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INCONSISTENT SRH TAKE ON LSG FOR PLAYOFFS SPOT 12 SPORTS



Mercury Rises, Voting Falls

61 Per Cent Polling In Phase III of Lok Sabha Elections

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

Amidst the hostile weather conditions, the third phase of the Lok Sabha polls on Tuesday saw a further dip in the voting percentage which recorded 61.81 per cent voter turnout when compared to 66.14 per cent in the first phase followed by 66.71 per cent in the second. Comparatively, in the 2019 elections, these same 93 seats collectively recorded an overall turnout of 67.33 per cent. The third phase failed to buck the trend amid hot weather and heatwave in the polling States. Experts and political parties attributed the decline to heatwave and voters' apathy. The stakes are high for the BJP in this round as it had won an overwhelming majority of these seats, including all in Gujarat, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, in the last election. Fate of candidates for more than half of the 543 Lok Sabha has been sealed while four phases still remain for the counting to be done on June 4. Voting has been completed in 283 seats out of 543 seats so far. Except sporadic incidents of violence in four constituencies in West Bengal, the polling in 10 States and Union Territories has been peaceful. Five States — Assam, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat and Karnataka — have wrapped up



Prime Minister Narendra Modi shows his ink-marked finger after casting his vote for the third phase of Lok Sabha elections, in Ahmedabad, on Tuesday

their polling in phase three. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Chief Electoral Officer for Gujarat, P Bharathi, industrialist Gautam Adani were among the early voters to cast their vote. Modi urged people to vote in record numbers and said their active participation will make the election more vibrant. While the BJP has already declared a win in Surat Lok Sabha seat as unopposed, stakes are significant for the BJP and its allies, which had, in 2019, won 75

of the 93 seats. INDIA Bloc parties had won only 11. Four seats had gone to the undivided Shiv Sena, two were won by independents, and one by the AIUDE. As per the EC's voter turnout app (till 8 pm), Assam witnessed the highest voter turnout of 75.30 per cent followed by West Bengal at 73.93 per cent, while Maharashtra witnessed the lowest at 55.21 per cent, with Bihar doing slightly better at

54.73 per cent, Budaun 52.77 per cent, Bareilly 54.21 per cent, Etah 57.07 per cent, Fatehpur Sikri 54.93 per cent, Firozabad 56.27 per cent, Hathras 53.54 per cent, Mainpuri 55.88 per cent and Sambhal 61.10 per cent. "The polling was held smoothly and peacefully in all States/UTs across the three phases which covered the entire North Eastern part of the country, Left Wing Extremists affected and vulnerable areas in Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh," the EC said in a statement. During the third phase polling, 13 people were injured when swarms of bees attacked them in two separate polling booths of two constituencies in north Chhattisgarh. Eight people were injured in Aara village under Raigarh Lok Sabha constituency and five at Jawaharnagar under Surguja Lok Sabha constituency. The first vote for the election to Jammu and Kashmir's Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency was cast by Ali Mohammad Rather, a visually impaired person, under the Election Commission's new home voting facility. In Karnataka's Kapalapur village in Bidar district, a 110-year-old Gattigitti Lakshmi reached a polling station along with her son and grandson to cast her vote while 100-year-old Gurama exercised her franchise in Sindbandagi village. In many polling stations, the elderly reached in wheelchairs.



Will Kejriwal Be Able To Campaign For AAP?

RAJESH KUMAR NEW DELHI

After the arguments by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and the Supreme Court in the multi-crore liquor-gate scandal on Tuesday in the court, all eyes are on the judiciary to see whether AAP convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal would be granted interim bail, allowing him a chance to campaign in the Lok Sabha elections. After much deliberation on the arguments made by Kejriwal's legal team and those representing the probing agency, the Supreme Court deferred its order on the Delhi Chief Minister's interim bail plea, with a two-judge bench rising without pronouncing an order. The court is likely to hear the matter on Thursday. Meanwhile, a Delhi court extended Kejriwal's judicial custody in the money laundering case till May 20. Special Judge for CBI and ED matters Kavari Baweja extended Kejriwal's custody after the AAP leader was produced before the court through a video conference on the expiry of his remand granted earlier. Legal experts are of the view there is a possibility that the Supreme Court might grant Kejriwal interim bail in view of the ongoing Lok Sabha polls. "Suppose we grant interim bail on account of elections. Then if you say you will attend office then it may have a cascading effect... Dr Singhvi if we give any interim bail we do not want you to be performing official duties as somewhere it will lead to conflict. We do not want interference at all in



the working of the Government," the court remarked. However, in the same breath, the court also remarked, "Let us see whether at all it (interim bail) should be given or not." The bench reserved its decision after hearing the arguments put forth by senior advocate Singhvi and Additional Solicitor General S V Raju, who appeared for Kejriwal and the ED, respectively. Solicitor General (SG) Tushar Mehta, appearing for the ED, staunchly opposed showing any leniency to Kejriwal on account of the Lok Sabha polls and said granting interim bail to the AAP national convener would amount to creating a separate class for politicians. "Please do not earmark a political leader as a separate class and let them not be separated from the common man. It is being stated that nothing was done (by the ED) in 1.5 years and (he was) picked up during elections. That is not the correct impression at all," he said. Continued on Page 2

THE PIONEER REPORTS FROM GROUND ZERO

GUJARAT

PNS AHMEDABAD



A voter turnout of 55.22 per cent was recorded till 5 pm in 25 Lok Sabha seats of Gujarat in the third phase of the elections on Tuesday. Home Minister Amit Shah from Gandhinagar as well as his Cabinet colleagues Mansukh Mandaviya and Parshottam Rupala from Porbandar and Rajkot, respectively, are in the fray. Gujarat has 4.97 crore voters, including 2.56 crore men, 2.41 crore women and 1,534 persons from the third gender. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi cast his vote at Nishan School in Ranip area, Shah exercised his franchise at a polling booth in Naranpura, both of which fall under the Gandhinagar Lok Sabha seat. As per the data shared by the Election Commission, the tribal-reserved Valsad constituency in south Gujarat recorded the highest turnout of 68.12 per cent, while Amreli in Saurashtra saw the lowest turnout of 45.59 per cent till 5 pm. Meanwhile, a 45-year-old woman polling officer deployed at a polling booth in Amreli district died after she complained of uneasiness while on duty on Tuesday, an official said. Kaushika Babariya, a government school teacher, was deployed at a booth in Jafrabad town.

Some voters braved physical limitations to exercise their franchise. A person with disabilities used his leg to cast his vote, and another person voted on a stretcher. Dedicated non-resident Gujaratis (NRGs) turned up in large numbers to cast their vote in their hometowns. The State Election Commission ensured that voting was a celebratory exercise by decorating some polling stations like wedding venues and setting up selfie points for voters to make their day memorable. In Nadiad, which falls under the Kheda Lok Sabha constituency, Ankit Soni, who lost both hands, cast his vote using his legs. "Around 15-20 years ago, I suffered an electric shock and lost my hands. With the blessings of my teachers and parents, I started drawing, completed CS and earned an MBA. I am working towards a PhD. I voted using my legs," Soni said.

UTTAR PRADESH

PNS LUCKNOW



Over 56 per cent polling was recorded till 5 pm in the Lok Sabha elections being held for 10 seats in Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday in the third phase. According to the Election Commission, by 5 pm, 57.34 per cent votes were cast. Voting began at 7 am and will continue till 6 pm. More than 1.89 crore voters are eligible to vote in these 10 constituencies. With the end of this phase of voting, 26 of the 80 Lok Sabha seats have already gone to polls. Agra witnessed 53.99 per cent polling till 6 pm, Aonla 57.08 per cent, Bareilly 57.88 per cent, Etah 59.17 per cent, Fatehpur Sikri 57.09 per cent, Firozabad 58.22 per cent, Hathras 55.36 per cent, Mainpuri 55.88 per cent and Sambhal 62.81 per cent. The third phase is important for the family members of Samajwadi Party founder Mulayam Singh Yadav. Party chief Akhilesh Yadav's wife Dimple Yadav is aiming to retain the Mainpuri seat, which she won in a bypoll following the death of her father-in-law. Akshay Yadav, the son of SP national principal general secretary Ram Gopal Yadav is contesting

from Firozabad and Aditya Yadav, the son of SP national general secretary Shivpal Yadav, is making his electoral debut from Budaun. Voting began at 7 am and concluded at 6 pm. More than 1.89 crore voters are eligible to vote in these 10 constituencies. With the end of this phase of voting, 26 of the 80 Lok Sabha seats have already gone to polls. Uttar Pradesh has the highest 80 parliamentary constituencies among all the states. Polling in the state is spread across all seven phases from April 19 to June 1. The counting of votes will be taken up on June 4. Continued on Page 2

MAHARASHTRA

TN RAGHUNATHA MUMBAI



In a polling marred by an incident of violence which claimed one life and left another person injured in Osmanabad parliamentary constituency, as many as 53.40 per cent of total 2.09 crore voters exercised their franchise till 5 pm in eleven constituencies that went to polls in the third phase of high-stake Lok Sabha polls held on Tuesday. On a day when Kolhapur registered a maximum 63.71 per cent polling while prestigious Baramati registered a lowest 45.68 per cent voting till 5 pm, a man was knifed to death and one person sustained stab wounds in a brawl that broke out near a polling station in Patsangvi village in Bhoom taluka of Osmanabad district. The tentative final polling percentage figures are likely to be released either later on Tuesday night. As per the revised figures put out by the Election Commission of India on April 30, 2024, 63.71 per cent of total voters exercised their rights in five constituencies in the first phase of the Lok Sabha held in Maharashtra on April 19, while 62.71 per cent of the total electorate voted in eight Lok Sabha constituencies during the second phase of polling held on April 26. Compared with the percentages of voting that took place in the first

and second phases of Lok Sabha polling held earlier, the polling witnessed in the third phase of the Lok Sabha on Tuesday is not very encouraging which can be 60 per cent of voter turnout best be called at moderate polling. The polling percentages in 11 Lok Sabha constituencies at 5 pm are as follows: Latur-55.38 per cent, Sangli-52.56 per cent, Baramati-45.68 per cent, Hatkanangale-62.18 per cent, Kolhapur-63.71 per cent, Madha -50 per cent, Osmanabad-52.78 per cent, Raigad-50.31 per cent, Ratnagiri -Sindhudurg-53.75 per cent, Satara-54.11 per cent and Solapur-49.11 per cent. Together, the average works out 53.40 per cent. Since the third phase final phase polling may be around 60 per cent, it is not clear yet as to what impact it will have on the Lok Sabha polls in eleven constituencies that went to polls on Tuesday. Continued on Page 2

WEST BENGAL

SAUGAR SENGUPTA KOLKATA

Bengal continued to reverse its poll-day trends as Tuesday's third phase polling passed off without reporting a single electoral violence related death. Notwithstanding, reports of sporadic and stray violence filtered in from different parts of four constituencies of Murshidabad, Jangipur, Malda South and Malda North. Amid all these voters polled briskly but a tad on the lower side. Most number of incidents came from Murshidabad where CPI(M) candidate Md Salim ran from booth to booth to report alleged illegal gathering and false voting. The CPI(M) leader was seen holding an alleged fake polling agent at Raninagar area whom he later handed over to the police. In other places he was seen chasing away people who were jamming the booths. In the process the TMC workers raised "go back" slogans against him, sources said. In 2019 a number of people had died at Murshidabad alone. In an election about 20 years ago the same district had seen about 75 people killed in a single day... even in last year's panchayat elections lakhs of people could not vote," said a local adding "comparing to what happens in Murshidabad this year things were far more cooler." At Jangipur a BJP booth president was seen exchanging blows with a TMC counterpart who was trying to rig polling, sources said. At Malda South bombs were hurled at Rata to chase away voters, Congress candidate Isha Khan Chowdhury said. Continued on Page 2

Top LeT commander among two terrorists killed in Kashmir

MOHIT KANDHARI JAMMU



A top commander of the Resistance Front (TRF), responsible for targeting members of the minority community, police personnel, and others, was killed, along with one accomplice in an overnight encounter with the joint team of security forces in the South Kashmir district of Kulgam on Tuesday. The TRF is an offshoot of Lashkar-e-Taiba. The encounter broke out after the security forces launched a cordon and search operation in Redwani Payeen of Kulgam late on Monday after receiving

inputs about the terrorists. "The operation continued throughout the night and concluded on Tuesday afternoon. Two terrorists were neutralised and their bodies have been retrieved," IG Police, Kashmir Vidhi Kumar Birdi said. "The slain TRF commander has been identified as Basit Dar. He was an A-category terrorist and was involved in

at least 18 cases. He was involved in the planning of conspiracy to attack minorities, police forces, and civilians," Birdi added. The terrorists, according to Birdi, were given ample time and opportunity to surrender. They did not pay any heed to the caution by police and security forces. The terrorists continued firing upon the forces and were killed in the encounter," he said. According to police, the house in which the terrorists were hiding caught fire on Tuesday morning during the exchange of fire between the two sides. Continued on Page 2

Modi, Lalu in tug of war on Muslim quota

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI/PATNA/BHOPAL

After a political slugfest over Constitution, SC/ST & OBC reservations during the campaigning for three phases of the Lok Sabha elections, a row over Muslim reservation has gained momentum ahead of the fourth phase scheduled on May 13. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday hit out at RJD president Lalu Prasad over his statement that he is in favour of extending reservation benefits to Muslims. Modi said the INDIA Bloc wants to snatch all quotas for SC, ST, and OBCs and give them to their 'vote bank' as part of a deeper conspiracy. The PM also asserted that India has reached a turning

point in history, and people have to decide in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections whether 'vote jihad' or 'Ram Rajya' is the way forward for the country. BJP's partner in NDA, the JD(U) slammed Lalu for favouring reservation for Muslims, saying his stand violates the basic spirit of the Constitution as well as the Mandal Commission report. Such a statement is tantamount to a conspiracy against the backwards who get reservation due to their social and educational backwardness, Janata Dal (United) spokesperson K C Tyagi said. Addressing a public rally in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar, the PM said a big alliance partner of the INDIA Bloc has endorsed what he used to say



about their plan to end the reservations for SC, ST and OBCs. "Their leader, who has eaten the animal's fodder and convicted by the court, even by the Supreme Court in the corruption case, is out on bail due to health. The Congress is making him dance on their head. He is saying not only

Muslims should get reservations but all the reservations should be given to Muslims. Means they want all the reservation to Muslims by snatching it from SC, ST and OBC," Modi said. After all, why these people are doing this is because they are counting their remaining breath with the help of this

"very vote bank" as everything else is over and nothing left with them, "one by one all have left and ran away", he said. "I have been saying the same thing about them for the last several days. I was saying that they would cut some part of the reservation and give it on the basis of religion but the conspiracy is deeper...They are saying on the day of voting that they want to give all the reservation of SC, ST and OBC to Muslim community," Modi said. He recalled how the maker of Constitution BR. Ambedkar had opposed religion-based reservation. Lalu alleged that the ruling BJP at the Centre wanted to do away with reservations by scrapping the Constitution. Continued on Page 2





# Yogi: INDIA Bloc is anti Hindu, anti Ram

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a blistering attack on the opposition parties on Tuesday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that the Congress, the Samajwadi Party and the entire "INDI Alliance" are anti-Hindu and anti-Ram. Addressing mediapersons at his official residence before departing for election campaigning, Yogi also criticised the statements made by SP leader Ram Gopal Yadav and RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav. He remarked, "These are the people who open fire at Lord Ram devotees, question the existence of Lord Ram and challenge his divine power. Expecting them to honour India's faith, national heroes, and show reverence for the esteemed freedom fighters who played pivotal roles in our independence struggle is futile." The CM further said that whether it is Congress,



Samajwadi Party, DMK, RJD, or the National Conference, all have opposed the Ram temple in Ayodhya. "They are against Hindus and the Sanatan faith. They are the ones that nurture the policy of appeasement. These supporters of terrorism behave contrary to the ideals of Lord Ram," he stated. "People associated with the Congress and the INDI Alliance have tried from the beginning to stall the verdict

from the honourable court in Ayodhya's Ram Temple case. These people used to act as barriers and create obstacles. When the case went to the Supreme Court, these people ensured that nothing happened for 7-8 years. However, when the NDA government was formed under the leadership of PM Modi at the Centre, and then in Uttar Pradesh, the case was expedited," Yogi said, adding under the leadership of PM Modi, a grand

temple was built in Ayodhya. "Millions of devotees from across the nation and around the globe are reaching there to express their faith and witness the rejuvenated Ayodhya. The members of the Congress-SP and INDI Alliance, however, have consistently aligned themselves with those who oppose Lord Ram," he remarked. In response to the remarks made by Ram Gopal Yadav, Yogi criticised them, stating that they exemplify the true nature of "INDI Alliance". "These individuals not only manipulate India's faith for political gain but also challenge the divine authority of Lord Ram. History attests that those who have dared to challenge divine authority have met with adversity," he noted. He further said that the opposition's statement amounts to disrespecting the Sanatan faith and insulting crores of Ram devotees.

# SC stays court order on school jobs termination in West Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In a timely relief for the Trinamool Congress Government the Supreme Court on Wednesday stayed the April 21 Calcutta High Court order terminating the jobs of 25,753 school teachers and non-teaching staff and restrained the Central Bureau of Investigation from taking any coercive measure against the Mamata Banerjee Cabinet but not before lambasting the State for perpetrating a "systematic fraud" in conducting the recruitment process in 2016. Saying that the recruitment authorities were duty-bound to maintain digitised records related to the appointment of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff the Bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra delivered an interim order staying the Calcutta High Court verdict terminating about 26,000 jobs. The Court also set aside the



High Court order directing the terminated employees who had secured their employment by adopting unfair means to return the entire salary they had drawn since the date of joining with 12 percent interest. Insofar as the State Cabinet is concerned the High Court had directed the CBI to bring its members under investigation and do so by taking the suspects in custody if required. The Apex Court put a stay on that order too. The Supreme Court however allowed the CBI to continue its investigation into the Bengal teacher

recruitment scam case. The case would be heard post summer vacation on July 16 post, sources in the bar said. The case arose out of the "school jobs for cash scam" and had besides seeing a number of TMC ministers and MLAs going to jail put the entire party on a sticky wicket in the election year. While the sacked teachers heaved a sigh of relief with many of them saying, "this order will for the time restore not only our lost honour but also give a relief financially," asking, "why we who had taken our exams cleanly should suffer for the crime committed by unscrupulous people." Bengal Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya on other hand said that "truth finally prevails and it has finally prevailed... the hawks that were making merry by eating away the jobs of common people have been exposed now." However, Calcutta High Court advocate Srinjay Sengupta said, "it is just a stay and not the final verdict... even the School Servicer Commission has conceded to the fact that there has been large-scale corruption in the recruitment process... both the High Court and the Supreme Court have seen that prima facie... no one wants the jobs of the honest candidates to go but it the dishonest appointees have to be found out in the larger public and students' interest and the interest of those candidates who had appeared in the exams, got empanelled but were not considered because those who purchased the jobs by greasing the palms of the people in power by-passed them."

