



## OPINION 6

UPHOLDING THE FOURTH ESTATE IN DIGITAL AGE | TRUMP CALLS JUDGE CROOKED AFTER FACING WARNING OF JAIL TIME

## WORLD 8

NEW DELHI, FRIDAY MAY 3, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

## MONEY 10

STOCK MARKETS REBOUND AS GST REVENUES HIT RECORD IN APRIL

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KKR LOOK TO IRON OUT FLAWS AGAINST MI 12 SPORTS

**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 Rae Bareli, a Gandhi family bastion which has been won by former

Gandhi's aunt Sheila Kaul may be fielded from Rae Bareli, 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 loyalists associated with the Gandhi family are already in Amethi and neighbouring Rae Bareli and are believed to have prepared the nomination documents for both Rahul and Rae Bareli 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

PTI

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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**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.

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# 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 PTI

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

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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.

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

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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.

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## Clandestine 'dole surveys' make poll panel see red



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Mid 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



## Not at home in Amethi, RaGa may try Rae Bareli

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

Amid the suspense over Congress nominees from Amethi and Rae Bareli 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 Bareli 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 Bareli, a grandson of former Congress leader and Indira Gandhi's aunt Sheila Kaul may be fielded from Rae Bareli, 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 loyalists associated with the Gandhi family are already in Amethi and neighbouring Rae Bareli and are believed to have prepared the nomination documents for both Rahul as well as Priyanka.

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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 Saksha 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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PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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children



# 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 a 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 Court 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 25,300000 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 Janata 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

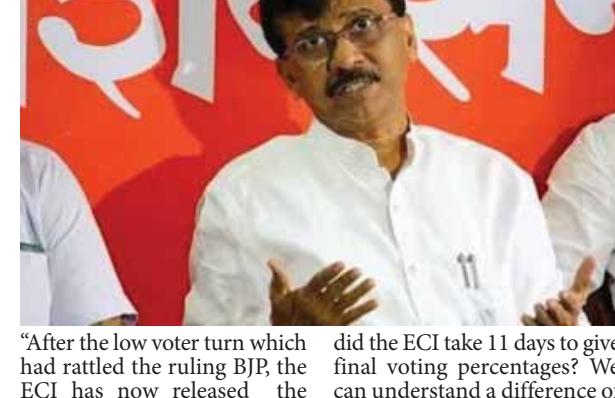
In a damaging development a woman employee of the Governor's House in Kolkata has alleged inappropriate behaviour by Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose. The incident took place on Thursday when the woman approached the nearby Hare Street Police Station alleging she had been misbehaved by the Governor, sources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

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.

## 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 paralysed 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.

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## Start...

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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 and ensure that everyone receives adequate briefing about the same.

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## 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 "Tughlaq order", Maliwal on X wrote, "LG has issued a Tughlaq 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 Baijal 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 INDIA 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

## 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.

are section 123 (1) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (corrupt practices), and section 171 (B) of IPC (accepting gratification).

The



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 been 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 has been recovered from the premises of some

schools. "I request all to please convey further that these are false messages. Messages going 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 panic-stricken 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-

nator 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

## 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 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 to 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 Satyendar 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 Mammooh and Justice Manmeet PS Arora disposed of the petition, saying it can-



not devise a policy in the middle 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.

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.

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.

## 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 @shyamguptarpsswa 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 conductive 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

masquerading as part of an annual report," Jaiswal said. "We really have no expectation that the USCIRF will even seek to understand India's diverse, pluralistic and democratic ethos," he added. "Their efforts to interfere in the largest electoral exercise of the world will never succeed," Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing. In its latest annual report, the USCIRF has criticised India for alleged violations of religious freedom as well as on certain other issues. New Delhi's response came

## India protests against China's illegal construction in Shaksgam Valley

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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 any 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.

"Obviously, no visa note was issued either. No visa is required for diplomatic passport holders to travel to Germany. The Ministry has not issued visa note for any other country," the MEA spokesperson said.

