His paintings, with pathways and figures amidst detailed landscapes, offer a deeper look as we move forward. Jayashree Chakravarty's work draws inspiration from Kolkata's Salt Lake region, translating its unique beauty onto canvas. Sumesh Kamballur's work demands attention for not only depicting the magical essence of night, but for how he transforms it into a poetic dreamscape. Bathed in the soft glow of moonlight, his paintings capture the essence of nature with a touch of surreal beauty. The moonlight itself becomes a character and illuminates details with nature's signature writ large. KP Pradeep Kumar delves into the realm of autobiographical landscapes. His paintings are not



just depictions of nature, they are reflections of his own lived experiences and emotions. In a conversation artist Pradeep Kumar described his artwork as a language that explores a multitude of themes; he emphasises that his art is a source of self-expression, a way to process his inner world. He finds freedom in creating art that resonates with him, hoping it will connect with others as well. He describes it as an "execution of my thought process into the painting," a freedom that allows him to explore his identity and translate his unique perspective onto the canvas.

Kumar emphasises that his artwork serves as a resource for him, a way to process and express his inner world. He finds a sense of freedom in the creative process, stating, "I never make art by keeping in mind that everyone would have to like it." His primary motivation is to create art that resonates with him, hoping it will connect with others as well. Uma Nair's vision as a curator takes centre stage in 'Paradise Regained,' as her discerning eye for talent and craft come through in her exhibition that about the very essence of nature. Through an insightful walk-through, she acts as a guide, enriching the visitor's experience with each piece. Her discerning eye reveals every artist's inspiration and the deeper meaning informing their landscapes, allowing viewers to appreciate not just the art, but also the emotional depth that informs each piece of poetry. 'Paradise Regained' serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of appreciating and protecting our planet, each piece a masterpiece in its own right, offering visitors a chance to experience the wonder of landscapes through the unique lens of artistic expression. This exhibition is truly a celebration of Mother Earth where one can immerse oneself and draw lessons from the fact that Earth Day is not just another Day; it is a call for action for each one of us, every day, a chance to celebrate and protect the paradise we have been blessed with. Only by appreciating its beauty, understanding its complexities, and taking steps towards its preservation, can we ensure a healthier planet for ourselves and future generations. Photos: Pankaj Kumar

AN ARTIST FINDS SOLACE IN NATURE

Ompal Sanswal's solo Exhibition JIVA reflects his unwavering commitment to preserve nature