# Three independent MLAs quit BJP Government in Haryana

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

In a setback to the ruling BJP in Haryana amid the Lok Sabha elections, three independent MLAs on Tuesday announced that they have withdrawn their support to the Nayab Singh Saini-led government in the state. The three MLAs — Sombir Sangwan, Randhir Gollen and Dharampal Gonder — also said that they have decided to extend support to the Congress during the elections. They made the announcement at a press conference held in Rohtak in presence of former Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda and State Congress chief Udai Bhan. "We are withdrawing support to the government. We are extending our support to the Congress. We have taken this decision on various issues including those related to farmers," he said. Udai Bhan said, "The three independent MLAs — Sombir Sangwan, Randhir Singh Gollen and Dharampal Gonder -- have withdrawn their sup-



port to the BJP government and extended their support to the Congress." "I also want to say that present strength of (90-member) Haryana Assembly is 88, of which the BJP has 40 members. The BJP government earlier had support of JJP MLAs and Independents, but JJP had also withdrawn support and now Independents are also leaving. Nayab Singh Saini government is now a minority government. Saini should tender his resignation as he does not have right to stay even for a minute," said Bhan demanding immediate assembly polls.

After 10 MLAs of its partner JJP withdrew support couple of months ago, the independents had backed BJP and the Saini won the trust motion. In the 90-member Haryana assembly when elected, BJP won 41 MLAs, Congress 30, JJP 10 while seven Independents and one MLA each from the INLD and HLP. Former chief minister and senior Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda said the State government has lost the moral right to be in power and it should resign and President's Rule should be imposed in the State.

# Patna one of most severely flood hit parts of India: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In the context of flood vulnerability, Patna in Bihar stands out as one of the most severely affected districts in India, according to a joint recent research by IIT-Delhi and IIT-Roorkee. West Bengal's Murshidabad and Maharashtra's Thane ranks second and third respectively, according to a district-level flood severity index (DFS) developed by researchers at IIT-Delhi and IIT-Roorkee. The index takes into account the historical severity of floods based on the number of affected people, the spread and duration of floods. The researchers said the top 10 districts where flood severity is the highest are: Patna, Murshidabad, Thane, North 24 Parganas (West Bengal), Guntur (Andhra Pradesh), Nagpur (Maharashtra), Gorakhpur (Uttar Pradesh), Ballia (Uttar Pradesh), East Champaran (Bihar), and East Medinipur (West Bengal). These are followed by Muzaffarnagar (Bihar),

Lakhimpur (Assam), Kota (Rajasthan), Aurangabad (Maharashtra), Malda (West Bengal), Rajkot (Gujarat), Prayagraj (Uttar Pradesh), Aurangabad (Bihar), Bahraich (Uttar Pradesh), Ahmedabad (Gujarat), Jalpaiguri (West Bengal), Darjeeling (West Bengal), Dibrugarh (Assam), Azamgarh (Uttar Pradesh), Chamoli (Uttarakhand), West Champaran (Bihar), Amravati (Maharashtra), Medinipur (West Bengal), and Samastipur (Bihar). Though Chamoli in Uttarakhand does not face recurrent floods, it appears on this list because of a few isolated highly damaging flood events. Among the 30 districts facing the highest risk of floods, 17 are in the Ganga basin and three are in the Brahmaputra basin. Among all the Indian river basins, the Ganga basin has the highest population, and its high flood proneness is worrisome, said the researchers, including Manabendra Saharia, an assistant professor at IIT-Delhi. Assam experiences the highest

number of floods in India, having faced more than 800 flood events over 56 years. The other flood-prone states, in descending order of flood events, include Kerala, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra. Data from 1967 to 2023 shows that Thiruvananthapuram has experienced more than 231 floods or more than four events per year on average. Five districts -- Thiruvananthapuram, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Kamrup, and Nagaon -- have been categorised as "severely flood-prone," having recorded more than 178 floods, or more than three events per year on average. The researchers said localised intense rainfall events are likely to rise in the future due to climate change, and therefore, more flash floods are expected. Under the warming climate, the frequency of cyclones will increase, and coastal and near-by inland areas will face more instances of intense rainfall and floods. It is also likely that areas that are not currently flood-prone may begin to see flooding.

# Defer scheme payments till LS polls, EC tells Telangana Government

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday directed the Telangana government to defer payments under the Rythu Bharosa scheme till Lok Sabha polls are held in the state on May 13, saying Chief Minister Revanth Reddy violated the model code of conduct by referring to the payouts in his public speeches. In a letter to the Telangana Chief Electoral Officer, the Commission said Reddy had violated the model code of conduct by publicly speaking about the ensuing disbursement under the scheme on or before May 9. Elections to all 17 Lok Sabha seats in Telangana will be held in the fourth phase on May 13. "In the above premise and clear violation of Model Code of Conduct by Revanth Reddy, President Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee and star campaigner and Chief Minister, the Commission has directed that disbursement of balance instalment under the

Rythu Bharosa scheme for Rabi season of 2023 will be effected only after completion of poll in the state of Telangana on 13.05.2024," the Commission said. It also expressed concern over attempts to politicise the ongoing scheme during the elections and held that such actions were deemed as attempts to influence voters and disturb the level playing field. The commission noted that similar directives were issued for the Rayathu Bandhu scheme during the Telangana assembly elections in 2023 on the condition that no new beneficiaries will be added to the scheme and the disbursement of instalments will be done without any publicity. The commission had asked the Telangana government to make payments through bank transfers and that no public function or political functionary will be involved in the process. The scheme has been renamed as Rythu Bharosa by the Congress government in Telangana.

# Modi, Lalu in tug of...

From Page 1

"The BJP is against the provision of reservations made in the Constitution. Hence, it wants to do away with both", Lalu told reporters at the legislative council premises. The ailing septuagenarian, who nowadays prefers to stay indoors, is attending a swearing-in ceremony where his wife Rabri Devi took oath as an MLC. On BJP's charge that if voted to power, the Congress, RJD and other allies would "steal" reservations meant for OBCs and divert these to Muslims, Lalu said, "But should not Muslims get the benefit of reservations? (Aarakshan to milna hi chahiye Musalmanon ko)". He also said the BJP is indulging in scaremongering (bhadka rahe hain) by raising the bogey of "jungle raj" at election rallies. Addressing an election rally in Madhya Pradesh's Khargone district, Modi hit out at the Opposition Congress, saying its intent is very dangerous and alleged it calls for "vote jihad" were directed against him. Speaking at a poll rally a week ago, Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Maria Alam, the niece of Congress leader Salman Khurshid, called for "vote jihad" in favour of Naval Kishore Shukya, the INDIA Bloc candidate from the Farrukhabad Lok Sabha seat of Uttar Pradesh. The SP is an ally of the Congress and a key constituent of the Opposition INDIA Bloc.

# Take action against anonymous political hoardings: EC to Delhi CEO

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission has reminded the Delhi Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) P Krishnamurthy to take action against anonymous political hoardings in the national capital on Tuesday amid the poll authority receiving complaints, including those by the Congress. In a letter to the CEO of Delhi, the EC said, "We have been receiving representations from various stakeholders, including political parties, regarding anonymous election hoardings at authorised and unauthorised sites in the

national capital." Anonymous political or election hoardings or advertisements are those which do not bear their face the names and addresses of the printer and the publisher, which is a violation of the electoral laws and the provisions of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). Section 127A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, unequivocally prohibits the printing or publishing of election pamphlets, posters, placards, or banners without prominently displaying the name and address of the printer and publisher.

# Two terrorists...

From Page 1

The ongoing searches have been going on across five district headquarters of Rajouri, Poonch, Doda, Udhampur and Kathua to ascertain the whereabouts of two active groups of foreign terrorists hiding in the area. A member of the Village Defence Guard (VDG) was killed in a brief firefight with the terrorists in the Basantgarh area of Udhampur on April 28. The security forces have relied on aerial surveillance to maintain a tight vigil besides using sniffer dogs and foot soldiers to track down their footprints. So far no contact was established with the hiding group of terrorists. The security forces have questioned several residents and also detained a few underground workers to ascertain the coordinates of the terrorists hiding in the upper reaches taking advantage of the natural cave-like structures and thick foliage. Police have also put posters of two suspected terrorists offering a cash reward of Rs 20 lakh for any information leading to their arrest.

peacefully in the district and the effort was to a higher polling percentage than in the last election." In Budaun, residents of Dhoranpur village boycotted the polling for the first three hours, saying politicians had ignored their demand for a road. A sub-divisional magistrate reached the village and persuaded the local people to vote. BJP leader Prem Shankar Shakya alleged that some unidentified persons hurled stones at his vehicle in Mainpuri's Kusmara area when he was going to vote along with the party's former district unit chief Pradeep Chauhan and others. He claimed that his driver was injured in the attack. Superintendent of Police, Vinod Kumar said that action will be taken after a complaint is received. Samajwadi Party's Budaun candidate Aditya Yadav alleged that the local administration was not allowing party supporters to vote at various booths in Ujhani Sahaswan.

# Maharashtra

From Page 1

State political circles is that Baramati recorded as low a polling percentage of 45.68 till 5 pm. Even if Baramati records an additional 10 per cent voting in the last hour of polling, the final polling will be around 56 per cent, which is far lower than the final polling percentage of 61.82 recorded in 2019 in the home turf of Pawars. It is difficult to hazard a guess on what impact the low polling percentage will have on the results in the Baramati constituency where a bitter electoral battle is being waged between prominent members of the Pawar family — Sharad Pawar's daughter and three-time MP Supriya Sule and his estranged nephew and deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra Pawar. In Kolhapur and Satara where two scions of iconic Maratha warrior Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj -- Shrimant Chhatrapati

Shahu Maharaj and Shrimant Chhatrapati Udayanraje Bhosale -are trying their luck in Kolhapur and Satara constituencies respectively, the polling percentages at 5 pm were 63.71 and 54.11 respectively. In Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg where senior BJP leader, former Chief Minister and current Union Minister Narayan Rane is seeking election to the Lok Sabha for the first time, 53.75 per cent of votes turned out to vote. In Solapur where veteran Congress leader and former Union Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde's daughter Praniti Shinde (Solapur) is contesting, the voter turnout was a relatively low 49.11 at 5 pm. In Osmanabad (now known as Dharashiv) where sitting MP Omraje Nimbalkar of the Shiv Sena (UBT) is contesting against his own sister-in-law sister in law Archana Patil of the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, the polling percentage was 52.78

per cent at 5 pm. In Madha from where Sharad Pawar had been elected to Lok Sabha in 2009 polls, sitting BJP MP is taking on Dhairyashel Mohite-Patil of the NCP (Sharad Pawar). Here, 50 per cent of total voters turned out to exercise their rights. In Latur (SC) where sitting BJP MP Sudhakar Shringare (BJP) is taking on a rank new comer Dr Shivaji Kalge of the Congress, the polling percentage was 55.18. In Sangli where sitting BJP MP Sanjay Patil is pitted against Chandraraj Patil (SS-UBT) and a formidable Independent candidate Vishal Prakashbapu Patil, 52.56 per cent of the electorate voted till 5 pm. In Hatkanangle where a three-cornered contest is being witnessed among the Dhairyashil Mane of the Shinde-Sena, Raju Shetti of the Swabhimani Paksha and Satyajit Patil of the Shiv Sena (UBT), the polling percentage was 62.18.

# Will Kejriwal Be Able To Campaign...

From Page 1

Releasing him because he is a politician is not a correct precedent, the SG insisted. "He chose to be a Chief Minister without a portfolio and it is done to accommodate some people. If bail is allowed, won't this be irreversible if the plea is allowed," the SG asked. The SG said letting out Kejriwal citing elections will set a bad precedent and others will seek similar exemptions. "The court is allowing the doors of contingencies just to let out this one person and the public prosecutor will not be able to argue even if a kirana owner comes. I know these are inconvenient arguments," he said. However, the court said it is not creating any special exemption for politicians but is only passing the order taking into account the fact that the general elections are due. "We are not going by whether he is a politician or not a politician. Every individual involved will have a special

# Uttar Pradesh

From Page 1

Yadav, Dimple Yadav, their daughter Aditi Yadav, Ramgopal Yadav, Dharmendra Yadav and other family members cast their votes in Etawah's Saifai. BJP candidates S P Singh Baghel and Parmeshwar Lal Saini cast their votes in Agra and Sambhal, respectively. Speaking to reporters after casting his vote, Ramgopal Yadav exuded confidence that Dimple Yadav would win the Lok Sabha polls with a greater margin compared to the bypolls. A group of Muslim women near a polling station in Budaun's Sahaswan Assembly segment alleged that they were being stopped from casting their vote. They also alleged that the men accompanying them were beaten by police. District Magistrate Manoj Kumar refuted the charges, saying the people who had already cast their votes were gathering unnecessarily and police had to move them away to maintain law and order. He said, "Voting is going on

# West Bengal

From Page 1

All this even as the four constituencies witnessed a comparatively low polling at about 74 per cent when reports last came in at 5 pm. The polling percentage was likely to go up by a few percentage points as many people were still standing in queues. Amid the stray and sporadic violence and sloganeering, singer Arijit Singh rode a scooter to his polling booth at Jiaganj in Jangipur constituency where he and his wife cast their votes. Jangipur stood out also on account of the instance put by Madhabi Lata Sil a 110-year-old woman who walked up to the booth to exercise her voting rights. "Radha Gobinda (God) has kept me alive to do some works and I think voting is also one of them... so I have come to vote though it is very difficult for me to walk off do my works on my own," she said, adding she would continue to vote as long as she would be able to do so.



# BJP members deployed in war room working overtime ahead of LS polls

STAFF REPORTERS ■ NEW DELHI

Party workers deployed in the war rooms of the BJP's State unit are working overtime to gather information and disseminate messages to the target audience in anticipation of the Lok Sabha polls slated to be held in the national capital on May 25.

With a little over two weeks to go for Lok Sabha polls in Delhi, those in the war rooms of the BJP's state unit are working hard to secure a win in each of the seven Lok Sabha constituencies in Delhi. The war room has been set up in all the parliamentary constituencies which operates in two shifts manned by around eight people.

The centres start operations at 10 am every day to ensure timely execution of scheduled plans and programmes of the party, said a BJP leader involved in the activities. "In fact, these war rooms-cum-call centres were fully operational since September last year but now they are running at full steam with an enhanced need for dissemination of messages among party leaders and workers as well as gathering feedback from the pub-



lic," said the BJP leader. The basic work of these war rooms involves gathering feedback from voters, and circulating messages related to the BJP leaders' programmes and other information, he said.

"Preparations related to polling at the booth level and taking stock of preparations for the different stages of elections are also carried out through these centres," he said, adding that these war rooms also send out messages to party leaders and workers. "We are sometimes tasked with reaching out to specified groups of workers to pass on information meant for

them," said a member of one of the war rooms in Delhi. The saffron party won all seven seats with huge margins in the 2014 and 2019 parliamentary polls. The party is pitted against the opposition INDIA bloc partners AAP and Congress, contesting on four and three seats, respectively. Similar arrangements have also been made in all the Lok Sabha constituencies in the country where around 30,000 personnel are deputed to run the centres, which are run according to the instructions and guidelines laid down by senior national and state leadership.

# BJP's Manoj Tiwari richest LS poll contender in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

BJP's Manoj Tiwari (53) is the richest among the prominent Lok Sabha poll candidates in Delhi with assets worth Rs 28.05 crore. Ramvir Singh Bidhuri (71), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate from South Delhi, is on the second spot with assets worth Rs 21.08 crore. According to his income-tax returns for 2022-23, Bidhuri has an annual income of Rs 14.93 lakh.

The third-richest among the poll contenders is Mahabal Mishra (69), the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate from West Delhi. He has declared assets worth Rs 19.93 crore. Mishra's highest qualification is pre-university certificate from the LS College in Bihar's Muzaffarpur that he obtained in 1971.

Oxford University-returned lawyer Bansuri Swaraj (40), daughter of former external affairs minister late Sushma Swaraj, with assets worth Rs 19 crore, occupies the fourth spot, followed by former AAP leader Raj Kumar Anand, who is now with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). Anand owns assets worth Rs 17.87 crore. Swaraj, who is making her poll debut from the New Delhi seat, owns two vehicles, including a high-end Mercedes Benz car bought in 2023, according



to her self-sworn affidavit. She possesses one-sixth of a joint property in Haryana's Palwal valued at Rs 99.34 lakh and three flats in posh areas of Delhi -- two at Jantar Mantar and one at Hailey Road. In her election affidavit, Swaraj has revealed her income at Rs 68.28 lakh, as mentioned in her income-tax returns filed for 2022-23. Swaraj earned her Barrister-at-Law degree from Inns of Inner Temple, London in 2007 and completed Master of Studies from St Catherine's College, University of Oxford in 2009. Tiwari, who is contesting the election from North East Delhi for the third time in a row, declared his income at Rs 46.25 lakh in his income-tax returns filed for 2022-23. He stated that his sources of income are

singing and acting, and as a member of Parliament. The Bhojpur singer-cum-actor completed BA (Honours) from the Banaras Hindu University (BHU), from where he also secured a master's degree in physical education in 1994. Anand is the BSP candidate from the high-profile New Delhi seat. He has declared in his poll affidavit that he has vehicles worth Rs 51 lakh, including that of his wife. Congress's Kanhaiya Kumar from North East Delhi has assets worth Rs 10.65 lakh. He holds a PhD that he completed in 2019 from the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). BJP's Kamaljeet Sehrawat from the West Delhi seat has declared movable assets worth Rs 1.3 crore and immovable assets worth Rs 27.6 lakh. She

holds a master's degree in commerce from the Himachal Pradesh University in Shimla. Praveen Khandelwal (64), the BJP's Chandni Chowk candidate, has declared assets worth Rs 6.62 crore. According to his income-tax returns for 2022-23, he had an income of Rs 4.56 lakh. He completed his graduation from the DU's Hansraj College in 1964. J P Agarwal (79), the veteran Congress leader fielded from Chandni Chowk, has movable assets worth Rs 76.98 lakh and immovable assets worth Rs 1.78 crore. He completed his graduation from the DU's Hansraj College in 1964. Harsh Malhotra, 60, has stated in his affidavit that he holds assets worth Rs 3.75 crore and his source of income is printing business. The BJP candidate from East Delhi is a law graduate from the DU. Sahi Ram, 63, is the MLA from Tughlaqabad. He has declared in his affidavit that his main source of income is his salary and allowances as an MLA, interest from a savings bank account and rent. According to his affidavit, Ram owns movable assets of Rs 34.8 lakh and immovable assets worth Rs 1.04 crore. Yogender Chandoliya, the BJP's North West Delhi candidate, graduated in political science and history from the Subharti University in Meerut in 2022, according to his election affidavit. The 61-year-old has shown an income of Rs 3.83 lakh in his income-tax returns for 2022-23. His movable assets are worth Rs 29.31 lakh and those of his wife are valued at Rs 31.92 lakh.

# Business establishments directed to allow paid leave for employees on poll day

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has instructed all business establishments, including shops, hotels, restaurants, trade and industrial units to allow paid holiday to their employees going to cast their votes in the Lok Sabha polls in the city on May 25.

The Delhi government's Labour department in an order issued on Monday said that Section 135B of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 provides that every person employed in any business, trade, industrial undertaking or any other establishment and entitled to vote in an election of the Lok Sabha or Vidhan Sabha will be granted holiday on the day of voting. "No deduction or abatement of the wages of any such person shall be made on account of a holiday having been granted in accordance with sub-section (1) and if such person is employed on the basis that they would not ordinarily receive wages for such a day, they would have drawn had not a holiday been granted to them on that day," said the order.