On Wednesday, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah urged the prime minister to take swift action to cancel the diplomatic passport of Revanna

from or issued by MEA in respect of the travel of the said MP to Germany," Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing while replying to a volley of questions on the MP's reported travel to Germany.

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

## 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, Karanji; 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 International Studies from Mumbai University.

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 Marshal Hardeep Bains on Wednesday assumed charge as 36th Commandant of the prestigious National Defence College here. He took over from Lt General S Dahiya. Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor assumed the appointment of Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief (AOC-in-C) Training

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 of a premier air base.

## 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

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 Bharadwaj who will lead the delegation of these women from the grassroots level will discuss strategies derived from India's PRIs 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 (PRIs) 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 frontline health workers and women and girls in need of health services through her public outreach efforts.

KVB 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 Securitisation & 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 of companies Act, 2013). Having its office at: 476, FIE Ground Floor, Patparganj Industrial Area Delhi - 110092, ALSO A.D- 102, Third Floor, Street no. 5, Laxmi Nagar, New Delhi - 110092; (2) Mr. Abhishek Jain (DIN - 07516099)-(Director) R/o G-11 Laxmi Nagar, Shakarpur, East Delhi, Delhi - 110092; (3) Mr. Kunal Chauhan (DIN - 07425833) (Director) R/o D-373 Laxmi Nagar, Shakarpur, Baradari, Shakarpur, East Delhi, Delhi - 110092; (4) Mr. Subash Chand Jain (Guarantor) R/o G-11 Laxmi Nagar, Shakarpur Baradari, Shakarpur, East Delhi, Delhi - 110092; (5) Mr. Gajender Singh (Guarantor) R/o D-373 Laxmi Nagar, Shakarpur Baradari, Shakarpur, East Delhi, Delhi - 110092; (6) Mr. Lal Ji (Guarantor) R/o H-15A, Lalita Park, Laxmi Nagar, Shakarpur, Gopal 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-18, Shubh Chowk, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi - 110092 to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs.1,55,22,714.57/- (Rupees One Crore Sixty Lakh Fifty Five Thousand Seven Hundred Sixty Three 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 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 Khasra 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: Gali 15 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

Bidders are advised to visit the website ([www.mstecommerce.com/auction/home/bapi/](http://www.mstecommerce.com/auction/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 [ibapi@mstecommerce.com](mailto:ibapi@mstecommerce.com) and for EMD status please contact [ibapifm@mstecommerce.com](mailto:ibapifm@mstecommerce.com).

For property details and photograph of the property and auction terms and conditions please visit: <https://ibapi.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://ibapi.in> and [www.mstecommerce.com](http://www.mstecommerce.com).

Date : 30.04.2024 Place : New Delhi

Authorised Officer





## 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 it 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,

tia, 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 sown 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.

## PIC TALK



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

PTI

## Time to curb fake videos in elections

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

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 'deepfake' 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.



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 abolition 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.

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

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.

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

discourse 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.

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

### 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.

Send your feedback to:  
letterstopioneer@gmail.com

# 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

**W**ere 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.

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### India's semiconductor mission



denced 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.

Adwait 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 Narayana Nair overshadowing the valorous efforts. Amidst the political manoeuvring, one thing remains clear: addressing the China challenge requires strategic foresight and resolute action.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai



## 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'



ABINAV 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



**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**

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.

Call for AFSPA comes under extraordinary situations which if not controlled or mitigated can result in serious consequences from the genocides of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990, 1986 Kashmir riots killing 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 Rastriya 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 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)

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.

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(The writer is an educator; 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



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 cha-

rade 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 extravagance

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 scuffed as officers encountered resistance. With police helicopters hovering, the sound of flashbangs, 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 incarcerated 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.