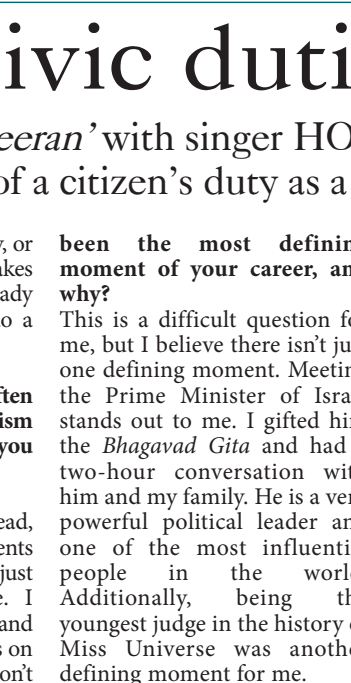


BY SAKSHI PRIYA

Renowned for his exquisite artistry, National Award-winning artist Ompal Sanswal's solo exhibition, JIVA is a mesmerizing journey into the heart of nature. Featuring around 60 of Ompal's paintings, this marks his first solo outing after a hiatus of 15 years. Each piece of art in the gallery feels like a shower of rainbows, with every stage of colour highlighted, showcasing the artist's unparalleled skill and artistic vision. It serves as a poignant reminder of the beauty and importance of our natural surroundings, particularly as the world observed Earth Month last month. Each artwork evokes a profound connection to nature, reminding us of the beauty that the artist has captured. It's akin to sitting in a peaceful forest, listening to the gentle chirping of birds — a hall full of paintings that truly lives up to the title of 'Meditations on Trees.' In his meticulously crafted paintings, the long roots and branches heavy with leaves take on various shapes, telling different stories — some mythological, others resembling human-like figures with eyes, nose, and mouth. Each painting reflects the deep bond between Ompal and his mother, evoking a sense of nostalgia and connection. Curated by renowned art historian and scholar Uma Nair, the exhibition was hosted by Black Cube Gallery for its debut at Bikaner House. Uma Nair's eyes for art never fail to impress, showcasing each painting in its true essence, beyond mere visual appeal. Her ability to highlight the intricate details and deeper meanings embedded in each artwork elevates the exhibition to a whole new level. The timing of the exhibition during Earth Month in April adds to its significance. Sanya Malik, the director of Black Cube Gallery, has played a pivotal role in bringing this exhibition to life. Her keen eye for detail and her dedication to presenting Sanswal's paintings in the most captivating manner have truly enhanced the overall experience of 'JIVA.' As the world celebrates Earth Month, this exhibition serves as a poignant reminder of the beauty and importance of our natural surroundings.

through Ompal's artistic vision. The balanced colors and techniques in each canvas create a visually stunning display. Ompal's fascination with trees is evident in every piece, embodying not just isolated entities in time but dynamic elements in a complex interplay with the environment. The acrylic, pen and ink on canvas, and watercolor pieces are striking for their intricate treatment and vibrant colors. They beautifully represent the connection between humans and trees, offering an immersive impact on viewers. Ompal's 15 years of paintings depict his journey of getting lost in his own world of art, where trees are not just subjects but extensions of his being, evoking beautiful stories. It's a meditation not just for him but for all visitors who stand in awe of his work, appreciating each piece. In a conversation with the artist Ompal, he shared that his mother is his greatest inspiration. Growing up surrounded by trees and forests near his hometown, he drew inspiration from the stories and environment around him. For Ompal, painting trees and nature, and even humans, is a form of meditation, deeply involving him in the process of creating art. His paintings, deeply rooted in humanity and nature, carry a special message to love and preserve trees and nature—plant as many as you can and save our planet. The 'JIVA' exhibition by Ompal Sanswal is not just a collection of paintings but a profound reflection of the artist's soul and his deep-rooted connection with nature. Through his meticulous artistry, Sanswal transports viewers into a world where trees are not mere subjects but living beings, each with its own story to tell. His paintings, with their intricate details and vibrant colors, evoke a sense of tranquility and harmony, inviting us to contemplate our relationship with the natural world. 'JIVA' is not just an exhibition—it's a journey, a meditation, and a celebration of our deep-seated connection with nature. It urges us to cherish and preserve our environment for generations to come, echoing the artist's message of love and respect for trees and nature. Photos: Pankaj Kumar

The 'JIVA' exhibition is a heavenly experience, where nature, trees, animals, and humans are all interconnected.

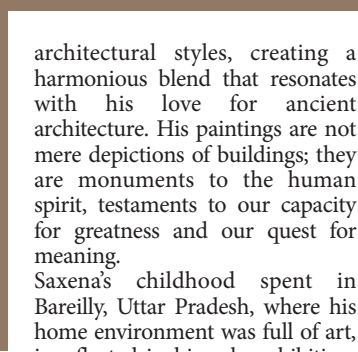
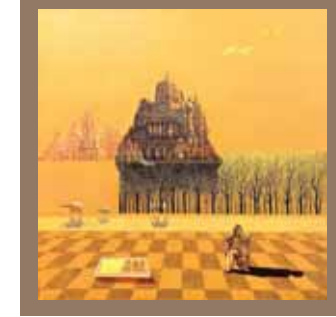
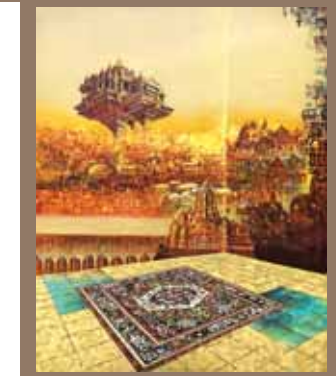