The daily wage (casual) workers are also entitled for a holiday and wages on the poll day.



All business establishments, including shops, hotels, restaurants, trade and industrial establishment that fall under the Delhi Shops and Establishment Act, 1954 and all factories covered under the Factories Act, 1948, will observe poll day (May 25) as a paid holiday, it said.

If an employer contravenes the provisions of sub-section (1) or sub-section (2) of the Act, then they will be punishable with fine, which may extend to five hundred rupees, said the order.

Section 135 B of the Representation of the People Act will not apply to any voter employee whose absence from duty may cause danger or substantial loss in respect of the employment in which he is engaged, it added. Voting on seven Lok Sabha constituencies in Delhi will be held on May 25. There are a total of 1.52 crore electors in Delhi.

# AAP modified its poll campaign song, says CEO Krishnamurthy

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Electoral Officer P Krishnamurthy on Tuesday clarified that the AAP had in fact modified its song including the removal of the video, which was one of the main objections put forward by the poll body. He was responding to a query on the AAP leader who claimed to secure a moral victory by getting its campaign song 'Jail ke jawab mein hum vote denge' without any modification.

"On May 2, we received a letter of approval for our campaign song without any changes. We have started using the song. In our point-by-point rebuttal, we had objected to all issues raised by the ECI and did not accept any of their recommendations or change any word in our campaign song. We did not surrender to the tanashahi of the EC. We did not bow down to the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) intentions. The result was the truth won, democracy was saved and the BJP lost," claimed song-writer and AAP Timarpur MLA Dilip Pandey.

While answering questions put forward by the media on the claims of AAP getting its campaign songs without modified and the BJP calling it a 'lie', the Delhi CEO said that as far as he knows the song has been modified. "While there is a separate body that



oversees such matters, from what I know they had removed the video of the song, which was one of the main problems with its campaign song 'Jail ke jawab mein hum vote denge' and made other modifications in their songs as per they were asked." The Election Commission on May 27 raised eight objections to various lines and phrases in AAP's campaign song while stating that it violated various provisions of the Advertising Codes and ECI guidelines. The phrase 'jail ke jawab mein hum vote denge' made to the top of the list while the election body objected to its video.

It alleged that an aggressive mob holding the photo of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, showing him behind bars, cast doubts on the judicial system.

Further it objected to the phrases 'tanashahi party ko hum chot denge' and 'goondagardi ke khilaf hum vote denge'. The Delhi chief elec-

toral officer had said that these phrases, along with a clip showing Manish Sisodia being escorted by the police, "tends to present the picture of police in bad taste".

The Delhi Chief Electoral Officer said that lines 'Awazein khilaf thi jo sabko jail mein daal dia, bas unko hi bahar rakha jisme unko maal dia/ itna lalach, itna nafrat, bhrastrachari se mohabbat' are slanderous and criticised the ruling party on the basis of unverified facts.

"Tanashahi party ko hum chot denge with clip showing aggressive mob clashing with police shows criticism of the ruling party on the basis of unverified facts," the state election commission said, while citing Rule-6, Programme Code (1) and Rule 7 (2) (iii).

It also quoted para 2.4 (d) of Part B of the ECI guidelines, which says "incitement of violence" shall not be permitted while certifying political advertisements. It cited ECI guidelines' Para 2.5 (d) which "bars criticism of other parties or their workers on behalf of unverified allegations or on distortions".

Following this, the Election Commission asked the AAP to "modify the contents of the creative as per the Advertising Codes prescribed under the Cable Television Network Rules, 1994 and the ECI guidelines/ norms".

# EC to improve voting booth facilities in face of heatwave

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to beat low voter turnout on the polling day on May 25 due to heatwave which will be more intense than usual in the national Capital, the Election Commission has decided to improve the facilities at the 13,641 polling booths in Delhi for making the voting process more comfortable for the voters.

This included facilities such as arrangement of shades and coolers being set up by the electoral body.

Delhi Chief Election Officer P Krishnamurthy informed that a high level meeting took place between the Commission and other stakeholders such as the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) and Delhi Jal Board (DJB) keeping in mind that the heatwaves on the day of polling will be more intense than usual.

"The heatwave is expected to be more intense than usual in Delhi. To ensure that there are ample facilities for the voters and this doesn't affect the voter turnout, we had a meeting with all the stakeholders including MCD, NDMC, Delhi Jal Board, and the health department. Coolers and mist fans will be set up in waiting areas. Cold drinking water will be

## Electoral roll data

Male	8212794
Female	6987914
Third Gender	1228
Total Electors	15201936
First Time Voters	252083
Senior Citizens (85+ yrs)	97823
PwD Electors	77480

made available at the polling stations. Delhi Jal Board tankers will be stationed at MCD zonal offices," Delhi CEO P Krishnamurthy said, adding that paramedics with basic medical kit, which includes will also be present so if any situation arises, we can give them medical assistance immediately.

In a first, there will be at least one polling booth managed by people with disabilities in each of the seven parliamentary constituencies.

Further, there will be a total of 70 pink polling booths, handled by women, located at each of the ten assembly constituencies.

There are a total of 15,201,936 voters in Delhi. Briefing the press, he also said that the number of male, female and transgender voters have also seen a rise.

While in 2019 the total number of male was 78,73,022, in 2024 it stands at 82,12,794. From 64,42,762 in 2019, the total number of women stands at 69,87,914. If we look at the transgender population in Delhi, the number has almost doubled with the number reaching to 1,228 in 2024 from 669 in 2019. There are a total of 2,52,038 first time voters, he said.

With the gender ratio in the national capital improving from 818 women per 1,000 men to 851, the Delhi CEO added, this means that there will be more participation of women in the elections this time. As many as 13,637 main polling booths are set up with four auxiliary booths being made. An auxiliary booth is set up when the voter limit for the main booth, which is 1,800 exceeds.

# AAP leader Bharadwaj highlights increasing crime rate in Capital

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Senior AAP Leader and SCabinet Minister, Saurabh Bharadwaj, highlighted the ever-increasing crime rate in Delhi. The AAP leader pointed towards the inefficiency of Lieutenant Governor (LG) Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena, in handling Delhi's law and order. Bharadwaj drew attention to concerning data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), revealing Delhi's unfortunate distinction as the highest crime-rate city in the nation, coupled with a dismal rate of charge sheets. Expressing dismay at the surge in daylight criminal activities, including heinous murders and shootings, the Delhi Minister demanded accountability from the LG.

He accused Saxena of mismanaging the Delhi Police and impeding the efforts of the elected government. Bharadwaj also condemned the removal of safety measures for women, such as bus marshals and helpline services.

Speaking on the issue of increasing crime rates in National Capital, Bharadwaj cited examples of serious crime including a daylight murder in Jafrabad in front of public and



a fatal altercation in one of Delhi's VIP area RK Puram involving a Seema Suraksha Bal (SSB) constable. He regretted the low rate of charge sheets, which he argued undermines justice and emboldens criminals. According to Bharadwaj, Delhi's crime epidemic is a direct consequence of Saxena's failure to effectively oversee key departments, including the Delhi Police and Delhi Development Authority (DDA). He also criticised the significant increase in police vacancies since 2014 and the reduction in the police budget. He said that the disproportionately high rate of crimes against women in Delhi, emphasising the need for urgent action to address the issue. He condemned Saxena's

decision to remove bus marshals and dismantle the helpline service, which he believes has worsened the situation. Bharadwaj alleged the Delhi police for corruption and said that corruption in the police department of Delhi has increased significantly in the last two years. He further said that LG is pointing fingers at the elected government, but his own departments are getting worse day by day. He called on Saxena to prioritise his responsibilities and refrain from interfering in the work of the elected government. He urged Saxena to focus on improving his own departments and allow the Delhi government to fulfill its mandate effectively.

# India seen globally as not just friendly, but also firm, fiery: EAM

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday affirmed that India in today's day and age is not only seen across the globe as friendly but also as a "firm" and "fiery" nation that cares for its people and fends for them in crisis situations while speaking on the topic "Viksit Bharat @2047-The Voice of the Youth" at an event at Delhi University's Hansraj college. The Minister was referring to the rescue operations run by India to bring back its citizens from war-torn countries such as Ukraine. He said that the world is closely watching India as it is moving away from the shackles of the past and making strides to become the world's third largest economy.

"Right now, we are a little less than a four-trillion dollar economy. Soon we will become the third largest economy when we reach five trillion dollars. By the time we reach 'Amrit Kaal', I am confident we will build a 30-trillion dollar economy," he asserted, adding that the country has made an impressive growth in the last couple of



years and this has been acknowledged and recognised by world leaders.

"Today we are respected because of our economic performance. India's talent is present in all sectors of the world," Jaishankar said. He added that the world is watching India to see how it will grow further. Asserting that "Viksit Bharat" is not a mere slogan to motivate the people, he said that it is the foundation built in the last 10 years upon which the future of India's next 25 years will be built.

"The next 25 years of the 'Amrit Kaal' are your future. It is the journey towards 'Viksit Bharat', and it is you who will make this journey possible," he said while addressing the college students. The external affairs minister

said that he sees these 25 years as "a period of opportunity and new challenge".

"This change is of the kind that we have never seen before," Jaishankar said while highlighting the developments that have taken place in the economy and the technology sector, and in India's position in the global forum. Referring to India's management of the COVID-19 pandemic, which he termed as "once in a century challenge", Jaishankar said India outshined the world's expectations. "When the Covid outbreak happened and world leaders met to find a way forward, they thought India would not be able to handle the situation. They had good reasons to be worried about. But the same country ended up supplying about 100 countries with vaccines," he said. He lauded the "Digital India" initiative and said that the country was among the few which provided digital vaccination certificates. The former diplomat also said that India is growing as a digital economy with cashless transactions of 12 billion per month, higher than America where four billion such transactions take place in a year.

# Want to do politics of development, not of caste: BJP Gurugram LS pick



PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

BJP candidate from Gurgaon Lok Sabha Rao Inderjit Singh said that he wants to do politics of development in Mewat and not of caste. He was addressing the Vijay Sankalp rally along with former Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar at Firozpur Jhirka on Tuesday. He said that the BJP government has implemented many schemes including bringing drinking water and irrigation work as a backward district by the Central Government. The BJP candidate said that rapid development work has taken place in the Mewat region in the last 10 years. "If the people of Mewat support me, there will be more

development work done in the next 5 years. My victory is certain due to the immense love I am getting from the public, but this time I wish that the people of Mewat should also rise above caste and support me," Rao Inderjit Singh said. Referring to Veer Hasan Khan Mewati, former Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar said that the people of Mewat are patriotic. Unfortunately, the opposition kept this community away from development by misleading them. But now the people of Mewat have woken up and will not be misled by anyone. Therefore, I would request you to once again cooperate in forming the government under the leadership of Narendra Modi by voting 100% in favour of Rao Inderjit Singh.



# Shekhar Suman, Radhika Kheda join BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a boost to the BJP on the day of the third phase of polling for the Lok Sabha polls, actor and TV personality Shekhar Suman, who recently garnered attention for his role in Netflix's Heeramandi, joined the BJP at the party headquarters in Delhi, adding to the list of other actors including Kangana Ranaut, Arun Govil and Rupali Ganguly, who joined the saffron camp amid the elections. Former Congress National Media Coordinator Radhika Kheda also joined the BJP a day after she resigned from the Congress.

Addressing the media in the presence of senior BJP leaders, including National General Secretary Vinod Tawde and National Media Department In-Charge Anil Baluni, at the party headquarters on Tuesday, Suman said, "Till yesterday, I did not know that I would be sitting here today because many things in life happen knowingly or unknowingly. I have come here with a very positive thinking and I would like to thank God that he ordered me to come here." The actor said he was waiting for Heeramandi to get hit before joining the party. "Log



kahi ye na kahe ki mere paas karne ko kuch nahi tha, isleye politics join ki. Heeramandi has now become a global hit," said the comedian-actor. He said that its probably god's wish behind him joining politics. "Hoiye vahi jo ram rach rakha" said Shekhar Suman quoting Ram Charitmanas. "Till yesterday I did not know that I would be sitting here today because many things in life happen knowingly or unknowingly. I have come here with a very positive think-

ing and I would like to thank God that he ordered me to come here..." added Suman. "You have to follow what Lord Ram has thought. I don't have any negative thoughts, I am thinking only about the country. A man depends on his words but they have no meaning beyond a point. But there is a difference between saying something and doing it. I can give a long address but it will mean anything only after I have done something," the actor added, and thanked

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP chief JP Nadda, among others.

Suman is currently enjoying the success of his recently released web series, Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar. Sanjay Leela Bhansali's show premiered on Netflix earlier this month and also stars Manisha Koirala, Sonakshi Sinha, Richa Chadda, Sanjeeda Shaikh, Aditi Rao Hydari, Sharmin Segal Mehta, Farida Jalal, Fardeen Khan and Adhyayan Suman in key roles. It explores the various aspects of a woman's trials and tribulations.

Before joining the BJP, Radhika Kheda made sensational allegations against Chhattisgarh Congress media chairman Sushil Anand Shukla. The former Congress national media coordinator claimed during her detailed press conference that on April 30, Chhattisgarh Congress media chief Sushil Anand Shukla started misbehaving with and abusing her when he went to talk to him. Radhika Kheda further alleged that the room remained locked for around a minute and she was abused. She all the three men came towards her and no one opened the door even as she kept screaming.

# EC directs X to take down Karnataka BJP video on quota row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Election Commission(EC) on Tuesday directed social media platform "X" to "immediately" take down an animated video shared by the Karnataka unit of the BJP related to the row over reservation for the Muslim community. In a letter to the nodal officer of 'X', the EC took exception to the non-compliance of the directive of the Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer to the social media platform for taking down the video.

The panel said the animated video shared by the Karnataka unit of the BJP on its social media handle was violative of the extant legal framework. The EC said the Chief Electoral Officer of Karnataka registered an FIR in this connection and wrote to 'X' on May 5 to take down the objectionable post as per the provisions of the Information Technology Act and the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021.

"However, the post has not been taken down yet.

Therefore, 'X' is directed to take down the post immediately," the EC said.

The fresh directive to 'X' came on the day votes were being cast in the remaining 14 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka. Polling in the other 14 parliamentary constituencies of Karnataka was held on April 26.

The Karnataka Congress had filed a complaint with the Chief Electoral Officer of the state, accusing the BJP of promoting enmity and hatred between the Muslim and the SC/ST communities.

The complaint pertains to an animated video shared by the Karnataka BJP, which has caricatures of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. The cartoon shows the leaders putting an egg marked 'Muslim' on a bird's nest and after it hatches, Rahul Gandhi feeds 'funds' to the 'Muslim' hatchling while others strive for it. The 'Muslim' hatchling grows as a result and kicks the three others - SC, ST and OBC - out as Gandhi and Siddaramaiah laugh.

# Kharge writes to INDIA Bloc leaders to raise voice over discrepancies in voting data

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge wrote to the leaders of various parties of the INDIA Opposition Bloc on Tuesday, questioning the alleged discrepancies in the voting data released by the Election Commission (EC).

In his letter, Kharge urged the INDIA Bloc leaders to raise their voice against such discrepancies, for "our only objective is to protect the culture of a vibrant democracy and the Constitution." "Let us ensure the independence of the Election Commission of India and make it accountable," he said in his letter.

"As the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), it should be our collective endeavour to safeguard democracy and protect the independent functioning of the ECI. All the aforementioned facts force us to ask a question -- could this be an attempt to doctor the final results?" he asked. "We all know how Prime



Minister (Narendra) Modi and the BJP are visibly flustered and frustrated by the voting trends and their receding electoral fortunes in the first two phases. The entire nation knows that an autocratic regime, drunk with power, can go to any extent to stay in the chair," Kharge said.

"I would urge all of you that we must collectively, unitedly and unequivocally raise our voice against such discrepancies, for our only objective is to protect the culture of a vibrant democracy and the Constitution," he added. Several opposition parties have raised questions on the delay in releasing the polling data by the EC.

# Defence Secretary lauds BRO for playing major role in security of country

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane here on Tuesday lauded the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and termed it an extremely crucial organisation which, through its infrastructure projects in border areas, is playing a major role in the security of the country. The BRO is also ensuring the socio-economic progress of far-flung areas, he said.

He made these observations on the occasion of the 65th Raising Day of the BRO. In his address, the Defence Secretary praised the BRO for fulfilling its responsibilities successfully in inhospitable terrain and tough weather conditions. Aramane commended the

BRO for completing the projects in a time-bound manner, exuding confidence that the Karmayogis will continue to ensure border infrastructure development in a record time. He urged the BRO to infuse latest technology and techniques for faster completion of projects, through which human efforts will be reduced and utilised more efficiently. Automation and mechanisation will be key for the BRO in the future, he said.

The Defence Secretary also recalled the valuable contribution of the BRO personnel in the relief and rescue efforts during the Silkyara Tunnel Collapse and the Sikkim Floods. He added that the Organisation will play an important role in the Vibrant Villages Programme which

envisages comprehensive development of select border villages.

Speaking on the occasion, Director General, Border Roads Lt General Raghu Srinivasan stated that the pan-India presence of the BRO reflects its commitment to national security, connectivity and development.

The event also witnessed the unveiling of a compendium on Sela Tunnel as well as some books including 'Oonchin Sadaken', 'Path Pradarshak' and 'Path Vikas' by the Defence Secretary. He gave away Excellence Awards to the BRO personnel for the year 2023-24 and felicitated the women achievers of the Organisation. The Casual Paid Labourers who worked in various projects such as Sela Tunnel, as well as



during Sikkim floods were also felicitated. Raised with just two projects in 1960 - Project Tusker (now Vartak) in the East and Project Beacon in the North, the BRO has today become a vibrant

organisation with 18 projects operating in 11 States and three Union Territories. It has now established its credentials as the leading infra construction agency in the high-altitude and difficult snow-bound areas.

The BRO executes road construction and maintenance works at altitude ranging from 9,000 ft up to 19,000 ft along the Northern and Western frontiers, primarily to meet the strategic requirements of the Armed Forces.

In over six decades, it has constructed over 62,214 kms of roads, 1,005 bridges, seven tunnels and 21 airfields in adverse climatic and geographical conditions along India's borders as well as in friendly countries, including Bhutan, Myanmar, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, thus contributing towards the nation's strategic objectives. In 2023-24, the BRO completed a total of 125 infrastructure projects worth Rs 3,611 crore. This includes the construction of Sela Tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh on

Balipara-Chardwar-Tawang Road. The tunnel was dedicated to the Nation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently from Itanagar virtually.

The BRO will soon commence the construction on 4.10-km long Shinkun La Tunnel. Once completed, this tunnel will become the world's highest tunnel at 15,800 ft bypassing Mila Tunnel in China at 15,590 ft.

The BRO accomplished the completion of two significant airfield projects namely Bagdogra and Barrackpore, marking yet another milestone in its journey of excellence. The foundation stone for Mudh Airfield Project was laid by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh recently. The BRO aims to complete the project within

just two working seasons.

Over the few years, the BRO has witnessed an exponential surge in budget expenditure, marking a remarkable leap forward in capabilities and impact. This increased budgetary support has empowered the organisation to undertake crucial projects, accelerate critical infrastructure development, and enhance its operational readiness.