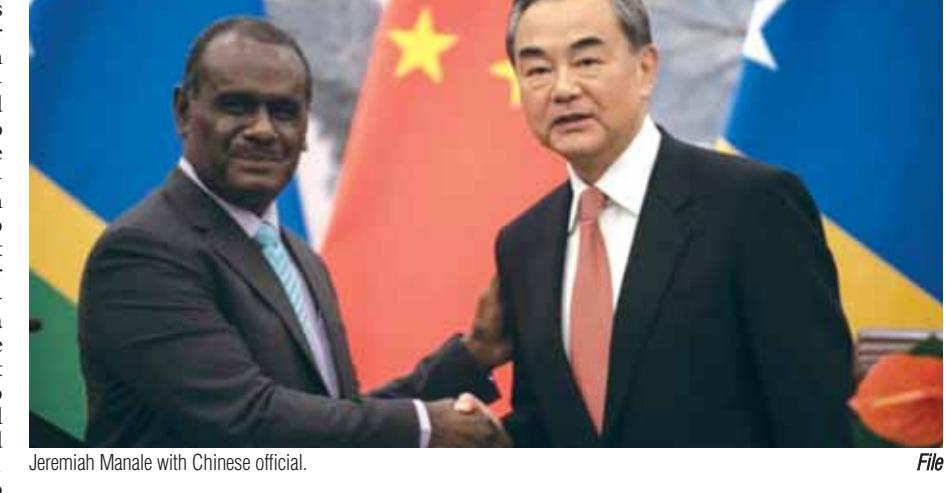
The gag order bars him from making public statements about witnesses, jurors and some others connected to his hush money case. Trump is still free to criticise Merchan.

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 likes 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



Jeremiah Manane with Chinese official.

File

Solomon Islands lawmakers on Thursday chose former Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manane 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 Manane 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 Manane 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.

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 Manane 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 panned 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.

## Norway to increase defence spending

AP ■ COPIEHAGEN

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.

## Georgia parliament cancels session after huge protests

AP ■ TBILSI (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.

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 torn Ukraine.

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 Zurabichvili, 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 overturn 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."

## 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 Republicans.

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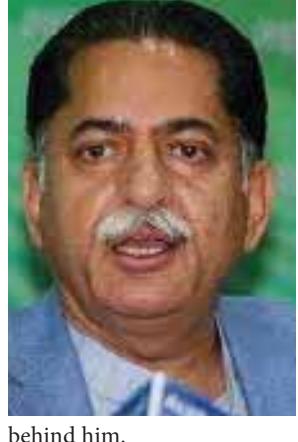
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# Senior PML-N leader signals possibility of early elections

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 news-paper 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 jabs 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 moto 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

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

**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

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

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

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-

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

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

**Beijing (AP):** 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

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 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 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."

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Lanka continues to service loans despite default

**Colombo (PTI):** 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.

"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 Batyar's 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 Batyar, 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 know 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 counteroffensive last summer: Ukraine's momentum was slowed in the Zaporizhzhia

# Stock markets rebound as GST revenues hit record in April

PTI ■ MUMBAI

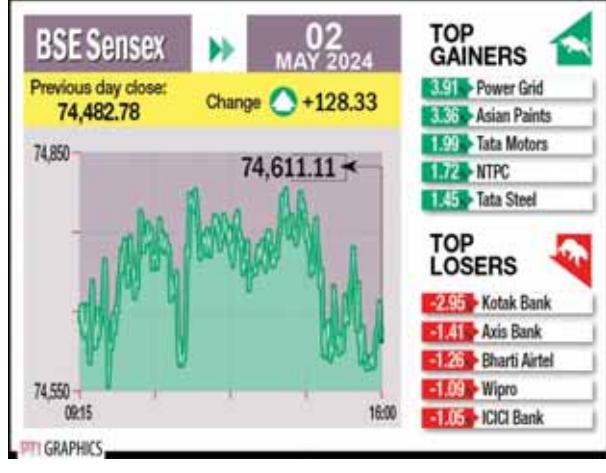
Stock markets rebounded on Thursday with benchmark Sensex closing higher by 128 points as record GST collections in April, positive manufacturing data, and foreign fund inflows boosted investor sentiment.