Whether it's a house, property, or even the Ram Mandir, it takes time to construct. It will be ready soon, and I will definitely do a housewarming soon. As a public figure, you often face both praise and criticism on social media. How do you handle negative comments? I don't let success get to my head, and I don't let negative comments affect me either. They are just momentary things for me. I believe in improving myself and keeping things simple. I focus on making myself better and don't really pay attention to negative comments. What are your thoughts on the current music scene in India, and how do you see it evolving in the future? I believe that old songs had a different charm, and their lyrics were very meaningful. However, today, I feel more inclined towards old cinema and songs from the 80s and 70s. I think that era was great, and I prefer the music from that time. How do you balance your personal life with your professional commitments, especially in an industry as demanding as Bollywood? I believe it's all about balance. Despite the demanding nature of the industry, I try my best to balance my personal and professional life. For example, I recently voted and also made sure to spend quality time with my family.

A SURREAL JOURNEY THROUGH TIME AND IMAGINATION

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

Step into a world where art tells stories, and dreams come to life. Kumar Vikas Saxena's latest exhibition, 'It Makes Me Wonder,' is a magical journey through time and imagination. Each painting is like a window to a different world, inviting you to explore and discover. Drawing inspiration from history and culture, Saxena's art blends reality with dreams, that is unique and captivating. 'It Makes Me Wonder,' is a series of paintings that explores the human subconscious through a surrealistic lens. Each painting is a visual narrative of history and culture, seamlessly weaving together elements of the past and present, taking viewers on a breathless journey through time. The well-balanced colours of yellow and brown, coupled with the rustic feel of the theme, evoke a sense of time travel to ancient civilizations. Saxena's solo exhibition is a historical and an immersive experience through a series of thought-provoking paintings. Each artwork feels like a pathway to a history book, every piece discovering its own historical



reflection of humanity, nature, and history. What sets his artwork apart is the combination of different architectural styles, his creations resonating with his love for ancient architecture. What sets Saxena's artwork apart is his ability to combine different

architectural styles, creating a harmonious blend that resonates with his love for ancient architecture. His paintings are not mere depictions of buildings; they are monuments to the human spirit, testaments to our capacity for greatness and our quest for meaning. Saxena's childhood spent in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, where his home environment was full of art, is reflected in his solo exhibition. His love for nature, nurtured during his solitary moments in the lush pine forests of the mountains, is evident in every piece of art. Each painting captures the beauty of nature in the raw, a textured rawness that retains its innocence. Saxena's art is a tribute to his sense

of freedom. He does not believe in imposing his thoughts on his viewers, preferring instead to let them interpret his artwork in their own way. "I don't give titles to my paintings because I don't want to impose my thoughts," he says adding, "I want people to think whatever they want to think of my artwork." This approach has resulted in a body of work that is both personal and universal, inviting viewers to embark on their own journey of discovery. In a conversation the artist revealed that his main source of inspiration is his love for ancient architecture. "I love creating art that is mostly in a rustic form, which takes me into history whenever I go to any historic place," he says, emphasising that, "I want to live in that moment, as if I was there at that time." He expressed a desire to create art that not only reflects the past but also speaks to the present and the future. His paintings are a testament to his belief that the future is built upon the foundations of the past, and he seeks to celebrate the timeless beauty of heritage while embracing the dynamism of progress. In the words of Kumar Vikas Saxena, "Every piece of art resonates with a dream within a dream, the mesmerizing art that allows us to get lost in the fantasy world. Each piece of artwork takes you on a journey to a fascinating