The BRO has been at the forefront of promoting gender equality and inclusivity, offering key roles and opportunities to women. Officers like Col Ponung Doming is leading critical projects in Eastern Ladakh. Assistant Executive Engineer (Civ) Nikita Chaudhary has played a pivotal role in successful completion of Sela Tunnel Project.

# Tourism Ministry unveils Cool Summers of India campaign

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As the scorching summer sun bore down on travelers worldwide, the Union Tourism Ministry of India has embarked on a transformative journey to redefine summer vacations by unveiling the "Cool Summers of India" campaign at the three-day Arabian Travel Mart 2024 in Dubai from May 6.

The campaign is an invitation to global tourists to explore the lesser-known destinations of India's diverse landscapes during the summer season.

Moving away its focus from traditional tourism strategies, the campaign spotlighted 50 enchanting getaways across four corners of the country from the snow-capped peaks of Gulmarg, Patnitop, Auli in Jammu and Kashmir to the lush valleys of Wayanad in Kerala. The curated list of 50 summer hotspots getaways also include destinations like Pithoragarh, Auli, Chopta



Valley, Binsar in Uttarakhand; Bir Billing, Kinnaur and Tirath Valley in Himachal Pradesh giving travelers a wide range of options to explore, from serene hill stations to lush green valleys.

"By diverting attention from overcrowded tourist hotspots to these hidden treasures, the Ministry aims to reach out to a wider audience, including potential foreign tourists as well as alleviate strain on pop-

ular destinations and ensure that India's summer getaways are not confined to domestic travelers alone," said Rajnish Kaistha (Sr. Vice President) of the International Association of Tourist Operators (IATO).

The Ministry's tagline says it all. "From the snowy peaks of the Himalayas to the misty hills of the Western Ghats, from the serene lakes of Kerala to the cascading waterfalls of Mizoram, India's got the

coolest summer getaways that'll have you feeling frosty fresh!" Moreover, leveraging social media channels like WhatsApp to disseminate information about these destinations, the Ministry has ensured that the campaign reaches a wider audience, including potential foreign tourists who may not be familiar with the hidden gems of India.

The campaign went live on Monday and social media handles of 'Incredible India' have already shared a teaser and some glimpses of this "segmented offering" in its run-up. Arabian Travel Mart is one of the key events in the global tourism arena.

It is largely targeted towards drawing the foreign tourists by challenging the notion that India is too hot for summer travel, as the Indian subcontinent has a range of weathers, sources had said here on May 3. "The event marks a significant step in strengthening India's presence in the Middle East tourism market," the min-

istry said in a statement adding that an 'Incredible India' pavilion was inaugurated by Satish Kumar Sivan, Consul General of India to Dubai.

"The pavilion has made a resounding entry, aiming to capture the entirety of the UAE market. Leading a delegation comprising tour operators, luxury hotels, wellness resorts, and the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation, India is poised to showcase itself as a 365-day destination," the statement said. India's participation in the Arabian Travel Mart 2024 holds immense potential for the tourism industry and the economy at large, they said.

The event provides a platform for the Indian tourism players to exhibit their offerings, forge alliances within the industry and attract visitors from the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region. This, in turn, is expected to bolster revenue generation and foster job creation within the tourism sector, the statement said.

# Talks on nurturing future leaders held at Commandants conclave

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The sixth edition of Commandants' Conclave was held on Tuesday at Military Institute of Technology, Pune and participants brainstormed on charting the course for future defence strategies in nurturing the future leaders of Indian Armed Forces, Defence Ministry said here.

Giving details, officials said the meet was held under the aegis of Head Quarters Integrated Defence Staff. The Commandants of esteemed Armed Forces Training Institutions and War Colleges along with other senior leadership of Armed forces attended the conclave.

Senior leadership gathered at MILIT, Pune and exchanged insights, shared best practices at institutions and strategised on building future-ready Forces. This landmark event



underscores Indian Armed Forces' commitment to continuous improvement, innovation and collaboration in the face of evolving global challenges.

This conclave served as a platform for the commandants and decision-makers of AFTIs to engage in open dialogue and discussions on fostering joint culture of learning and adoption of new technologies in

training the future leaders of the Armed Forces.

During the conclave, a wide range of key topics on strategic-resilience, technological advancement, human capital development, interoperability and jointness were discussed to harness innovation, technological advancement and to leverage the best practices of institutions for ensuring world class training at the AFTIs.

# Indian Naval ships reach Singapore to enhance ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to further enhance bilateral defence ties, Indian naval ships Delhi, Shakti, and Kiltan led by Rear Admiral Rajesh Dhankhar, Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet arrived at Singapore on Monday, Navy said here on Tuesday.

Giving details, officials said the Indian team was accorded a warm welcome by personnel of Republic of Singapore Navy and High Commissioner of India in Singapore. The visit is part of the operational deployment of the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet to the South China Sea.

Moreover, this visit is poised to further strengthen the long-standing friendship and cooperation between the two mar-



itime nations through a series of engagements and activities. During the ships' stay in harbour, various activities planned to be undertaken include interactions with the High Commission of India, professional interactions with the Republic of Singapore Navy as also academia and community outreach amongst other activities, reflecting the shared

values of both navies. The Indian Navy and Republic of Singapore Navy have had robust relations spanning three decades of cooperation, coordination and collaboration with regular visits, exchange of best practices, and reciprocal training arrangements. The current deployment underscores the strong linkages between both the navies.

# Government to formulate standards for over 2,000 medical devices

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Government is in the process of formulating standards for over 2,000 medical devices being produced in the country in order to make them globally competitive.

"Zero defect, full effect, this is our mission. Through BIS, we are making product standards for medical devices which would be comparable to ISO. We have already set standards for 1,500 products," Department of Pharmaceuticals Secretary Arunish Chawla said on Tuesday.

Highlighting the critical need to focus on quality to ensure that India becomes globally competitive, he noted that the government is in the process of formulating standards for over 2,000 medical devices being produced in the country in order to make



them globally competitive.

"Right now our med-tech sector is 75-80 per cent import dependent. In the next five years, we want to bring down this import dependence to less than 50 per cent," Chawla said while speaking to

reporters here on the sidelines of an industry event 'Meditech Stackathon 2024' organized by the Department of Pharmaceuticals in collaboration with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

The formulation of standards for around 500 products is in the process, he added. Government and industry should work together to bring down import dependence in the medical device segment to below 50 per cent over the next five years, said the senior official.

CII National Medical Technology Forum Chairman Himanshu Baid highlighted the need for enhanced data collation mechanisms to address gaps in product consumption and production within India.

Chawla further stressed on the need to produce quality products for global markets and noted that the government is trying to enhance standards of manufacturing process.

Chawla noted that the industry is also focusing on creating quality systems to get export certification which is

followed across overseas markets.

He noted that the PLI scheme for medical devices has played a stellar role in the growth of the segment.

"Around 150 medical devices, which used to be imported earlier, are now being produced in the country...Even exports have started now of such products," Chawla said. Exports have overtaken imports in consumables and disposables during last year, he said, and urged the industry to continue with the momentum in other pillars of the med-tech sector.

India's Med Tech industry is poised to grow to USD 50 billion by 2030 from the current level of USD 14 billion. India currently ranks as the fourth largest market for medical devices in Asia and stands among the top 20 globally. Net imports for 2022-23 stood at USD 4,101 million.









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PAPER WITH PASSION

## The die is cast

The pivotal third phase of the elections concluded with a low turnout, featuring prominent contenders

Yesterday, Prime Minister Modi exercised his voting right. He was vocal about India's exemplary democratic process on the global stage. Indeed, the complexity of Indian elections, given the vastness of the nation and its electorate, makes their execution a challenging feat. As the 2024 Lok Sabha election reaches midway, India's political arena brims with fervour, anticipation, and meticulous scrutiny. The third phase of voting holds particular significance, especially for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), with voting taking place in Gujarat, the home turf of Prime Minister Modi, and Amit Shah, the Home Minister. The presence of both leaders casting their votes amplifies the importance of this phase, shaping the election's narrative thus far. The third phase encompassed 11 States and Union territories, witnessing 93 constituencies participating in the electoral process. Notably, the BJP secured victory in the Surat constituency in Gujarat uncontested. With voting in 283 Lok Sabha seats (52 per cent of total Lok Sabha seats) complete, the election is less than a month away from its logical conclusion. After four more phases, the results would be out on June 4. What set the third phase apart was the presence of several constituencies where notable figures were contesting. This phase hosted several prominent candidates, including Amit Shah (BJP) from Gandhinagar, Gujarat; Digvijaya Singh (Congress) from Rajgarh, Madhya Pradesh; Shivraj Singh Chouhan (BJP) from Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh; Dimple Yadav (Samajwadi Party) from Mainpuri, Uttar Pradesh; Supriya Sule (NCP - Sharad Pawar) from Baramati, Maharashtra; Jyotiraditya Scindia (BJP) from Guna, Madhya Pradesh; Pralhad Joshi (BJP) from Dharwad, Karnataka; and KS Eshwarappa (BJP) from Shimoga, Karnataka, among others.



The Election Commission reported a turnout of 66.14 per cent and 66.71 per cent for the first and second phases, respectively. The third phase was no different in terms of voter turnout. With the completion of the third phase, the fate of 283 Lok Sabha seats has been sealed, marking the election's midpoint with 52% of seats voted upon. The persistently low turnout across all phases raises concerns for both democracy and political parties, each grappling with the challenge of ensuring voter participation. For the BJP, the third phase holds immense significance. As a party entrenched in power since 2014, it faces the daunting task of not only maintaining its stronghold but also expanding its influence across diverse regions of the nation. As the Lok Sabha election unfolds, discernible trends and dynamics offer insights into the nation's pulse. Despite facing formidable challenges, the BJP leverages its organisational strength, robust campaign machinery, and Modi's charismatic leadership to maintain its competitive edge. However, navigating through economic concerns, social tensions, and regional disparities presents formidable obstacles. The outcome of this phase serves as a litmus test for the BJP's policies and leadership shaping the trajectory of Indian politics.

### PICTALK



Women show their ink-marked finger after casting votes for the 3rd phase of Lok Sabha elections, in Bareilly

## Evolution of monetary policymaking in India

With the changing nature of inflation and macroeconomic turbulence, remaining committed to inflation-targeting seems daunting

The history of monetary policymaking in India dates back to the pre-independence era, but it gained significant momentum and structure post-independence. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) was established in 1935, as a private shareholders' bank and was nationalized in 1949, giving the Government greater control over monetary policy and credit system. With the establishment of the Planning Commission in 1951, emphasis was laid on the direct and active role of Central banking. A breakthrough year was 1969 when 14 private sector banks were nationalized. It led to transforming monetary policy into 'credit planning' and taking up a 'command approach' (Khatkhate, 1990). Soon the economy suffered due to the two oil price shocks (1973-75 and 1979-81) leading to critical economic crises, which led to large-scale monetary expansion in the form of Government debt to support fiscal policy. It badly hit the inflation situation when it reached 23% in 1974-75. The condition worsened and



became dismal when India had to borrow largely from the IMF and also faced a critical BOP situation. Hence, the revision of the monetary policy framework was the way ahead. This was done by appointment of a committee (which came to be known as the Chakravarty Committee (1985) chaired by Sukhmoy Chakravarty) to review the functioning of the monetary system by the then Governor of RBI, Dr Manmohan Singh. The RBI Governor, C Rangarajan, introduced the Multiple Indicator Approach (MIA) in 1998, incorporating various macroeconomic factors like interest rates, inflation, exchange rates, output growth, employment, foreign trade, capital flows,

banking stability, among others, into the monetary policy framework, moving away from the unreliable M3 target due to economic liberalisation's unpredictability. This provided monetary authorities the flexibility to cater to a broad forum of economic disruptions. The economy was coordinating well with the MIA till the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 dawned, and a high-order expansionary fiscal and monetary policy was floated to capture the receding economic growth. This jeopardised inflation management by the RBI with the inflation gliding into double digits in 2009-10. The RBI became hawkish and between March 2010 and October 2011, the repo rate was increased by 325 basis points. It started preparing for inflation as the primary goal of monetary policy. Finally, in May 2016, the RBI formally adopted inflation-targeting (IT), the target being a 4 per cent inflation rate, with a relaxation of 2 per cent on both sides, to handle unforeseen macroeconomic disruptions. Taming inflation helps

counter investor uncertainty and business sentiments, anchors inflationary expectations, unfavourable exchange rates and balance of payments, besides supporting receding purchasing power. The IT did not get a fair chance to prove itself due to economic disturbances like Demonetisation and the Pandemic, and the current geo-political unrest has led to supply-side inflationary pressures that are difficult to control with IT, which is more efficient against demand-side inflation. With the changing nature of inflation from demand to the supply side, macroeconomic turbulence, and burgeoning uncertainties, remaining committed to IT seems daunting. The RBI needs to frame a comprehensive policy to make determined efforts to address and supplement IT with prudent actions to counter supply-side disruptions especially, affecting food prices. (The author is assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi; views are personal)



KAJLEEN KAUR

## Global South's cultural diplomacy

Cannes transcends its role as a mere film festival; it serves as a beacon of cultural exchange, artistic exploration, and industry innovation



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

As we inch closer to the second week of May, excitement for the forthcoming 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival is reaching a crescendo. The Cannes Film Festival, since its inception, has been hailed as the platform celebrating the joy and creativity of cinema, the high point of confluence of cultures, and talents, and an assembly of masters of storytelling. In recent years, its stage has increasingly spotlighted the cinematic voices of the Global South, a trend underscored by the burgeoning presence of films from Africa, South Asia and Southeast Asia. Building on last year's diverse selection from Japan, China, and South Korea, Cannes in its 77th edition, from 14th to 25th May 2024, reaffirms its commitment to amplifying varied narratives and perspectives. This year's edition promises to continue this trajectory, featuring standout entries like "All We Imagine As Light" by Indian filmmaker Payal Kapadia, "Boku No Ohisama (My Sunshine)" by the acclaimed Japanese filmmaker Hiroshi Okuyama, "Viet And Nam" by Vietnamese filmmaker Truong Minh Quy, and "The Village Next to Paradise" by Somalian filmmaker Mo Harawe. These selections highlight the new creative talent spots for cinema.

With the evolving world, there is a deeper significance highlighted by the recognition of cinema as a potent tool of soft power by countries in the Global South. Across the continents of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, nations have increasingly acknowledged the power of storytelling through cinema as a means to amplify their cultural influence and enhance their global standing. Over the past two years Cannes Film Festival has seen a dynamic shift in programming, from a European narrative to a more perceptive Southern inclusion and interconnection. In the borderless world that we live in today, the prominence of the Global South as a group has risen despite being dominated by multipolarity. Enhanced communication and the growing effects of globalisation have blurred geographical



boundaries, ushering in a new era where technology plays a pivotal role in shaping interactions. This transition has reverberated across various realms, including the cinematic sphere, where soft power finds expression on prestigious platforms. Cannes truly give the Global South a platform for creativity on the silver screen. Nomination and participation in prestigious festivals like Cannes are not merely accolades but recognition of the importance of soft power in the creative ecosystem. By showcasing their cinematic prowess and an amalgamation of their creative skills on a global stage, countries in the Global South seek to assert their cultural identity, foster cross-cultural dialogue, and bolster diplomatic ties. In an era where cultural diplomacy holds increasing sway, the Cannes Film Festival serves as a creative platform for nations to assert their soft power through the medium of cinema. Through their cinematic endeavours, these filmmakers become cultural ambassadors, bridging divides and fostering mutual understanding between nations. At the helm of the 77th Cannes Film Festival jury stands Greta Gerwig, both an accomplished actor and a filmmaker. Gerwig's appointment signals a broader effort towards gen-



BY SHOWCASING THEIR CINEMATIC PROWESS AND AN AMALGAMATION OF THEIR CREATIVE SKILLS ON A GLOBAL STAGE, COUNTRIES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH SEEK TO ASSERT THEIR CULTURAL IDENTITY, FOSTER CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUE, AND BOLSTER DIPLOMATIC TIES

der representation at Cannes, a realm historically dominated by male voices. Symbolising a step towards inclusivity and recognition of the invaluable contributions of women in shaping cinematic discourse. As the jury list for this year awaits announcement, anticipation brews for a lineup that mirrors the festival's commitment to diversity, echoing last year's eclectic mix of talents from Argentina, Afghanistan, Morocco, Zambia, and beyond. Amidst the glitz and glamour, the Marché du Film emerges as a vital nexus for industry professionals, offering a platform for networking, deal-making, and creative exchange. With its finger firmly on the pulse of evolving industry dynamics, the Marché du Film embraces innovation and adaptation. Recognising the need to cater to the ever-changing landscape of filmmaking, it champions emerging trends, technologies, and voices, fostering a conducive environment for the flourishing growth of the global film industry. As over 14,000 industry professionals converge in Cannes annually to present and explore nearly 4,000 films and projects, the Marché du Film serves as a catalyst, urging professionals to elevate their business acumen and seize new opportunities.