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.

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 add specific growth numbers



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, Northwest 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 Evolence 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



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.

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

"We have sustained momentum on digital banking is here to stay."

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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," 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 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.

"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

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.

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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.

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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



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.

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

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 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 Whisky 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 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

## American Express will open its campus in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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 its 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 plan to 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 already has a facility in Indonesia, this will be a completely separate facility that

# 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

**I**magine 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



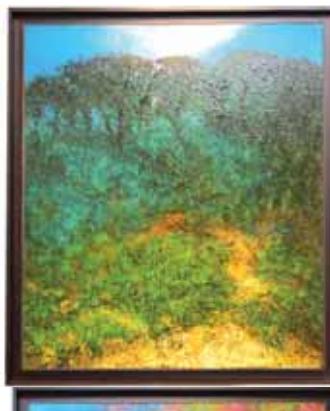
incomparable odes to nature's multilayered beauty. His brushstrokes transport us to a world where nature thrives, and constantly remind us of power to captivate. His pieces are a subtle testimony to the delicate balance between humans and nature, an stark pointer to the connection we humans often tend to overlook or forget.

Paranjit 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 Virangami'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 Appukuttan 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 emphasizes 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 emphasizes 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 centrestage 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

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 Sansanwal 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, Sansanwal 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

## A SURREAL JOURNEY THROUGH TIME AND IMAGINATION

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

**S**tep 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, their creations resonating with his love for ancient architecture. What sets Saxena's artwork apart is his ability to combine different

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, emphasizing 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.

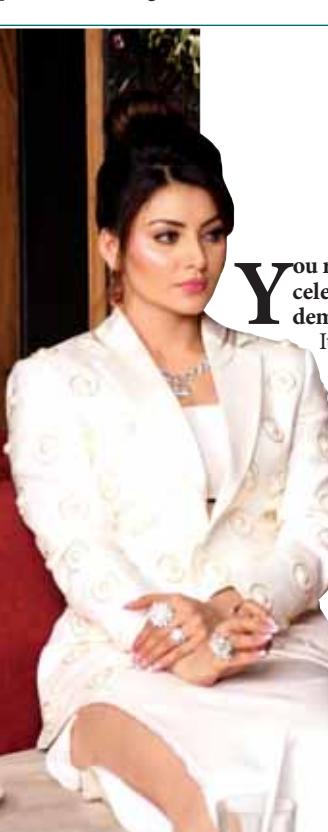
'It Makes Me Wonder' is a dreamlike experience, transporting viewers to a world that is both familiar and unknown. Saxena's works is a testament to his ability to create a sense of wonder inviting viewers to get lost in the fantasy world

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.

Photos: Pankaj Kumar

## 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



**Y**ou 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 citizens. 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, 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.

Theres 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.

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. 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.



# 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 misfiring 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 fire-power 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 Madhwani, Kwena Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Namam Dhir, Shivalik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Harvick Desai (wk), Nehal Wadhera, Luke Wood.

**Kolkata Knight Riders:** Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat (wk), Rahamanullah Gurbaz (wk), Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramadeep 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 seen pulling 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 Ruturaj 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 stumped 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."

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 Dembelé 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 classic 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 Júnior'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, Vinícius 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.

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 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 Gurjot Kaur, midfielders Sonika and Nisha and Lalremisiami.

striker Beauty Dungdung have been dropped and were replaced by Mahima Chaudhary, Manisha Chauhan, Pretti Dubey and Deepika Sorenge.

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, Uditा, Ishika Chaudhary, Monika, Jyoti Chhatri and Mahima.

The midfield will be marshalled by Salima, Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Navneet, Neha, Jyoti, Baljeet Kaur, midfielders Sonika and Nisha and Lalremisiami.

## 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 6-2 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."