wonderland, a reality world that makes you think of the past and the future." Saxena's exhibition is a testament to the power of art to inspire, provoke thought, and ignite our imagination. The exhibition showcases Saxena's excellence in creating a world that captivates everyone who views it, inviting them to lose themselves in his artwork. The paintings are evidence of his artistic vision, showcasing a world that seamlessly blends mankind's history and civilization with each artwork telling a unique story of balance between man and nature. 'It Makes Me Wonder' is a dreamlike experience, transporting viewers to a world that is both familiar and unknown. Saxena's works is a testament to his ability to create a sense of wonder inviting viewers to get lost in the fantasy world he has created that transports you to a world where time stands still and imagination knows no bounds. So take a moment to immerse yourself in the timeless wonder of Saxena's art and let your imagination soar. It is a beautiful journey through history, mankind, and nature, inviting viewers to explore the beauty of the past and the potential of the future. His artwork is a gift to the world, and it reminds us of the power of creativity to transform our lives and our world.

Balancing professional and civic duties

URVASHI RAUTELA has been in the limelight of late for the song 'Vigdiyan Heeran' with singer HONEY SINGH. In a conversation with SAKSHI PRIYA, she reflects on the significance of a citizen's duty as a voter



You recently cast your vote. How important is it for celebrities to actively participate in the democratic process? It is very important. I was the first person in the queue to cast my vote at 6:45 am to focus as it is our birthright, and similarly for responsible Indian citizen. At the same time as artists, we inspire today's generation, so it is very important for all of us to set a great and positive example. I feel the more youth participate in the electoral process, the better the result for our country and nation. What challenges did you face breaking into Bollywood as an outsider, and how did you overcome them? I believe people are familiar with my journey, including my background, the titles I have won, and my filmography. I feel the power and love of my audiences, which has made the entire journey great. I am grateful and blessed by the kind of love I have received on social media. I

visited a blind school in Uttarakhand for some Urvashi Rautela Foundation work, and the response was beautiful. Vigdiyan Heeran with Honey Singh has generated a lot of excitement. What drew you to this project, and what can audiences expect from it? Yes, it has received a lot of love. Even though the video was short, I being a part of the legendary and cult song 'Love Dose,' 'Vigdiyan Heeran' instantly became a hit the moment it was announced. It's a great track, part two 'Love Dose' after 10 years. There will be a part three as well as people love me and Honey's pairing. They have an emotional connection with us, and fans love us together. It's all about the love from the people

and the fondness for Honey Singh. There's a great back-and-forth energy between you and Honey Singh in the video. How was it working with him again? My experience working with Honey Singh was amazing and fantastic. But I really want to ask Honey Singh about his working experience with me. Next time, I will definitely meet him and ask as I really want to know. Finally, there is a lot of buzz about your stunning palace-like home in Uttarakhand, reportedly valued at Rs 25 crore. Why has it taken so long to complete? It is a beautiful property, and generally, amazing and beautiful things take time to build.

Whether it's a house, property, or even the Ram Mandir, it takes time to construct. It will be ready soon, and I will definitely do a housewarming soon. As a public figure, you often face both praise and criticism on social media. How do you handle negative comments? I don't let success get to my head, and I don't let negative comments affect me either. They are just momentary things for me. I believe in improving myself and keeping things simple. I focus on making myself better and don't really pay attention to negative comments. Looking back at your journey so far, what would you say has

been the most defining moment of your career, and why? This is a difficult question for me, but I believe there isn't just one defining moment. Meeting the Prime Minister of Israel stands out to me. I gifted him the Bhagavad Gita and had a two-hour conversation with him and my family. He is a very powerful political leader and one of the most influential people in the world. Additionally, being the youngest judge in the history of Miss Universe was another defining moment for me. What are your thoughts on the current music scene in India, and how do you see it evolving in the future?