Indeed, Cannes itself is a reflection of society's evolution, a microcosm of shifting cultural paradigms and technological advancements. Embracing the ethos of change, the Festival de Cannes introduces innovative elements to its programming, staying at the vanguard of storytelling in the digital age. One of the nominations for this year's Immersive Competition includes "Maya: The Birth of a Superhero", an XR experience created by Poulomi Basu, an Indian artist and CJ Clarke. The announcement of eight projects as part of the Immersive Competition heralds a bold foray into uncharted territory, encompassing location-based virtual reality, mixed reality experiences, projection mapping, and holographic works. Amid these shifts, India shines bright with the participation of Payal Kapadia, Sandhya Suri's "Santosh", FTII's "Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know" and the screening of Shyam Benegal's "Manthan". As the global cinematic landscape continues to evolve, Cannes remains steadfast in its mission to celebrate the myriad voices that enrich the tapestry of world cinema. (The writer is former additional director general, DFF and Festival Director, IFFI; Views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### JP AGGARWAL'S COMMITMENT

Madam — Apropos the news article, "I have not lost touch with Chandni Chowk people: Aggarwal," published on May 6, this is my response. In a political landscape rife with rhetoric and rivalry, Jai Prakash Aggarwal emerges as a steadfast figure, deeply rooted in Chandni Chowk's tapestry. Despite electoral setbacks, his commitment to constituents remains resolute. Aggarwal's recent critique of Prime Minister Modi's language underscores a concern for decorum in public discourse, a sentiment often lost in the cacophony of contemporary politics. His indictment of the BJP's alleged misuse of investigative agencies reflects a broader apprehension about democratic norms and the rule of law. Beyond partisan skirmishes, Aggarwal's focus on local issues—traders' welfare, infrastructure, and healthcare—reveals a genuine concern for Chandni Chowk's residents. His vision for the area, encompassing tourism, urban renewal, and social welfare, speaks to a holistic approach to governance. Amidst shifting political alliances, Aggarwal's unwavering commitment to his constituency stands out as a beacon of stability. As he embarks on his eighth electoral campaign, his pledge to serve remains unyielding, a testament to the enduring spirit of public service. Zoia Chatterjee | Chandigarh

#### VOTERS' DISILLUSIONMENT

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Narendra Modi introduces India to its Ashtalakshmis," published on May 4, this is my response. The narrative of electoral promises, unfulfilled commitments, and regional disparities echoes through the decades of Indian politics. From the inception of the democratic process to contemporary times, the saga persists. The cyclical pattern of pledges made during elections, often forgotten once power is secured, perpetuates a sense of disillusionment among the populace. Despite significant milestones like the Green

#### Make mistakes to learn something new



Apropos the news article, "Oops, I Dropped The Lemon Tart," published on April 28, this is my response. Gyaneshwar Dayal's piece in The Pioneer paints a vivid canvas of Chef Massimo Bottura's recent culinary odyssey in New Delhi. Bottura, not merely a chef but a maestro of gastronomy and a beacon of philanthropy, brought the essence of Osteria Francescana to India's capital once more. His partnership with The

Leela Palace New Delhi illuminated the culinary scene, offering an unforgettable experience steeped in innovation and sustainability. The narrative delves into Bottura's culinary philosophy, highlighting his penchant for turning mistakes into masterpieces, epitomised by the iconic "Oops! I Dropped the Lemon Tart." His interactive session at The Leela, where he shared the genesis of this dish, revealed profound insights into creativity and embracing imperfection. Through his culinary prowess and philanthropic endeavours, Bottura transcends the role of a chef, becoming a global inspiration. His anticipation for a simple breakfast with underprivileged children reflects his humility and dedication to making a difference beyond the kitchen. In essence, Bottura's visit not only tantalised taste buds but also stirred hearts, leaving an indelible mark on India's culinary landscape. Neha Gupta | Delhi

Revolution, persistent challenges like hunger and malnutrition endure, revealing systemic failures in addressing agricultural productivity. The poignant juxtaposition of floods ravaging the North while droughts parch the South underscores the urgent need for holistic solutions, like river interlinking. However, bureaucratic inertia and political apathy have impeded meaningful progress. Amidst this backdrop, the Northeast emerges as a beacon of transformation, propelled by visionary leadership and concerted efforts to integrate the region into the national fabric. The narrative of Modi's North East Story encapsulates this metamorphosis, beckoning readers to witness the evolution firsthand and embrace the region's vibrant culture and potential. Amaira Singhania | Bengaluru

#### WORK FROM HOME CHALLENGES

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Mastering self-leadership during work from home," published on May 6, this is my response. The transition to remote

work has been a mixed bag, with some relishing newfound flexibility while others struggle to delineate between work and home life. Blurred boundaries breed conflicts, taxing individuals' energy and focus. Boundary theory sheds light on these dynamics, emphasising the impact of role transitions on work-home conflicts. Employers must support employees, but self-leadership is equally vital. As remote work becomes ubiquitous, individuals must proactively manage their roles. Yet, challenges persist, from lacking managerial support to battling distractions. Self-leadership emerges as a beacon amid these complexities. Its principles empower individuals to adapt, innovate, and thrive in remote environments. As remote work becomes the norm, mastering self-leadership will be indispensable for professional success and personal well-being alike. Reyanish Joshi | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com





## FIRST COLUMN

## OVERCOMING BONDAGE OF THINKING

God's grace frees us from anguish, guides us on the right path



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

This is a cruel fact. We are hopelessly tied down by our thinking, especially negative. What do you see on roads? Older folks are engrossed in thoughts. What happened? They realized that they were not so great after all. But the obstinate ego would not allow them to seek help where it is available. If a solution to a problem is to be found, it must be; this is their thinking. Sure, but how long would you meditate on it? There should be a time limit. No, that is why obsession is a very common problem.

Other ages are no better. The younger ones are guilty of lusty thoughts. With the advent of cell phones and the internet, age is no longer a bar. What a shame when one is supposed to be in the 'brahmacharya' (celibacy) stage. As one gets older, thoughts of earning the maximum amount of money capture the imagination. There is nothing wrong with it except our expectations should be based on reality. Otherwise, there will be a lot of pain. What is common to all ages is fear of different kinds. This is a real problem, which causes all kinds of mental diseases. This particular problem requires help at the highest level, that is from God, but will we turn to Him? Also common to all ages are hate, anger, enmity, etc. There is hardly any chance of relief when we think that we are the centre of the universe, even though there are eight billion of us. If that were true, there would be eight billion centres of the universe. See, how silly such thinking is. This is what is the basis of our thought process. The frog mentality of thinking one's limited knowledge is everything leads many to dismiss spiritual practices as simplistic, when in fact they are meant to be easily accessible to all.



Let us get to the bottom of this all-pervasive problem. What is this mind? It is a faculty given to us for thinking, willing and feeling. It is subtle, i.e. far more strong than the gross body. The mind affects the body, as we all have experienced. When we are disturbed, our bodies get affected; their working is disturbed. Why has God given us a faculty, which can hurt us so much? He had to do to give us free will, which can bring bliss, as indicated by Lord Krishna, 'A person, having consciousness, unattached to external sense objects, enjoys that happiness within, which is extraordinary. He who, with consciousness united to Brahman, finds eternal joy. God's kindness lies in our return to Him, part of the Cosmic Design, where independence is limited, and control rests with God. So we must turn to God to control our uncontrolled and negative thinking. Lord Krishna States, "Undoubtedly the mind is very difficult to control due to its fickle nature, but it can be brought under control by practice and by detachment from inappropriate sense objects." (6.35) This practice has to be with help from God. Otherwise, there will be partial success only. As we age, our focus shifts towards God, as our physical pleasures diminish, highlighting the purpose of the "Ashram" system for spiritual growth in later years. Therefore, God has made provisions for unlimited mental enjoyment. But we have to seek shelter from God for that. We should not be turning to drinks, etc. for compensation to get over our woes, because they send us deeper into more suffering. Fear is a defence mechanism but only in the limited sense. It should alert us to take curative action. But if it overtakes our thinking, fear becomes a serious problem, as all mental diseases point to.

The conclusion is: that we must turn to God with determination sooner than later. Then God will not only free us from the bondage of painful thinking but will also help us in all matters with His guidance and help. This is the way the System has been designed.

(The writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

## Elected leaders need to rethink

It is time that elected representatives live up to the expectations of their electors as responsible, honest and devoted community leaders



JS RAJPUT



These are election times and each one of us is a part of the process. These are also times of model code of conduct in the shape of guidelines for political parties and candidates. There are restrictions imposed by the election commission on the maximum expenditure a candidate could incur. Everyone knows what happens to it! In general, people are no more worried about spiralling high expenses that the spread of elections imposes on the candidate and State exchequer.

The spread of elections leads to avoidable wastage of manpower and other resources required to conduct and complete the process. The worst sufferers are the schoolchildren, as teachers are the most easily available manpower for elections at every stage! Once elected, no one is willing to pave the way for the generation next! Election times also reveal the behavioural decline amongst those who had tasted the fruits of power earlier but were dethroned by the people. Their frustrations even bring forth utterances that may be blatantly unsocial, personal and not acceptable in a civil society. The elders have created conditions that demand innovative action by the young 'millennials' who must realize how their elders have decimated the basic principles of democracy by taking recourse to caste combinations, igniting regional and linguistic sentiments, and creating communal antagonism at the cost of deteriorating social cohesion! Independent India began its new journey at around 18% of literacy, today its boosts to nearly 80% of it despite the population increase of over 100 crores. We are a learning society. Our international standing is at its best after independence. One wonders why the language used by politicians against each other should become so coarse and uncivil. It could put to shame any decent educated person. Respect for the learned, committed and experienced is one of the most liked of the treasures of our heritage which unfortunately stands torn to tatters. India shall never be in a position to ignore the



ARTICULATING THE NORMAL EXPECTATIONS FROM THE ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE, APJ ABDUL KALAM WAS GIVING VOICE TO EVERY SANE INDIAN: "IT HAS BECOME CRUCIAL FOR US TO BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT WE CAN RIGHTLY EXPECT FROM OUR LEADERS, FROM PANCHAYAT MEMBERS TO MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT"

presence of great luminaries of contemporary times like Gandhi, Patel, Subhash Bose, Nehru, Rajendra Prasad and others. How could anyone who wishes to understand India do so without getting familiar with Swami Vivekananda, Ramkrishna Paramhans, Tagore or Sri Aurobindo? Hope lies only in those who were in schools a couple of years ago, and were mesmerized by a saint-scientist; the indomitable APJ Abdul Kalam. I had personally witnessed on numerous occasions how children of India fell in love with him. It was not because of his position or the Pokhran II, it was because of the love his persona emanated for every child, every Indian! India stands blessed with numerous such luminaries who could make a change in the area around their place. One wishes political aspirants learn from APJ, and other luminaries how to deal with people! APJ Abdul Kalam was one of the most admired and loved celebrities during the millennial transition to the 21st century. He was a professional leader who led by example, through heart-to-heart connections with one and all. His dedication and devotion to the national cause were of the highest order. He inspired, he motivated and he achieved his target with gusto.

He could win over every Indian irrespective of their socio-economic station in life, his profession or his ideological leanings. APJ endeared himself particularly to the children of India in whom he could see the emerging India, the future India! He ignited the curiosity and creativity of millions of children. He gave them 'wings of fire'. He entered the Rashtarpati Bhavan with two bags and left with the same after five years. India needs people with such

personalities right from the panchayat level to the Parliament with whom every individual could feel connected, who may be acknowledged as 'approachable'. All this, and much more; reverberates in one's mind as various inputs concerning the general elections float before everyone. Each one of us who has voted over a dozen times in general elections would love to talk about the drastic change that has occurred in the quality of leadership on a larger scale, the deterioration in mutual respect and regard amongst those in public life, in power or opposition.

We are witness to the usage of a language for the opponents that would have shamed everyone some five decades ago. Today, no one seems to be worried about it. The only encouraging sign is that all this is being noted by the voters, and they are despising it. In the long run, one could say with confidence that it would not work in favour of the truants. Sadly enough, the defects of elections about whom Gandhi had written as early as 1922, have reached every stage of elections, including even those of panchayat Raj bodies.

One must not give up hope. And there is always hope for the better after having reached the bottom. Articulating the normal expectations from the elected representatives, APJ Abdul Kalam was giving voice to every sane Indian: "It has become crucial for us to be clear about what we can rightly expect from our leaders, from panchayat members to local councillors of a municipal corporation to members of parliament."

In other words, there has to be ownership. Whether it is the panchayat member, development officer, councillor, MLA MP or minister, they have to at least try to be the best of their ability to do what they are elected to do. We need a Parliament with a vision, one that has the larger picture in mind and can rise above petty party politics.

How would such a parliament perform? What are how it can play a far more constructive role than it has in the last Lok Sabha? I would also expect that the Hon'ble members of the next Lok Sabha shall firmly and sincerely resolve not to present before the nation any spectacles that disturb the functioning of the August House, and present a poor example before the young of India. What was happening till now, was a matter of serious concern for the last couple of decades. It was precisely articulated with great concern by the veteran politician C. Subramaniam: "The indiscipline that marks the proceedings of parliament and legislatures is a matter of great concern. Not only pandemonium is created obstructing the proceedings of the legislatures but also acts of violence among the members inside the legislatures are becoming common and an almost everyday occurrence. Nobody is prepared to observe the rules of the game. Then how can we expect the masses of the people to observe discipline and respect the laws and regulations?"

It is time that future MPs and other elected representatives live up to the expectations of their electors as responsible, honest and devoted community leaders. They have to be a source of inspiration to generations ahead. Let them resolve not to let even a minute of parliament's time be wasted! It would be a great gift to the nation!

(The author works in education, social cohesion and religious amity, views are personal)

## Benevolent hearts: Dynamics of begging and household donations

Despite legal prohibitions in many States, begging persists with beggars being one of the highest recipients of household donations

Begging is a ubiquitous phenomenon in India and is hidden in plain sight. Perceptions of 'persons engaged in Beggary' may vary but it is also evident that many households donate to them. 'Persons engaged in Beggary' are largely missing from the discussions on public policy in the country. A recent study by the Centre of Social Impact and Philanthropy (CSIP) at Ashoka University showed that 'persons engaged in Beggary' are one of the highest recipients of household donations, ranking only after 'religious organisations'. This leads us to question, what are the motivations that lead households in such a large proportion to donate to 'persons engaged in Beggary'. Who are the biggest donation-makers to



SHAIVYA VERMA

'beggars' with respect to gender, geography and age? And in what 'form' donations are received by the 'persons engaged in Beggary'? Even though begging is not a crime it is legally prohibited in more than twenty States and Union Territories and can invite punishment for one year to 10 years and even beyond under special circumstances. The pros and cons of the existing laws are another

debate. The study by CSIP showed a 14% increase in total 'cash' donations by Indian households from INR 23.7 thousand crores in 2020-21 to INR 27 thousand crores in 2021-22 of which 'persons engaged in Beggary' are one of the preferred recipients of household giving among 'religious organisations', 'non-religious organisations', 'family and friends', 'household staff', and 'supporting a cause or signing a petition'. They are the second highest recipient of household donations both in terms of overall market size and the proportion of households who made donations to them among other recipient groups in the study. The report further notes that the market size and the average cash payments to

'persons engaged in Beggary' have increased from 2020-21 to 2021-22. While 'persons engaged in Beggary' are one of the preferred recipients, households do not trust them with their money but with materials. Despite a high proportion of households who donated to 'persons engaged in Beggary' they received the lowest value of 'cash' donations from households (under INR 100). While 'persons engaged in Beggary' were least preferred for 'cash' donations as compared to other recipient groups in the study, a clear preference to donate 'in-kind' was noted for this recipient group. More than half of those donating to 'persons engaged in Beggary' donated 'in-kind' which is starkly different from 'in-kind'

donations received by other recipient groups. Households are mostly driven by their intrinsic motivations when giving to the 'persons engaged in Beggary'. 'Religious beliefs' are one of the top motivators. It guided 55% of households that gave to the 'persons engaged in Beggary'. Religious beliefs can be understood as 'helping others is a way to serve God', and 'good karma/ Almighty rewards good deeds'. Furthermore, 'family traditions' play an important role in motivating households to give to the 'persons engaged in Beggary'. They are also affected by the visible hardship due to poverty and are driven to donate in order to support someone in financial distress. Rendering 'seva' or service

also emerged as a significant motivation for giving to 'persons engaged in Beggary'. Households also find it easier to give in smaller amounts in 'cash', which leads many households to offer some money to 'persons engaged in Beggary'. About 60% proportion of households responded to have donated to them. The study also found that donations made to 'persons engaged in Beggary' were in the range of smaller amounts 'under INR 100'. It was intriguing to find that the givers who are more empathetic to the 'persons engaged in Beggary' are the people who have a 'vulnerable' position in society and are mainly dependent on others for social and economic security. Older women and households from

rural areas and from lower socio-economic categories are primary givers to 'persons engaged in Beggary'. More households from rural India donate to 'persons engaged in Beggary' than households from large towns. In fact, the proportion of households making offerings to 'persons engaged in Beggary' in rural India was higher than the national average of the proportion of households who gave to 'persons engaged in Beggary'. Similarly, 'giving' by lower socioeconomic category (SEC D/E) to 'persons engaged in Beggary' was higher than the national average. While about 53% of households from higher and middle socio-economic categories (SEC A, SEC B and SEC C) contributed, more

than 65% of households contributed towards 'persons engaged in Beggary' from the lower socioeconomic groups (SEC D/E). In terms of gender and age, older women between the ages of 46 to 60 years are the biggest and primary donation-makers to the 'persons engaged in Beggary'. Beggary in many forms has been in existence for ages. Due to the hardships faced, persons engaged in Beggary usually suffer from negativity, hopelessness, low self-esteem and stigma. In India, 'people engaged in Beggary' are often seen outside religious places. The writer is Senior Research Manager at the Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy (CSIP), Ashoka University. Views expressed are personal



# Israeli forces seize Rafah crossing in Gaza

AP ■ CAIRO

Israeli tanks seized control of Gaza's vital Rafah border crossing on Tuesday as Israel brushed off urgent warnings from close allies and moved into the southern city even as cease-fire negotiations with Hamas remained on a knife's edge.

The UN warned of a potential collapse of the flow of aid to Palestinians from the closure of Rafah and the other main crossing into Gaza, Kerem Shalom, at a time when officials say the northern part of the enclave is already experiencing "full-blown famine."

The Israeli foray overnight came after hours of whiplash in the Israel-Hamas war, with the militant group on Monday saying it accepted an Egyptian-Qatari mediated cease-fire proposal. Israel, however, insisted the deal did not meet its core demands. The high-stakes diplomatic moves and military brinkmanship left a glimmer of hope alive — if only barely — for a deal to bring at least a

pause in the war, which as it marked its 7-month point Tuesday, has killed more than 34,700 Palestinians, according to local health officials, and has devastated the Gaza Strip.

The incursion appeared to be short of the full-fledged offensive into Rafah that Israel has planned, and it was not immediately known if it would be expanded.

The looming operation threatens to widen a rift between Israel and its main backer, the United States, which says it is concerned over the fate of around 1.3 million Palestinians crammed into the city. US President Joe Biden warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu again on Monday against launching an invasion of the city after Israel ordered 100,000 Palestinians to evacuate from parts of Rafah.

Cheers of joy overnight among Rafah's Palestinians over Hamas' acceptance of the cease-fire turned to fear Tuesday. Families fled in a steady stream out of Rafah's eastern neighbourhoods on

foot or in vehicles and donkey carts piled with mattresses and supplies. Children watched as parents disassembled tents in the sprawling camps that have filled Rafah for months to move to their next destination — which for many remained uncertain.

"Netanyahu only cares about coming out on top. He doesn't care about children. I don't think he'll agree" to a deal, said Najwa al-Saksuk as her family packed up. Israeli strikes rang out and raised plumes of black smoke.

The Israeli 401st Brigade entered the Gaza side of the Rafah crossing early Tuesday, the Israeli military said, taking "operational control" of it.

Footage released by the military showed Israeli flags flying from tanks that seized the area. It also said that ground troops and airstrikes targeted suspected Hamas positions in Rafah. The military claimed it had intelligence the crossing was "being used for terrorist purposes," though it did not immediately provide evidence.

It said Hamas fighters near the crossing launched a mortar attack that killed four Israeli troops near Kerem Shalom on Sunday and that more mortars and rockets were fired from the area on Tuesday. The Rafah crossing with Egypt and the Kerem Shalom crossing with Israel are critical points of entry for food, medicine and other supplies keeping Gaza's population of 2.3 million alive. They have been closed for at least the past two days, though the smaller Erez crossing between Israel and northern Gaza continues to operate.

Israeli authorities denied the UN humanitarian affairs office access to Rafah crossing Tuesday, its spokesman Jens Laerke said, warning that the disruption could break the fragile aid operation. All fuel for aid trucks and generators comes through Rafah, and Laerke said they have a "very, very short buffer of about one day of fuel."

"If no fuel comes in for a prolonged period of time, it would be a very effective way

of putting the humanitarian operation in its grave," he said.

Israeli strikes and bombardment across Rafah overnight killed at least 23 Palestinians, including at least six women and five children, according to hospital records.

Mohamed Abu Amra said his wife, two brothers, sister and niece were killed when a strike flattened their home as they slept. "We did nothing. ... We don't have Hamas," he said. "We found fire devouring us. The house was turned upside down."

Egypt's Foreign Ministry condemned the seizure of the crossing, calling it "a dangerous escalation." Egypt has previously warned that any seizure of Rafah — which is supposed to be part of a demilitarised border zone — or an attack that forces Palestinians to flee over the border into Egypt would threaten the 1979 peace treaty with Israel that's been a linchpin for regional security.

Netanyahu has said an offensive to take Rafah — which Israel says is Hamas' last

major stronghold in Gaza — is crucial to the goal of destroying Hamas after its October 7 attack on southern Israel that triggered the war.