I believe that old songs had a different charm, and their lyrics were very meaningful. However, today, I feel more inclined towards old cinema and songs from the 80s and 70s. I think that era was great, and I prefer the music from that time. How do you balance your personal life with your professional commitments, especially in an industry as demanding as Bollywood? I believe it's all about balance. Despite the demanding nature of the industry, I try my best to balance my personal and professional life. For example, I recently voted and also made sure to spend quality time with my family.



KKR look to iron out flaws against off colour MI

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Kolkata Knight Riders will look to iron out their flaws and get the better of a mis-firing Mumbai Indians when the two teams, placed on the opposite ends of IPL points table spectrum, clash here on Friday.

With six wins in nine games giving them 12 points and the second position in the IPL points table, a berth in the playoffs looks within the grasp of two-time winners KKR. But the Shreyas Iyer-led side will have to find consistency across departments and avoid any slip-ups in order to make it to the final four. Each of their three losses have come in the last six games for KKR, who were at the receiving end of a record run chase by Punjab Kings but did well to bounce back with a seven-wicket thrashing of Delhi Capitals.

With the bat, KKR's requisite firepower in the ranks entwined with an ultra-aggressive approach has delivered the goods more often than not but it is their bowling which needs improvement.

Mitchell Starc has given nearly 12 runs an over while managing a mere seven wickets in eight outings. On flat, batting-friendly pitches, the

lanky Australian's lack of control has also been exploited well by zealous batters. Harshit Rana is among those with most wickets (11) for KKR this season but the right-arm seamer will serve a one-match ban for his animated celebrations after dismissing DC's Abhishek Porel.

Vaibhav Arora's nine scalps in five games make him KKR's best bet with the ball. A small Wankhede Stadium with a batting-friendly wicket tends to encourage scores in excess of 200 and the team would be mindful of that.

Spotlight will also be on Rinku Singh, whose exclusion from India's main squad for the T20 World Cup, has triggered an outpouring of sympathy for the 26-year-old. The power-hitter has not got enough game time this season which probably tilted the scales against him.

For Mumbai Indians, the race to the IPL playoffs seems lost even though the five-time winners have five more games to play. Even if Mumbai Indians win each of these, they can only get to 16 points and somewhere in the middle of the points table - not necessarily challenging those who have been consistently good.



Jasprit Bumrah (14 wickets) and Gerald Coetzee (13) have been MI's best bets with the ball but despite their impressive showing, the batters' collective failure has resulted in the team's underwhelming season.

Tilak Varma has been MI's best batter with 343 runs, including three fifties this IPL, but his performances have not been enough to hide the failings of others.

Ishan Kishan has struck the ball well but severely lacks consistency at the top and losing wickets in heaps in the powerplay has been one of MI's biggest woes in this season.

India skipper Rohit Sharma's (315 runs at strike rate of 158.29) selfless approach with the bat has not given him big scores consistently but his form will be in focus given the T20 World Cup is now just one month away.

All eyes will also be on Suryakumar Yadav who has two fifties in seven IPL games this season, but it is not the consistency which is expected from the batter of his calibre.

Mumbai Indians' under-fire skipper Hardik Pandya has neither dazzled with the ball nor the bat after a long injury lay-off. But the fact that he

finds himself in the Indian side as vice-captain for the World Cup should motivate him to turn things around.

TEAMS (FROM):

Mumbai Indians: Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan (wk), Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kwena Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Harvik Desai (wk), Nehal Wadhwa, Luke Wood.

Kolkata Knight Riders: Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat (wk), Rahmanullah Gurbaz (wk), Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Varun Chakravarthy, Sunil Narine, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Gus Atkinson, Allah Ghazanfar, Phil Salt.



Deepak Chahar does not look good: Fleming on his possible injury

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings head coach Stephen Fleming admitted that seamer Deepak Chahar's latest injury "doesn't look good" but he is hoping for a positive report from the franchise's medical team ahead of the business phase of the ongoing IPL.

Although Fleming did not divulge any details on Chahar's new injury, the 31-year-old seamer was being pulled off his run-up in just the second ball of Punjab Kings chase here on Wednesday night.