In that unprecedented Hamas raid, militants killed some 1,200 people and took around 250 others as hostages back to Gaza. Israeli critics say Netanyahu is concerned about his government's survival, since hard-line partners in his coalition could bolt if he signs onto a deal before a Rafah invasion.

As Israel announced it would push ahead with Rafah operations, it said the cease-fire proposal that Hamas agreed to did not meet its "core demands." But it said it would send a delegation to Egypt to continue negotiations. An Egyptian official said delegations from Hamas and Qatar arrived in Cairo on Tuesday.

An Egyptian official and a Western diplomat said the draft Hamas accepted had only minor changes in wording from a version the US had earlier pushed for with Israeli approval.

# Police break up pro-Palestinian student protest in Berlin

AP ■ AMSTERDAM

German police on Tuesday broke up a protest by several hundred pro-Palestinian activists who had occupied a courtyard at Berlin's Free University earlier in the day, the latest such action by authorities as protests that have roiled campuses in the United States spread across Europe.

The protesters had put up about 20 tents and formed a human chain around the tents. Most had covered their faces with medical masks and had draped kufiyah scarves around their heads, shouting slogans such as "Viva, viva Palestina." Earlier on Tuesday, Dutch police arrested about 125 activists as they broke up a similar pro-Palestinian demonstration camp at the University of Amsterdam. In Berlin, police called on the students via loudspeakers to leave the campus. Police could also be seen carrying some students away and some scuffles erupted between police officers and protesters.

Police used pepper spray against some of the protesters. The school's administrators said in a statement that the protesters had rejected any kind of dialogue and they had therefore called in police to clear the campus. "This form of protest is not geared towards dialogue. An occupation is not acceptable on the FU Berlin campus," university president Guenter Ziegler said. FU is the abbreviation for Free University. "We are available for academic dialog — but not in this way."

The administrators said some protesters attempted to enter rooms and lecture halls at Free University in order to occupy them. The protest organizers, which say they are made up of students from various Berlin universities and other individuals, had called on other students and professors to take part in the action,

the university statement said.

In recent days, students have held protests or set up encampments in Finland, Denmark, Italy, Spain, France and Britain, following earlier protests at US campuses.

Amsterdam police said on the social media platform X that their action was "necessary to restore order" after protests turned violent. There were no immediate reports of injuries. Video from the scene aired by national broadcaster NOS shows police using a mechanical digger to push down barricades and officers with batons and shields moving in, beating some of the protesters and pulling down tents. Protesters had formed barricades from wooden pallets and bicycles, NOS reported.

The demonstrators occupied a small island at the university on Monday, calling for a break in academic ties with Israel over the war in Gaza.

After clearing the Amsterdam protest by early afternoon Tuesday, police closed off the area by metal fences. Students sat along the banks of a nearby canal. The school said in a statement that police ended the demonstration at its Roeterseiland campus overnight Tuesday "due to public order and safety concerns."

"The war between Israel and Hamas is having a major impact on individual students and staff," it said. "We share the anger and bewilderment over the war, and we understand that there are protests over it. We stress that within the university, dialogue about it is the only answer."

In Finland, dozens of protesters from the Students for Palestine solidarity group set up an encampment outside the main building at the University of Helsinki, saying they would stay there until the university, which is Finland's largest academic institution, cuts academic ties with Israeli universities.

# Malaysia defends companies that supply weapons to Israel

**Kuala Lumpur:** Malaysia will not interfere in business relations between arms manufacturers and other countries, its defence minister said Tuesday, after protesters demanded that the government expel companies that supply weapons to Israel from an international exhibition. More than 1,300 companies from 60 nations are participating in Defence Services Asia and the concurrent National Security Asia exhibitions that started Monday. The events are hosted and co-organised by Malaysia's Defence Ministry and Home Affairs Ministry.

The Solidarity for Palestinian coalition held a brief rally outside the exhibition centre on Tuesday to protest the presence of US weapons maker Lockheed Martin, European missile manufacturer MBDA and others that provide arms to Israel. The coalition accused the manufacturers of being complicit in Israel's offensive in Gaza.

They said the companies' presence was inconsistent with the Malaysian government's support of Palestinian statehood and insensitive to the many Malaysians who oppose Israel's actions in the Palestinian territories. Muslims account for two-thirds of Malaysia's 34 million people. "We urge the Malaysian government to take a firm and consistent stand. Do not allow these murderous arm dealers to participate and prevent their war mongering," coalition spokesperson Tian Chua said. Defence Minister Khaled Nordin said Malaysia opposes all forms of injustice against the Palestinian people but is also a "free trade country".

He said the exhibition is a space for the defense industry to display its latest technology and help countries strengthen their defence preparedness. "This exhibition does not favour or give advantage to any particular country or company," Khaled said in a statement. "The relationship of some global defense companies with certain countries is a business matter that Malaysia will not interfere with."

# 'Gaza may be Joe Biden's Vietnam'

AP ■ WASHINGTON



In April, Bernie Sanders repeatedly stood shoulder to shoulder with President Joe Biden, promoting their joint accomplishments on health care and climate at formal White House events while eviscerating Donald Trump in a widely viewed campaign TikTok video.

Then just last week, Sanders was bluntly warning that the crisis in Gaza could be Biden's "Vietnam" and invoking President Lyndon B. Johnson's decision not to run for reelection as the nation was in an uproar over his support of that war.

Such is the political dichotomy of Bernie Sanders when it comes to Joe Biden. They are two octogenarians who share a bond that was forged through a hard-fought primary in 2020 and fortified through policy achievements over the last three years.

Now, in this election year, Sanders will be Biden's most powerful emissary to progres-

sives and younger voters — a task that will test the senator's pull with the sectors of the Democratic Party most disillusioned with the president and his policies, especially on Gaza.

Privately, Sanders has felt less enthusiastic in recent days about making the political case on Biden's behalf as the Gaza crisis worsened, according to a person familiar with Sanders' sentiments. Still, Sanders remains adamant that the specter of Trump's return to the Oval Office is too grave a threat and stresses that "this election is not between Joe Biden and God. It is between

Joe Biden and Donald Trump." "I understand that a lot of people in this country are less than enthusiastic about Biden for a number of reasons and I get that. And I strongly disagree with him, especially on what's going on in Gaza," Sanders said in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

But Sanders continued: "You have to have a certain maturity when you deal with politics and that is yes, you can disagree with somebody. That doesn't mean you can vote for somebody else who could be the most dangerous person in American history, or not vote and allow that other guy to win."

That will be the thrust of the message that Sanders will carry through November, even as progressive furor over Biden's handling of the war in Gaza continues to escalate, protests continue to fester and Sanders' own critiques of the administration's policy become more pointed.

"He's not trimming the sails on Gaza, because of

Biden," said Sen. Peter Welch, D-Vt., who succeeded Sanders in the House and joined him in the Senate last year. "Bernie's credibility is that he's maintained his solid positions, and then he's going to make the case why, Biden versus Trump."

Few can doubt Sanders' influence throughout the Biden presidency. Once rivals for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020, the two men later joined forces to assemble half a dozen policy task forces that underpinned the party's policy platform later that year — an unusual endeavor that helped bring the Democratic socialist's supporters into Biden's fold.

That laid the groundwork for a burst of ambitious policymaking in the first two years of the Biden administration, from a sweeping \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief package in early 2021 to legislation in the summer of 2022 that was a mish-mash of longstanding Democratic priorities, including cheaper prescription drugs for Medicare beneficiaries.

Sanders, who helped craft those blueprints as head of the Senate Budget Committee, had been directly encouraged by Biden to go big in those proposals, with the assurance that the president had his back.

"You and I have been fighting this for 25 years," Biden told Sanders admiringly at their joint health care event in April. "Finally, finally we beat Big Pharma. Finally."

Sanders, like many others who back Biden's domestic achievements, believes the public is still too unaware of them. He was the one who approached White House officials about doing an event specifically to spotlight a drop in the cost of inhalers.

More than three years into Biden's term, Sanders' connections throughout the West Wing are deep.

He chats regularly not only with the president, but his top aides, including White House chief of staff Jeff Zients, senior adviser Anita Dunn and national security adviser Jake Sullivan.

# 2 killed, 21 injured in knife attack at hospital in China

**Beijing/Kunming (PTI):** At least two people were killed and 21 others injured in a knife attack at a hospital on Tuesday in China's Yunnan Province, local authorities said, in the latest incident of mass stabbing in the country.

The attack took place at around 11:30 am when a man assaulted people with a knife at a local hospital in Zhenxiang County, the county's public security bureau said.

The injured are being treated in the hospital, and the case is under investigation, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported. It is not yet known whether police have subdued the suspect, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

China, where private gun ownership is illegal for most civilians, has faced a spate of mass knife attacks in public places in recent years.

In August last year, two people were killed and seven others injured after a man with a history of mental illness attacked people with a knife in a residential district in also Yunnan.

In July of that year, six people, including three children, were killed in a stabbing at a kindergarten in the south-eastern province of Guangdong. Zhenxiang County, situated in Yunnan's northeast, borders Guizhou and Sichuan provinces and, until 2020, was classified as "poverty-stricken".

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# Stormy Daniels expected to appear at hush money trial

AP ■ NEW YORK



Donald Trump returns to the hush money trial Tuesday facing a threat of jail time for additional gag order violations as prosecutors gear up to summon big-name witnesses including porn actor Stormy Daniels.

An attorney for Daniels, Clark Brewster, told The Associated Press that the porn actor, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, is "likely" to be called as a witness in the trial on Tuesday. Trump said earlier Tuesday that he was "recently told" who the witness would be on Tuesday and complained he should've been given more notice. In the final weeks of Trump's 2016 Republican presidential campaign, his then-lawyer and personal fixer, Michael Cohen, paid Daniels USD 130,000 to keep quiet about what she says was an awkward and unexpected sexual encounter with Trump at a

celebrity golf outing in Lake Tahoe in July 2006. Trump denies having sex with Daniels. Trump and his campaign were reeling from the October 7, 2016, publication of the never-before-seen 2005 "Access Hollywood" footage in which he boasted about grabbing women's genitals.

He spoke with Cohen and Hope Hicks, his campaign's press secretary, by phone the

next day as they sought to limit damage from the tape and keep his alleged affairs out of the press.

Cohen paid Daniels after her lawyer at the time, Keith Davidson, indicated she was willing to make on-the-record statements to the National Enquirer or on television confirming a sexual encounter with Trump. National Enquirer editor Dylan Howard alerted Pecker and then, at Pecker's direction, told Cohen that Daniels was agitating to go public with her claims, prosecutors said. Daniels had previously sought to sell her story to another celebrity gossip magazine, Life & Style, in 2011.

The jury on Monday heard from two witnesses, including a former Trump Organization controller, who provided a mechanical but vital recitation of how the company reimbursed payments that were allegedly meant to suppress embarrassing stories from sur-

facting and then logged them as legal expenses in a manner that Manhattan prosecutors say broke the law.

The testimony from Jeffrey McConney yielded an important building block for prosecutors trying to pull back the curtain on what they say was a corporate records cover-up of transactions designed to protect Trump's Republican presidential bid during a pivotal stretch of the race.

It focused on a USD 130,000 payment from Cohen to Daniels and the subsequent reimbursement Cohen received.

McConney and another witness testified that the reimbursement checks were drawn from Trump's personal account. Yet even as jurors witnessed the checks and other documentary evidence, prosecutors did not elicit testimony Monday showing that Trump dictated that the payments would be logged as legal expenses, a designation

that prosecutors contend was intentionally deceptive.

McConney acknowledged during cross-examination that Trump never asked him to log the reimbursements as legal expenses or discussed the matter with him at all.

Another witness, Deborah Tarasoff, a Trump Organization accounts payable supervisor, said under questioning that she did not get permission to cut the checks in question from Trump himself.

"You never had any reason to believe that President Trump was hiding anything or anything like that?" Trump attorney Todd Blanche asked. "Correct," Tarasoff replied. The testimony followed a stern warning from Judge Juan M. Merchan that additional violations of a gag order barring Trump from inflammatory out-of-court comments about witnesses, jurors and others closely connected to the case could result in jail time.

# Boeing calls off its first astronaut launch due to valve issue

AP ■ CANAVERAL



Boeing called off its first astronaut launch because of a valve problem on the rocket Monday night. The two NASA test pilots had just strapped into Boeing's Starliner capsule for a flight to the International Space Station when the countdown was halted, just two hours before the planned liftoff. United Launch Alliance CEO Tory Bruno said an oxygen pressure-relief valve on the upper stage of the company's Atlas rocket started fluttering open and close, creating a loud buzz.

The valve may have exceeded its 200,000 lifetime cycles, Bruno said, which means it would have to be replaced, pushing the launch into next week. But if engineers can determine the valve is still within that limit, the launch team could try again as soon as Friday. It was the latest delay for Boeing's first crew flight, on hold for years because

of capsule trouble. Bruno said similar valve trouble had occurred in years past on a few other Atlas rockets launching satellites. It was quickly resolved by turning the troublesome valves off and back on. But the company has stricter flight rules for astronaut flights, prohibiting valve recycling when a crew is on board. "And so we stayed with the rules and the procedures, and scrubbed as a result," Bruno said at a press conference. NASA's commercial crew pro-

gram manager Steve Stich acknowledged it was a tough call.

"We're taking it one step at a time, and we're going to launch when we're ready and fly when it's safe to do so," Stich told reporters.

Within minutes of the countdown halting, Boeing's new astronaut was back at the launch pad to retrieve Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams from their pad at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station. Starliner's first test flight without a crew in 2019 failed to reach the space station and Boeing had to repeat the flight. Then the company encountered parachute issues and flammable tape. NASA hired Boeing and SpaceX a decade ago to ferry astronauts to and from the space station after the shuttle program ended, paying the private companies billions of dollars. SpaceX has been in the orbital taxi business since 2020.

# Details of UK military personnel exposed in payroll data breach

**London (AP):** British officials say the names and bank details of thousands of serving British soldiers, sailors and air force members have been exposed in a data breach at a payroll system.

The Ministry of Defence said Defence Secretary Grant Shapps would make a statement in the House of Commons on Tuesday afternoon "setting out the multi-point plan to support and protect personnel". The ministry would not comment on a Sky News report that Chinese hackers are suspected of carrying out the cyberattack. Cabinet Minister Mel Strickland told Sky that "we are not saying that at this precise moment". British media reported that the government will blame "hostile and malign actors" but will not name the country it believes is responsible.

# Trump faces jail threat over gag order

AP ■ NEW YORK



Donald Trump returns to his hush money trial Tuesday facing a threat of jail time for additional gag order violations as prosecutors gear up to summon big-name witnesses in the final weeks of the case.

Stormy Daniels, the porn actor who has said she had a sexual encounter with Trump, and Michael Cohen, the former Trump lawyer and personal fixer who prosecutors say paid her to keep silent in the final weeks of the 2016 presidential campaign, are among those who have yet to take the stand but are expected to in the coming weeks.

The jury on Monday heard from two witnesses, including a former Trump Organization controller who provided a mechanical but vital recitation of how the company reimbursed payments that were allegedly meant to suppress embarrassing stories from surf-

facting and then logged them as legal expenses in a manner that Manhattan prosecutors say broke the law.

The testimony from Jeffrey McConney yielded an important building block for prosecutors trying to pull back the curtain on what they say was a corporate records cover-up of transactions designed to protect Trump's presidential bid during a pivotal stretch of the race. It focused on a \$130,000 payment from Cohen to Daniels and the subsequent reimbursement

McConney and another witness testified that the reimbursement checks were drawn from Trump's personal account. Yet even as jurors witnessed the checks and other documentary evidence, prosecutors did not elicit testimony Monday showing that Trump himself dictated that the payments would be logged as legal expenses, a designation that prosecutors contend was intentionally deceptive.

McConney acknowledged during cross-examination that Trump never asked him to log the reimbursements as legal expenses or discussed the matter with him at all. Another witness, Deborah Tarasoff, a Trump Organization accounts payable supervisor, said under questioning that she did not get permission to cut the checks in question from Trump himself. "You never had any reason to believe that President Trump was hiding anything or anything like that?" Trump attorney Todd Blanche asked. "Correct," Tarasoff replied. The testimony followed a stern warning from Judge Juan M. Merchan that additional violations of a gag order barring Trump from inflammatory out-of-court comments about witnesses, jurors and others closely connected to the case could result in jail time.

The \$1,000 fine imposed Monday marks the second time since the trial began last month that Trump has been sanctioned for violating the gag order. He was fined \$9,000 last week, \$1,000 for each of nine violations. "It appears that the \$1,000 fines are not serving as a deterrent. Therefore going forward, this court will have to consider a jail sanction," Merchan said before jurors were brought into the courtroom. Trump's statements, the judge added, "threaten to interfere with the fair administration of justice and constitute a direct attack on the rule of law. I cannot allow that to continue."



# Putin starts his 5th term as president

AP ■ MOSCOW

Vladimir Putin begins his fifth term as Russian president in an opulent Kremlin inauguration Tuesday, after destroying his political opponents, launching a devastating war in Ukraine and consolidating all power in his hands.

Already in office for nearly a quarter-century and the longest-serving Kremlin leader since Josef Stalin, Putin's new term doesn't expire until 2030, when he is constitutionally eligible to run for another six years. He has transformed Russia from a country emerging from economic collapse to a pariah state that threatens global security. Following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine that has become Europe's biggest conflict since World War II, Russia has been heavily sanctioned by the West and is turning other regimes like China, Iran and North Korea for support.

The question now is what the 71-year-old Putin will do over the course of another six years,



both at home and abroad. Russian forces are gaining ground in Ukraine, deploying scorched-earth tactics as Kyiv grapples with shortages of men and ammunition. Both sides are taking heavy casualties. Ukraine has brought the battle to Russian soil through drone and missile attacks, especially in border regions. In a speech in February, Putin vowed to fulfill Moscow's goals in Ukraine, and do what is needed to "defend our sovereignty and security of our citizens."

dynamic." Instead, Russia's economy has pivoted to a war footing, and authorities are spending record amounts on defense.

Analysts say now that Putin has secured another six years in power, the government could take the unpopular steps of raising taxes to fund the war and pressure more men to join the military.

At the start of a new term, the Russian government is routinely dissolved so that Putin can name a new prime minister and Cabinet.

One key area to watch is the Defense Ministry. Last year, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu came under pressure over his conduct of the war, with mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin launching withering criticism against him for shortages of ammunition for his private contractors fighting in Ukraine. Prigozhin's brief uprising in June against the Defense Ministry represented the biggest threat to Putin's rule.

After Prigozhin was killed two

months later in a mysterious plane crash, Shoigu appeared to have survived the infighting. But last month, his protege, Deputy Defense Minister Timur Ivanov, was detained on charges of bribery amid reports of rampant corruption.

Some analysts have suggested Shoigu could become a victim of the government reshuffle but that would be a bold move as the war is still raging in Ukraine.

In the years following the invasion, authorities have cracked down on any form of dissent with a ferocity not seen since Soviet times. There is no sign that this repression will ease in Putin's new term.

His greatest political foe, opposition leader Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic penal colony in February. Other prominent critics have either been imprisoned or have fled the country, and even some of his opponents abroad fear for their security. Laws have been enacted that threaten long prison terms for anyone who discredits the military.