It could be a possible hamstring injury as, after having a chat with skipper Rituraj Gaikwad and the physio, Chahar walked off ground holding his hamstring and did not bowl any further in the match.

Chahar's career has been marred by injuries in the last couple of years, costing him a permanent spot in the Indian team. "Yeah, the travelogue is pretty busy. There's a lot of ins and outs. So, Deepak Chahar doesn't look good," said Fleming during the post-match presser.

"The initial feeling wasn't great. So, I'm hoping for a more positive report when the physio and the doctor have a look."

Chahar's injury somewhat forced Gaikwad to bring in Shivam Dube for an over, who has mainly been used as a batter this season.

But Dube went for 14 in the only over he bowled, and Fleming admitted that with the Impact Player rule, Dube is not suited for the role in the IPL and will have his chances in proper conditions.

"He (Dube) is ready to bowl and is working hard on it. He will play a role in the right conditions, and with the Impact Player rule, we have players who can fit the role better. Currently, his necessity to bowl is pretty much small," the coach said.

CSK suffered a seven-wicket defeat to PBKS, their second loss at home this season, managing a meagre 162 for 7, which was comfortably chased down with 13 balls to spare. Talking about the demanding

wicket at Chepauk, Fleming said, "It's difficult, and we have spoken on the unpredictability of the wickets here before. Batting first makes it difficult for us to judge as to what a good competitive score is."

"We had a couple of 200s (before), which was in our minds today. But, the wicket was very sticky."

"We also had a good start in the (first) six overs before things became difficult. We also tried a few lefties in the form of Dube and (Ravindra) Jadeja but we just couldn't get anything through the middle. They bowled really well, they got good purchase and held onto it. We just got stifled through the middle, which prevented us from getting a score of 180," he said.

With a low score to defend, Fleming was impressed with the commitment and performance shown by English pacer Richard Gleeson, who made his debut last night.

"Richard Gleeson was good, and it was a positive. Losing Fizz (Mustafizur Rahman) is disappointing."

"Tushar (Deshpande) has a bit of flu going around as well. So, we've had to make a few changes, which is unusual. Again, that's part of it, and we have got the resources," he said.

"Just they haven't had the game time to be really comfortable with their roles and us to be comfortable with a game plan, which we're struggling a little."

Although veteran opener Ajinkya Rahane managed to get to double figures after a lean phase in the last four games, he didn't last beyond a 24-ball 29.

"I thought he (Rahane) was good today. He's been probably a bit too aggressive in what he wants to do," Fleming observed.

"Keep in mind, we're batting on wickets here that we don't know how they are gonna play. So, we got to take a bit of a pause to see what a good score is. If you are 3 for 30, the game is pretty much over."

"His (Rahane) hitting that was so good last year, is more crisp. It's not for lack of intent. He has doubled up on intent. We're fine with Jinks and the role he plays."

OTHER SPORTS

Füllkrug fires Dortmund to 1-0 win over PSG

AP ■ DORTMUND

Niclas Füllkrug scored and Borussia Dortmund earned a 1-0 win over Paris Saint-Germain in the first leg of their Champions League semifinal.

Dortmund defender Nico Schlotterbeck sent a long pass over the top for Füllkrug to control brilliantly with his first touch before firing it past PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma with his next in the 36th minute on Wednesday.

"It's not the first time that I've tried to stick the ball in at the near post this season. This time it worked out and I'm even happier that it's in such an important game," Füllkrug said. The win gives Dortmund a narrow advantage before the teams play again in the second leg in Paris next Tuesday, when the French champion will need to overturn the result if it's going to capture Europe's biggest prize before Kylian Mbappé leaves the club.

PSG is under pressure to finally win to the Champions League to justify more than a decade of huge investment from its Qatari owners.

Dortmund's win ensured it qualified for the tournament next season and it gives the Bundesliga five teams in the expanded tournament. Dortmund is assured of finishing at least fifth.