# 'Suicide bombing that killed five Chinese planned in Af'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The Pakistan Army on Tuesday said the suicide bombing that killed five Chinese nationals in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in March was planned in Afghanistan and carried out by an Afghan national.

Addressing a press conference, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) chief Maj-Gen Ahmed Sharif accused Afghanistan of allowing militants to use its soil for carrying out attacks inside Pakistan. He said Afghan soil was used in the attack that killed five Chinese engineers in the Bisham area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in March because the plot for the attack was prepared in Afghanistan.

"This suicide bombing also connects to across the border [in Afghanistan]; the planning of this terrorism [act] was done in Afghanistan. Terrorists and their facilitators were also being controlled from

Afghanistan and the suicide bomber was also an Afghan," Sharif said.

Five Chinese engineers and their Pakistani driver were killed when a suicide bomber rammed his explosive-rigged car into their vehicle in the Bisham area of Shangla district in March. The victims were en route from Islamabad to their camp in Dasu, the headquarters of the Upper Kohistan district of the province.

He said the attacks by the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have been going on despite complaints lodged with the Afghan authorities.

"There is concrete evidence that TTP terrorists are still using Afghan soil to launch attacks in Pakistan," Sharif said, adding that the Foreign Office has lodged 12 protests with the Afghan government over this issue.

Pakistan has been hosting Afghan refugees for a long time and helped them more than

other countries but the Afghan side failed to address concerns regarding the TTP. "TTP terrorists are continuously committing acts of terrorism in Pakistan," he said.

The head of the army's media wing said so far in 2024, the security forces conducted 13,135 small and major intelligence-based operations (IBOs) against terrorists and their facilitators, during which "249 terrorists were sent to hell while 396 were arrested". He said more than 100 operations were being conducted daily against terrorism.

He said that during the operations in the ongoing year by Pakistani forces, two of its officers and 60 soldiers were killed. Sharif said the drive against illegal Afghan nationals would continue in the larger interest of Pakistan. "So far, 563,639 illegal Afghan citizens have been returned to their countries, yet hundreds of thousands are still living in Pakistan," he said.

# Ukraine says it foiled Russian spy agency plot to assassinate Zelenskyy

Kyiv (AP) — Ukrainian counterintelligence investigators have foiled a Russian plot to assassinate President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other top military and political figures, Ukraine's state security service said Tuesday.

Two colonels in the State Guard of Ukraine, which protects top officials, were detained on suspicion of enacting the plan drawn up by Russia's Federal Security Service, a statement said. The colonels were recruited before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, according to the statement. It quoted the head of the State Security Service, Vasyl Maliuk, as saying the plot foresaw an attack ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inauguration for a fifth term Tuesday.

Maliuk said he personally oversaw the top-secret operation to track the plot. Ukrainian claims of Russian efforts to kill Zelenskyy are not new. Zelenskyy said in 2022 there has been at least 10 attempts to assassinate him as the war with Russia stretches into a third year.

Also, prosecutors in Poland said last month a Polish man had been arrested on allegations of being ready to spy on behalf of Russia's military intelligence in an alleged plot to assassinate Zelenskyy. The Ukrainian statement said the Russian intelligence agents targeting Zelenskyy sought out members of the Ukrainian military close to the president's security detail who could take the head of state hostage and later kill him.

The operation was run from Moscow, it said, providing the names of three alleged Russian spies behind the conspiracy.

The broader plan was to identify the location of senior Ukrainian officials and target them with a rocket attack, followed by drones and missiles. The two Ukrainian colonels were arrested on suspicion of treason, which carries a life sentence, the statement said.

# Nawaz Sharif files plea for acquittal in corruption case

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's former prime minister and PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif on Tuesday filed a plea for acquittal in the Toshakhana corruption case in an accountability court in Islamabad.

Sharif's counsel Rana Muhammad Arif Khan submitted the petition in the case, The Express Tribune newspaper reported. The prosecutor representing the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) stated in court that he would forward the application to NAB headquarters. The court issued notices on Sharif's petition and adjourned the hearing till June 3.

Earlier this month, NAB gave a clean chit to 74-year-old Sharif in a case related to the acquisition of a luxury vehicle from the gift repository (Toshakhana). The anti-graft body submitted a report that read that the Supreme Court had passed instructions to investigate an alleged fake



account associated with Sharif. Furthermore, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader did not utilise funds from the alleged account to pay for the vehicle acquired from the Toshakhana. The report by the country's graft buster further read that the vehicle gifted to the then-premier by Saudi Arabia was relinquished to Toshakhana in 1997. It clarified that in 2008 when it was bought by Nawaz, it was no longer under the ownership of the Toshakhana but that of the

# Govt not doing anything regarding interference by intelligence agencies in judicial affairs: SC judge

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Supreme Court judge Jamal Khan Mandokhail on Tuesday said that the government was not doing anything regarding the alleged interference by the powerful intelligence agencies in judicial affairs.

In an unprecedented move, six judges of the Islamabad High Court in March sought intervention by the Supreme Judicial Council against the alleged interference in the working of the judiciary by Pakistan's intelligence agencies.

The six judges - out of a total strength of eight - wrote a letter to the Supreme Judicial Council members, regarding alleged attempts to pressure judges through abduction and torture of their relatives as well as secret surveillance inside their homes.

The six judges who signed the March 25 dated letter include Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani,

Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, Justice Babar Sattar, Justice Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan, Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir, and Justice Saman Rafat Imtiaz.

After a meeting between Pakistan's Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on March 28, they formed a commission to investigate the allegations of interference in judicial affairs following the cabinet's approval.

The apex court on April 1 took suo motu notice of the IHC judges' letter and formed a seven-member bench led by Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa to hear the matter.

On Tuesday, the bench headed by Chief Justice Isa, resumed the suo motu hearing on the IHC judges' letter accusing agencies of meddling in judicial matters.

The bench comprises Justices Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Athar Minallah, Musarrat Hilali and

Naeem Akhtar Afghan.

On Tuesday, Attorney General for Pakistan (AGP) Mansoor Awan appeared before the court and told the bench that the written order of the last hearing had not yet been received, Geo News reported. Awan said that the order must be shown to the prime minister to file the government's reply. He added that the government would be able to file its response by tomorrow if they receive the order today.

The Supreme Court Bar Association also submitted suggestions to the top court, saying that it would never compromise on the independence of the judiciary.

The SCBA called for an inquiry against those who intervene in judicial matters. It said that the IHC has the power of contempt of court and it should have taken contempt of court action for any kind of interference.

The CJP then asked the AGP to read the written order.

During the hearing, Justice Mandokhail said that there is interference but the government is not doing anything about it, Geo News reported. CJP Isa then said that the Supreme Judicial Council is a separate body and the Supreme Court cannot give directions to it. "I am the chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council but I am not the SJC itself. There are other members in the body," he was quoted as saying by the channel.

Justice Minallah said this is not a letter but it reflects a trend, adding that the AGP said this happened in 2018 as well. Pakistan Bar Council's (PBC) lawyer said that the government was not doing anything, hence, the judiciary itself has to take action.

CJP Isa then summarised that the PBC was suggesting a probe, that the judges use criminal laws to deal with the issue and launch contempt of court proceedings.

# Australia accuses China of unsafe behaviour

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Australia has protested to Beijing through multiple channels that a Chinese fighter jet endangered an Australian navy helicopter with flares over international waters, the prime minister said Tuesday. The incident occurred Saturday as the Australian air warfare destroyer HMAS Hobart was enforcing U.N. Security Council sanctions against North Korea in international waters in the Yellow Sea, officials said Monday. There were no injuries or damage reported. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the Australian public expected an explanation from China.

"We've just made it very clear to China that this is unprofessional and that it's unacceptable," Albanese told Nine Network television.

"We've made it very clear ... through all of our channels, at all measures at our disposal, including here publicly," Albanese said.

He said Beijing had yet to make any public comment on the incident.

"It's important that we speak out when events like this occur. It's important that we make clear our position, which has been done at the diplomatic levels, at government-to-government, but also defense-to-defense as well. And all of those avenues have been made clear. This issue, we have made public in order to be able to speak out very clearly and unequivocally that this behavior is unacceptable," the prime minister said.

Defense Minister Richard Marles said Monday that a Chinese Chengdu J-10 fighter jet released flares in the flight path of an Australian navy Seahawk helicopter deployed from the Hobart.

He said the flares were 300 meters (986 feet) in front of the helicopter and 60 meters (197 feet) above it and the helicopter pilot had to "take evasive action in order to not be hit by those flares."

"The consequence of being hit by the flares would have been significant," Marles said.

"We will not be deterred from engaging in lawful activities and activities which are there to enforce U.N. sanctions in

respect of North Korea," Marles added.

It was the most serious encounter between the two nations' forces since Australia accused the Chinese destroyer CNS Ningbo of injuring Australian navy divers with sonar pulses in Japanese waters in November. Australia said China disregarded a safety warning to keep away from the Australian frigate HMAS Toowoomba.

China maintains that encounter happened outside Japanese territorial waters and that the Chinese warship caused no harm.

Albanese said the encounter would be raised with Chinese Premier Li Qiang when he visits Australia next month.

Albanese referred to the period since 2020 when China ended minister-to-minister discussions with the previous Australian government which lost power at elections in 2022. "One of the things that had broken down over a period of time was any dialogue. Dialogue is important. It's always, always important to have avenues of communication," Albanese told

reporters.

During a visit to China earlier in November, Albanese invited Chinese President Xi Jinping to visit Australia for the first time in a decade as bilateral relations have improved in recent years from unprecedented lows. He said Tuesday that Xi would not visit Australia this year.

But Albanese said he expected to have "some face-to-face engagement" with the Chinese leader when they both attend G20 and APEC summits late this year.

Australian National University expert on the navy and former naval officer Jennifer Parker described the Chinese use of flares as "incredibly dangerous." "If the helicopter had ingested one of the flares into its engine, it could've shut down the engines of the helicopter and we could have seen the helicopter need to ditch with potential injuries or loss of life," Parker told Australian Broadcasting Corp.

"So this isn't normal by any stretch of the imagination," Parker added. "Impeding its flight path I would interpret as a breach of international law."

# Nepal's ruling coalition party splits

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

The Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal (JSP-N), one of the coalition partners in Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda-led government, has split after a majority of its lawmakers and over two dozen central committee members applied for a new party at the Election Commission. A faction of the JSP-N led by the party's federal council chair Ashok Rai registered the application for a new party while the party's chair Deputy Prime Minister Upendra Yadav, who is also minister for health and population, is on a trip abroad.

Pradip Yadav, a lawmaker of the JSP-N, said that 29 central committee members and seven lawmakers have jointly applied to form a new party.

Of the party's 12 House of Representatives members, seven - Rai, Sushila Sherstha, Pradip Yadav, Nawal Kishor Sah, Ranju Kumari Jha, Birendra Mahato and Hasina Khan - have supported the new party named 'Janata Samajbadi Party' (without the 'Nepal' of the mother party).

The Election Commission on

Monday officially recognised the Ashok Rai-led Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP) as a new political party.

Party insiders said that Rai registered the new party at the advice of Prime Minister Prachanda to counter Yadav, whose relations with the ruling alliance have soured lately.

There are reports Yadav was trying to ally with the opposition Nepali Congress and the ruling party alliance CPN-Unified Socialist-led by Madhav Kumar Nepal after NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba reportedly offered the Prime Minister's post to Yadav to topple the Prachanda-led government.

However, the ruling coalition consisting of the CPN-UML led by K P Sharma Oli and the CPN (Maoist Center) has managed to maintain a narrow majority in the Parliament with the latest political developments.

Leaders of the Rai-led faction claimed they had to revolt against the party leadership as Yadav was running the party in an autocratic way.

"The chair ran the party unilaterally and disrespected law-

makers," Pradip said.

Forest and Environment Minister Nawal Kishor Sah Sudi, who also quit the party, claimed that the need for a new outfit was felt after the chair tried to break the ruling coalition.

"We took this decision for the stability of the incumbent government," Sudi said. "The party chair (Yadav) is against this coalition but we will continue to support this government."

However, the party establishment's leaders said the party has not split. Just a dissident faction has parted ways, they claimed.

The split in the JSP-N will not affect the government's stability at the moment, said Central Member of CPN-Maoist Centre Sunil Kumar Manandhar, who is also the former Minister for Environment amidst speculations that it might affect the coalition government.

Unless the CPN-Unified Socialist and JSP-N withdraw support from the government there is no need to seek a vote of confidence by the Prachanda government, Manandhar added.

# Powerful storms bring tornadoes to Oklahoma, hail to Kansas

AP ■ OKLAHOMA CITY

Powerful storms have erupted in the central United States, bringing tornadoes to rural Oklahoma and large hail in parts of Kansas, with forecasters warning that the dangerous weather could stretch into the early hours of Tuesday amid a rare high-risk weather warning for the two states.

"You can't rely on waiting to see tornadoes before sheltering tonight," the National Weather Service said Monday.

Gusty winds and heavy rains began Monday afternoon, while tornadoes were spotted after dark skirting northern Oklahoma, including one that touched down about a 45-minute drive north of Tulsa.



At one point, a storm in the small town of Covington "produced tornadoes off and on for over an hour," the National Weather Service said. Throughout the area, wind farm turbines spun rapidly in the wind and blinding rain. In Kansas, some areas were

Plains and Midwest have been hammered by tornadoes this spring.

Oklahoma's State Emergency Operations Centre, which coordinates storm response from a bunker near the state Capitol, remains activated from last weekend's deadly storms. The Weather Service said more than 3.4 million people, 1,614 schools and 159 hospitals in Oklahoma, portions of southern Kansas and far northern Texas, faced the most severe threat for tornadoes on Monday. Monte Tucker, a farmer and rancher in the western Oklahoma town of Sweetwater, had spent Monday putting some of his tractors and heavy equipment in barns to protect it from hail.

# Xi Jinping begins visit to Serbia

AP ■ BELGRADE

Chinese leader Xi Jinping's visit to European ally Serbia on Tuesday falls on a symbolic date: the 25th anniversary of the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade during NATO's air war over Kosovo. US jets dropped five bombs on the Chinese Embassy compound in the Serbian capital on May 7, 1999, setting it ablaze and killing three Chinese nationals. Twenty other people were injured in the incident, which has burdened relations between the two powers ever since.

The Western military alliance had launched the air war in March that year to force then Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic to end a brutal onslaught against ethnic Albanian rebels in Kosovo.

The US at the time apologised

and said the embassy bombing was a mistake that happened due to faulty intelligence. The intended target, Washington said, was the headquarters of a Serbian state arms exporter located on the same street, a few blocks away.

"Imagine that somebody would, even by accident, strike an American Embassy somewhere around the world. The reaction would be immediate," said Sven Biscop, a professor of European foreign and security policy at the Ghent University and Egmont Institute.

"So for a country like China, it is also clear that this is a big thing," he added. "And, of course, it has not been forgotten." Angry protesters in China stormed US diplomatic installations as the bombing fuelled anti-American sentiments and speculation that the attack was intentional rather

than accidental. Mistake over the incident has endured to this day. "We will probably never really conclusively know either way," Biscop said. "But one thing is sure. In war, incidents like that do happen, and I usually tend to go for the most simple explanation rather than try to invent complicated theories."

While straining Beijing's relations with the US, the embassy bombing brought China and Serbia closer together. China has emerged as Serbia's largest provider of foreign direct investment and its second-largest trading partner after the European Union.

Beijing opposed the NATO bombing campaign and has since backed Belgrade's bid to counter the Western-backed push for independence in Kosovo, a former Serbian province. In return, Serbia has

been a loyal ally to Beijing and has opened its doors without restraint to billions of dollars of Chinese investment, even as it formally seeks EU membership.

Signs of pro-China sentiments were clearly visible ahead of Xi's visit on Tuesday and Wednesday. In Belgrade, a huge Chinese flag was placed on a skyscraper along a roadway leading into the city from the airport. Smaller Chinese and Serbian flags could be seen downtown and along a highway. Xi will arrive from France and proceed from Serbia to Hungary as part of his first European tour in five years. He is expected to visit the site of the former embassy on the anniversary date and pay his respects to the bombing victims. A Chinese cultural centre now stands at the spot where the embassy was once located.



# Markets settle lower

HDFC Bank, Reliance, ICICI Bank major drags

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices declined on Tuesday dragged by HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries and ICICI Bank amid concerns over rich valuation of equities. Paring all its early gains, the 30-share BSE Sensex went lower by 383.69 points or 0.52 per cent to settle at 73,511.85. During the day, it tanked 636.28 points or 0.86 per cent to 73,259.26. The NSE Nifty declined 140.20 points or 0.62 per cent to 22,302.50. From the Sensex basket, Power Grid, IndusInd Bank, Tata Motors, JSW Steel, NTPC, HCL Technologies, Tata Steel, ICICI Bank, Mahindra & Mahindra, Axis Bank, HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries were among the major laggards. Among the gainers, Hindustan Unilever climbed over 5 per cent. Tech Mahindra, Nestle, ITC, Wipro, Tata Consultancy



Services and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the other major gainers. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Shanghai settled with gains while Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading higher. Wall Street ended in the green on Monday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.23 per cent

to USD 83.51 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 2,168.75 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark edged up 17.39 points or 0.02 per cent to settle at 73,895.54 on Monday. The NSE Nifty declined 33.15 points or 0.15 per cent to 22,442.70.

# Sebi rejects NSE's proposal to extend trading hours

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi has rejected a proposal by the National Stock Exchange (NSE) to extend the trading hours in the equity derivatives segment citing a lack of feedback from the stock brokers community.

"Currently, there is no plan to extend the timings as Sebi has returned our application as the stock brokers have not given the feedback that Sebi wanted. So, as of now, the extended time frame (plan) is shelved," NSE MD and CEO Ashishkumar Chauhan said in a post-earnings analysts call.

This came after the NSE had urged Sebi to extend trading hours in the equity derivatives segment in a phased manner. This was aimed at potentially curtailing the overnight risk arising from global information flow. Sriram Krishnan, Chief Business Development Officer of NSE, had told PTI



in September that the bourse was planning a session from 6 pm to 9 pm after a break from the closure of the regular session from 9.15 am to 3.30 pm. Based on the response, a gradual extension of the market timing till 11.55 pm was proposed on the lines of commodity derivatives. To begin with, only index derivatives in phase 1 were proposed to be available followed by single stock

efforts to enable the integration of stocks and commodities trading on a single exchange. With regard to NSE's IPO, Chauhan said that "situations remain as in". Last month, he said that NSE is awaiting approval from Sebi to kickstart the initial public offering process. The NSE's listing plans have been on the backburner amid a Sebi probe against the exchange and some of its top officials. During the fourth quarter ended March 2024, NSE reported a 20 per cent year-on-year increase in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,488 crore. Further, the consolidated operating revenues stood at Rs 4,625 crore for the January-March quarter of the financial year 2023-24, marking a surge of 34 per cent year-on-year. Apart from trading, the total revenue was also supported by other revenue lines, including listing, index services, data services and co-location facility.

# SRMIST celebrates World Intellectual Property Day



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

SRM Institute of Science and Technology (SRMIST) marked the World Intellectual Property Day 2024 with a grand event held on May 7, 2024, at the TP Ganesan Auditorium Mini Hall-2. This event was organised by the SRM Directorate of Entrepreneurship and Innovation (DEI). The event commenced with a welcome address delivered by the DEI Associate Director Dr. Shantanu Patil, setting a celebratory tone for the day's proceedings. The Vice Chancellor Prof. C. Muthamizhchelvan, inaugurated the event amidst enthusiasm and anticipation.