Roared on by most of the 81,365 fans present, including the famed "yellow wall" behind one of the goals, Dortmund made the busier start and maintained its intensity for the whole game. The home team ran 119.7 kilometers - almost 10



more than the visitors.

Defender Lucas Hernández went off injured after trying to stop Füllkrug from scoring. It looked like Hernández suffered a left leg injury.

PSG pushed hardest early in the second half, when Mbappé hit the right post before Achraf Hakimi struck the left post. Gregor Kobel saved Mbappé's next effort and Dortmund survived the pressure.

Füllkrug went on to miss further good chances for the German team, while Marquinhos made a crucial block to deny Julian Brandt late on.

"It would have been nice if we could have made our counterattacks count to get a second goal at the end," Dortmund veteran Mats Hummels said.

"But now we have to come through in Paris."

The visitors missed chances, too.

Ousmane Dembélé should have scored on his return to Dortmund when he blazed a shot over late, then Vitinha flashed a shot wide of the left post.

"We tried to keep the ball from them but it's so difficult because they have a lot of quality," PSG coach Luis Enrique said.

"They are a great team on the ball and off the ball. Today in that environment they were great in both aspects of the game. I think we had maybe a lack of intensity in the first half, but in the second half we created clear, clear chances. But we couldn't score."

Dortmund coach Edin Terzic only made his first substitution in the 83rd, when he sent on veteran Marco Reus for the exhausted Karim Adeyemi.

The winner of the two-leg tie will play either Real Madrid or Bayern Munich in the final in London on June 1.

Real Madrid can clinch Spanish league title

AP ■ BARCELONA

Chasing another Champions League crown, Real Madrid already has its fingertips on the Spanish league title.

The 14-time European Cup winner could clinch the Spanish league on Saturday when Madrid hosts Cadiz and Barcelona visits Girona if everything goes its way.

Madrid can lock up title No. 36 with four games left in two scenarios: If Madrid beats Cadiz and Barcelona fails to beat Girona, or if Madrid draws with Cadiz and Barcelona loses at Girona. Madrid leads Barcelona by 11 points and has the tiebreaker with Barcelona in its favor entering the round. Madrid has been the runaway favorite since it beat Girona,



then its top challenger, in February and quashed a half-hearted rally by Barcelona in a clasico victory last month.

With the domestic title apparently a question of time, Madrid's priority is its Champions League semifinal with Bayern

Munich. Madrid earned a 2-2 draw in Germany thanks to Vinicius Junior's brace on Tuesday. Bayern comes to Madrid next Wednesday to decide who will face Paris Saint-Germain or Borussia Dortmund in the June 1 final.

Led by Jude Bellingham, Vinicius and veteran midfielder Toni Kroos, Carlo Ancelotti's side has lost only once in 33 league games in this campaign.

Ancelotti rotated his starting lineup for the last round where Madrid won at Real Sociedad, so it is likely that he will also rest some key players against a Cadiz side that is in danger of relegation. The team from southern Spain is in 18th place, inside the drop zone, and five points behind Celta Vigo, the last team clinging to safety.

WOMEN HOCKEY TEAM



Salima replaces Savita as skipper

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mid-fielder Salima Tete on Thursday replaced veteran goalkeeper Savita Punia as captain of the 24-strong Indian women's hockey squad for the Belgium and England legs of the FIH Pro League starting later this month.

Navneet Kaur has been named her deputy for the tour.

"I am happy that I have been appointed to lead the team. It is a big responsibility and I am looking forward to this new role. We have a strong squad and it's a mix of experienced and young players," Salima was quoted as saying in a Hockey India press release.

"In the upcoming Belgium and England legs of the FIH Hockey Pro League 2023-2024, we look to put our strong foot forward. We have worked on areas where we needed to improve," she said.

Savita had captained India during the failed Olympic qualifying campaign and the pro league matches at home after that.

Barring three changes, the squad was the same that took part in the Bhubaneswar and Rourkela legs of the Pro League in February this year.

Defender Gurjit Kaur, midfielders Sonika and Nisha and striker Beauty Dzungdung have been dropped and were replaced by Mahima Chaudhary, Manisha Chaudhary, Pretti Dubey and Deepika Soreng.

The matches in Belgium will begin on May 22 and end on May 26, while the England leg will commence on June 1 and conclude on June 9.

India will play against Argentina, and Belgium twice during the first leg, starting May 22 against Argentina.

During the London leg, the team will take on Great Britain and Germany.

India are currently placed sixth in the FIH Pro League table with eight points from as many matches.

Salima was recently honoured with the prestigious Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr Award for Player of the Year in the women's category at the sixth Hockey India Annual Awards.

The goalkeeping responsibilities will rest with Savita and Bichu Devi Kharibam, while the defensive line-up includes Nikki Pradhan, Uditia, Ishika Chaudhary, Monika, Jyoti Chhattri and Mahima.

The midfield will be marshalled by Salima, Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Navneet, Neha, Jyoti, Baljeet Kaur, Manisha and Lalremsiami.

Alcaraz loses to Rublev in Madrid Open quarterfinals

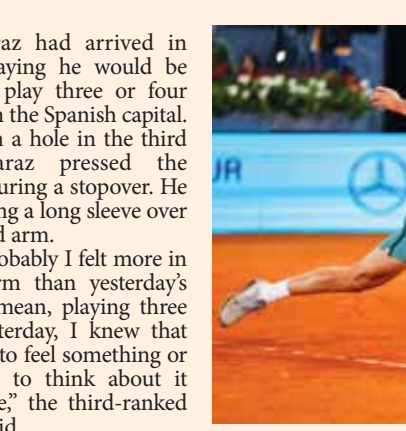
AP ■ MADRID

Carlos Alcaraz's bid to win a third straight Madrid Open title ended with a three-set loss to Andrey Rublev in the quarterfinals.

The second-seeded Spaniard got off to a good start but then was outplayed by the seventh-seeded Rublev, losing 4-6 6-3 6-2 at the Caja Magica centre court on Wednesday.

Alcaraz, who had already struggled in a three-set win over Jan-Lennard Struff on Tuesday, looked out of sorts and was mistake-prone toward the end.

It was his first tournament after missing Monte Carlo and Barcelona because of a right forearm injury. The 20-year-



old Alcaraz had arrived in Madrid saying he would be happy to play three or four matches in the Spanish capital. Already in a hole in the third set, Alcaraz pressed the forearm during a stopover. He was wearing a long sleeve over the injured arm.

"Today probably I felt more in the forearm than yesterday's match. I mean, playing three hours yesterday, I knew that I'm going to feel something or I'm going to think about it even more," the third-ranked Alcaraz said.

"Playing someone like Rublev that I couldn't push him to the

limit in every point is tough," Alcaraz plans to play in Rome to continue his preparation for the French Open later this

month. "I'm going to go to Rome. I'm going to work to be close to 100% or in a good way to play Rome, but I'm going to decide these days. But I think I'll be OK," he said.

"I have to work hard if I want to go to Rome with good feelings, without pain, without thinking about my forearm, but it's going to be a slow process, I guess. I have to be patient in that way."

Alcaraz was trying to become the first player to win the clay-court tournament three straight times. He hadn't lost on Spanish soil since 2021.

Rublev, seeking his second ATP 1000 title after winning Monte Carlo last year, will play Taylor Fritz in the semifinals. The world No. 8 was solid from the start and overpowered Alcaraz with 30 winners.

"The serve saved me a lot of times today," Rublev said. "The key was I was completely calm the whole match. I did not say one word, even if I was losing. That was the key and I was able to serve even better near the end. In the beginning, I was not serving that well but little by little, after set one, I served better and better and finished really well."