# Rupee settles on flat note, higher by 1 paisa at 83.51 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled higher by 1 paisa at 83.51 against the US dollar on Tuesday, amid a negative trend in domestic equities and strong dollar demand. Forex traders said elevated significant foreign fund outflows in the international market dented investors' sentiments. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.48 against the greenback. The unit hit an intra-day high of 83.47 and a low of 83.52 against the greenback. The domestic unit finally settled at 83.51 (provisional) against the dollar, 1 paisa



higher than its previous close. On Monday, the rupee settled 7 paise lower at 83.52 against the US dollar. The Indian rupee traded almost flat on weak domestic markets and positive US

Dollar. FII outflows also weighed on the rupee, said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. However, a soft tone in crude oil prices cushioned the

downside. The US Dollar gained on weak Asian currencies after the Australian Dollar fell amid a less-hawkish-than-expected tone of the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA). "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on weak domestic markets and positive dollar amid geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. "However, softness in crude oil prices and positive European and Asian markets may support the rupee at lower levels. Any intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may also support the domestic currency. USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.30 to Rs 83.75," Choudhary added.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.10 per cent to USD 83.25 per barrel. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was at 105.26, higher by 0.20 per cent. On the domestic equity market front, Sensex declined 383.69 points, or 0.52 per cent, to settle at 73,511.85 points. The Nifty fell 140.20 points, or 0.62 per cent, to close at 22,302.50 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Monday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,168.75 crore, according to exchange data.

# SRF Q4 profit falls 25 per cent to ₹422 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Chemical firm SRF Ltd on Tuesday reported a 25 per cent decline in its net profit to Rs 422 crore for the quarter ended March 2024 on lower income. "The company's Profit After Tax (PAT) decreased 25 per cent from Rs 562 crore to Rs 422 crore in Q4FY24 when compared with the corresponding period of the last year," SRF said in a statement. The consolidated revenue of the company declined 6 per cent to Rs 3,570 crore in the fourth quarter of the last fiscal from Rs 3,778 crore in the year-ago period. In the 2023-24 fiscal, SRF's revenue decreased 12 per cent to Rs 13,139 crore from Rs 14,870 crore in the preceding year. The company's profit after tax decreased 38 per cent to Rs 1,336 crore in the last fiscal from Rs 2,162 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal. SRF Chairman and Managing Director Ashish Bharat Ram said, "While the general performance has been weak, we have seen a reasonable recovery in our chemicals business in the fourth quarter, as we had envisaged. We believe that this recovery will pick up pace in the second half of FY25." In 2024, SRF commemorates 50 years since the start of manufacturing. With an annual turnover of Rs 12,910 crore (USD 1.6 billion), the company's diversified business portfolio covers fluorochemicals, specialty chemicals, packaging films, technical textiles and coated and laminated fabrics. The company has 13 manufacturing plants in India and one each in Thailand, South Africa and Hungary. It exports to 100-plus countries.

# Number of ghost shopping malls rise to 64 in 2023 across eight major cities, reveals report



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The number of ghost shopping malls — those with vacancy of more than 40 per cent — increased to 64 last year from 57 in 2022 across eight major cities as retailers and consumers are preferring premium properties, according to Knight Frank. Real estate consultant Knight Frank India on Tuesday released a report titled 'Think India Think Retail 2024' capturing the dynamics of shopping centres and high streets across 29 cities. The consultant found a sharp rise in low-performing retail assets across eight major Tier I cities. As many as 64 shopping malls with about 13.3 million square feet of gross leasable area have been categorised as 'Ghost Shopping Centre' in 2023. In terms of area, this is up 58 per cent from 8.4 million square feet in the preceding year. As a result of the rise in ghost shopping centres, Knight Frank estimated the loss of value to be at Rs 6,700 crore or USD 798 million in 2023. National Capital Region (NCR) accounted for the highest ghost shopping centre stock measuring at 5.3

million sq ft (rise of 58 per cent Year-on-Year), followed by Mumbai with 2.1 million sq ft (rise of 86 per cent YoY) and Bengaluru with 2 million sq ft (rise of 46 per cent YoY). Hyderabad is the only city to record a decline in the ghost shopping centre stock by 19 per cent YoY to 0.9 million sq ft in 2023. The sharpest rise in ghost shopping centres was recorded in Kolkata (237 per cent YoY), albeit at a lower base. Of the total 64 ghost malls across top 8 cities, Knight Frank data showed that 21 such malls are in Delhi-NCR, 12 in Bengaluru, 10 in Mumbai, 6 in Kolkata, 5 in Hyderabad, 4 in Ahmedabad and 3 each in Chennai and Pune. "The momentum of consumption, propelled by rising disposable incomes, a youthful demographic, and urbanisation, tilts in favour of the organised retail sector," Shishir Baijal, Chairman & Managing Director of Knight Frank India, said. An enhanced retail experience remains crucial for shoppers, highlighting the significance of physical retail spaces, he added. "Grade A malls have notably excelled, maintaining robust occupancy, foot traffic, and conversion rates, thereby delivering value to their customers.

# JSW Energy profit rises 29 per cent in March quarter

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sajjan Jindal-led JSW Energy on Tuesday posted a 29 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit to Rs 351 crore in the March quarter compared to a year ago mainly on the back of higher revenues. The company had reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 272 crore in the quarter ended on March 31, 2023, according to a BSE filing. "Profit after Tax (consolidated net profit) increased by a robust 29 per cent YoY (year on year) to Rs 351 Crore," it stated. During the quarter, total revenue increased by 3 per cent YoY to Rs 2,879 crore from Rs 2,806 crore in Q4 FY23, it stated. The profit after tax increased by 17 per cent YoY to Rs 1,723 crore in fiscal year 2023-24 crore compared to Rs 1,478 crore in FY23.

# Indian FMCG industry sees 6.5 per cent volume growth in Q4FY24: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian FMCG industry experienced a 6.5 per cent growth in volume terms at a national level in the January-March period of 2024, with rural consumption surpassing urban for the first time in five quarters, according to consumer intelligence firm NielsenIQ. Both food and non-food sectors contributed to the growth in consumption in the first quarter of 2024, but non-food saw almost double the growth as compared to food, NielsenIQ (NIQ) said in its quarterly snapshot for Q1 2024. The FMCG industry has experienced a 6.6 per cent growth in value, attributed to a 6.5 per cent increase in volume at an all-India level. The volume growth for this quarter was higher than Q1 2023, which stood at 3.1 per cent, it added. NIQ Head of Customer Success India, Roosevelt



Dsouza said, "The FMCG industry's growth continues to be driven by consumption trends in Q12024 with rural areas surpassing urban growth for the first time in five quarters." Notably, Dsouza said home and personal care (HPC) categories have outperformed food categories. While food categories witness higher unit purchases, the growth in HPC is largely driven by the popularity of larger pack sizes. The quarterly snapshot pointed out that there is a consumption slowdown in urban and modern trade,

while there is an uptick in rural and traditional trade. "Rural consumption growth has gradually picked up pace and has surpassed urban (growth) in Q12024. Urban sees sequential decline in consumer demand leading to 5.7 per cent this quarter," NIQ said. Within the retail sector, modern trade continues to exhibit strong double-digit volume growth at 14.7 per cent. Traditional trade, on the other hand, experienced stable growth, with volumes registering 5.6 per cent growth in Q1 2024, compared to 5.3 per cent in the previous

quarter (Q4 2023), suggesting that traditional retail channels are holding their ground, it added. According to the snapshot, at a pan India level, both food and non-food sectors contributed to the growth in consumption but non-food saw almost double the growth as compared to food. "More units were purchased in food categories compared to the same period last year, whereas in non-food, more large packs were bought," it said. In Q1 2024, the volume growth in the food sector was 4.8 per cent compared to Q1 2023, down from 5.3 per cent in Q4 2023. This slowdown in growth is primarily due to products falling under staples. In contrast, non-food categories, there is an improvement, with consumption reaching 11.1 per cent in Q1 2024 compared to last year, an increase from the 9.6 per cent recorded in Q4 2023.

# Toy exports marginally down at USD 152.34 million in 2023-24: GTRI report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's toy exports declined marginally to USD 152.34 million in 2023-24 from USD 153.89 million in the previous financial year, according to a report by economic think tank GTRI. The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said that India's toy exports did not benefit much from the mandatory quality control orders. It said that while the domestic measures were primarily aimed at boosting local industry and ensuring safety, they did not significantly enhance India's toy exports. "From FY2020 to FY2022, exports increased modestly from USD 129.6 million to USD 177 million. However, by FY2024, exports decreased to USD 152.3 million," the report said. Imports, however, increased to USD 64.92 million in 2023-

24 from USD 62.37 million in 2022-23. GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said that the QCO checked substandard imports from China but did not result in higher exports from India. Though India has taken decisive steps since 2020 to curb the inflow of substandard toy imports, especially from China, and strengthen the domestic toy industry, but "India needs to take more comprehensive approach for development of the industry," he said. The report proposes a comprehensive strategy aimed at developing India's toy industry and boosting exports. He suggested steps such as developing a robust domestic ecosystem, encouraging global toy brands to manufacture in India, learning from China, and localise production of key inputs.



"Invest in research and development to foster innovation in toy design and functionality, positioning Indian toys competitively on the global stage. Strengthen partnerships between toy manufacturers and design institutes to continuously introduce innovative products," Srivastava said.

The report recommended setting up specialized toy manufacturing hubs to reduce costs and increase efficiency; modernising traditional Indian toys while preserving their cultural value to create unique products. "Support small and medium enterprises in leveraging digital marketing and

promote Indian toys at international fairs to establish global connections," it said. It also asked India to invite international toy manufacturers who operate in China, such as Hasbro, Mattel, Lego, Spin Master, and MGA Entertainment, to consider setting up production facilities in India.

This move could help shift part of the global toy production market to India. Further, it asked to reduce dependency on imports by developing local production capabilities for critical toy-making materials and components, such as glass eyes for dolls, beads, imitation stones, various types of plastics, electric motors, and remote control apparatus. This step will decrease costs and enhance the self-sufficiency of the Indian toy industry, the GTRI said. "Imports of inputs used for making toys is much higher than import of finished toys. For example, we imported glass eyes for dolls or other toys, beads and imitation stones of value USD 137.2 million in FY2024," Srivastava said. He added that India needs to make separate strategies for each group of toys such as plush toys like stuffed animals

(world trade is about USD 7 billion); educational toys (world trade is about USD 6 billion); construction toys like LEGO (USD 10 billion); action figures and dolls (USD 10 billion); electronics (USD 15 billion); board games and puzzles (USD 9 billion); and outdoor and sports toys (USD 5 billion). In 2022, the global market imported toys valued at about USD 60.3 billion. Dominating this market, China exported toys worth USD 48.3 billion, securing an 80 per cent share of the global exports. Other significant contributors to the global toy export market include the Czech Republic with exports of USD 3.2 billion, the European Union with USD 2.7 billion, Vietnam with USD 1.7 billion, and Hong Kong with USD 1.1 billion. In contrast, India's share in the global toy export market

is minimal, totalling USD 167 million, which represents only 0.3 per cent of the global exports, ranking it 27th, the report said. On the import side, India ranks even lower, at 61st, with toy imports amounting to USD 60 million. The largest importer of toys is the USA, which alone procured toys worth USD 22.2 billion. It is followed by the European Union (USD 9 billion), Japan (USD 2.8 billion), and Canada (USD 1.6 billion). India raised import duties on toys beginning in February 2020. The basic customs duty was increased from 20 per cent to 60 per cent and then to 70 per cent in July 2021. Implemented from January 2021, the QCO mandates that all toys sold in India, whether domestically produced or imported, must comply with specific Indian Standards for safety.



# Stimac announces second list of probables for World Cup qualifiers

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Injured central defender Sandesh Jhingam missed out as Indian senior men's team head coach Igor Stimac on Tuesday announced his second list of 15 probables for the Bhubaneswar camp ahead of the FIFA World Cup 2026 preliminary joint qualification round 2 matches against Kuwait and Qatar. The first list of probables was announced on Saturday. Defender Jhingam, who sustained a right knee injury during India's Asian Cup group match against Syria in January, missed out of the list. The 26 players from the first list will begin training in the Odisha capital on May 10. The 15 players from the second list, comprising players from Mumbai City FC and Mohun Bagan SG, who contested the ISL Cup final, will join the camp on May 15. A total of 41 players will take part in the national camp. The Blue Tigers will face Kuwait in



Kolkata on June 6 before travelling away to take on Qatar on June 11 in their last two matches of Group A. India are currently placed second in the group, with four points from four matches. The top two teams in the

group will qualify for Round 3 of the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers and book their berth at the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027. **The second list of 15 probables for the Bhubaneswar**

**(training from May 15):** Goalkeepers: Phurba Tepla Lachenpa, Vishal Kaithi  
Defenders: Akash Mishra, Anwar Ali, Mehtab Singh, Rahul Bheke, Subhasish Bose  
Midfielders: Anirudh Thapa, Deepak Tangri, Lalengmawia

Ralte, Lallianzuala Chhangte, Liston Colaco, Sahal Abdul Samad  
**Forwards:** Manvir Singh, Vikram Partap Singh  
**The first list of 26 probables for the Bhubaneswar camp (training from May 10):**  
**Goalkeepers:** Amrinder Singh, Gurpreet Singh Sandhu.  
**Defenders:** Amey Ganesh Ranawade, Jay Gupta, Lalchungnunga, Muhammad Hammad, Narender, Nikhil Poojary, Roshan Singh Naorem.  
**Midfielders:** Brandon Fernandes, Edmund Lalrindika, Imran Khan, Isak Vanlalratfela, Jeakson Singh Thounaojam, Mahesh Singh Naorem, Mohammad Yasir, Nandhakumar Sekar, Rahul Kannoly Praveen, Suresh Singh Wangjam, Vibin Mohanan.  
**Forwards:** David Lalhansanga, Jithin Madathil Subran, Lalrinzuala, Parthib Sundar Gogoi, Rahim Ali, Sunil Chhetri.

# What to know about journey of Olympic torch to Paris

**AP ■ PARIS**  
The Olympic torch will finally enter France when it reaches the southern seaport of Marseille on Wednesday. And it's already been quite a journey. After being lit by the sun's rays on April 16 in Ancient Olympia, the torch was carried around Greece before leaving Athens aboard a three-mast ship named Belem, headed for Marseille. The Belem was first used in 1896, the same year the modern Olympics came back. It will be accompanied by more than 1,000 boats as it parades around the Bay of Marseille, before arriving at the Vieux-Port, or Old Port, and docking on a pontoon resembling an athletics track. Torch bearers will carry the flame across Marseille the next day, the last stretch running on the roof of the famed Stade Vélodrome, home to Marseille's passionate soccer fans. After leaving Marseille, a vast relay route will be undertaken before the torch odyssey ends on July 27 in Paris. Here's a look at where the torch goes before reaching Paris:  
**MONT-SAINT-MICHEL:** The torch is due to reach France on June 18 in the southern city of Nice. Located in an area of raised land surrounded by water, the island fortress looks like it was created for a Game of Thrones film set. But it's real, and very old. So old that it already existed during the Hundred Years' War between England and France, from 1337 to 1453. An English attack was even fended off. Later it became a prison, and in 1979 it was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Every year swarms of tourists are in awe of its raw and



haunting beauty. **ACROSS THE OCEANS:** The torch travel route is even more unique considering it takes a detour through France's overseas territories called the Relais des Océans, or Ocean Relay. Riding the waves of the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Ocean, it will be in French Guiana on June 9 before hitting New Caledonia on June 11. Next is the island of Réunion at Saint-Denis — coincidentally the same name as the Paris suburb with the Olympic village — before reaching Peapeite in the surfing realm of Tahiti, then Baie-Mahault in Gaudeloupe and finally Fort-de-France in Martinique. The torch comes back to France on June 18 in the southern city of Nice. **FROM SEA BREEZE TO HEAVY CHEESE:** Just five days after landing on French shores, the torch heads up the Alpine mountain pass of Chamonix-Mont-Blanc for Olympic Day on June 23. The Haute-Savoie region is known for its outstanding Chamonix ski resort, which hosts World Cup races, for sweeping views across glacier fields to nearby Italy, and — some would say more importantly — as a producer of fine cheese. A Cheese Olympics, should it be invented, would feature a

sturdy crew of eight competitors from Savoie: Abondance, Beaufort, Chevrotin, Emmental, Reblochon, Tome, Tomme and the heavy-duty Raclette. **HEADING FOR PARIS:** After leaving fromage-friendly Savoie, torch bearers will digest in the Doubs region of eastern France, and then visit the Alsace city of Strasbourg in the northeast. Three days later the torch will reach Verdun, the site of one of the most horrific battles of World War I. From February to December 1916, more than 700,000 French and German soldiers were killed or wounded at the Battle of Verdun. **BASTILLE DAY ARRIVAL:** The torch is to arrive on the streets of Paris on July 14 — hardly surprising, considering it's Bastille Day, France's national day. The torch will stay the following day in Paris, then exit again before snaking back to the French capital via Versailles — home to the resplendent Royal Palace — and the suburbs of Nanterre on July 24 and Seine Saint-Denis on July 25. From there, it's to travel a very short distance back to Paris on July 26, the eve of the grandiose opening ceremony where athletes will parade on more than 80 boats at sunset on the Seine River.

## Atalanta comes from behind to beat Salernitana and improve Champions League chances

**AP ■ ROME**  
Atalanta came from a goal down to beat Salernitana 2-1 in Serie A and improve its chances of a place in next season's Champions League. The Bergamo-based club rose above Roma and into fifth place. The top five qualify automatically for the Champions League. Atalanta rested some regular starters with one eye on Thursday's second leg of the Europe League semifinal against Marseille. It went behind after 18 minutes when Loum Tchaooua scored against the run of play. But Atalanta woke up in the second half. Gianluca Scamacca converted a nice headed assist by Mario Pasalic and six minutes later Teun Koopmeiners stroked home from outside the box.

Salernitana remained on the bottom of the table and will spend next season in Serie B. **UDINESE DRAWS WITH NAPOLI:** Udinese equalized deep in stoppage time to draw with Napoli 1-1 at home and earn a vital point in its fight against relegation. Substitute Isaac Success was surrounded by defenders but managed to squeeze a shot home in the second minute of stoppage time. Until then, it had looked like a certain defeat for the home side



after Victor Osimhen scored his 15th league goal five minutes into the second half. Osimhen rose to power home an inviting cross from Matteo Politano. The Nigeria international also had a goal chalked off 10 minutes from the end. Udinese remained third from the bottom and in the relegation zone but it was just two points behind Empoli and Frosinone. Three rounds remain and six teams are fighting to avoid joining Salernitana in the second division.

# Gukesh, Arjun and Praggnanandhaa in Warsaw for Superbet Rapid and blitz

**PTI ■ WARSAW**  
Fresh from his historic triumph at the Candidates' tournament, Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh will compete in the Superbet Rapid and Blitz chess tournament which begins here on Wednesday. A part of the Grand Chess tour, the event will also see GM R Praggnanandhaa in action for the first time since the Candidates while world number seven Erigaisie Arjun is the other Indian in the 10-player field for the tournament which will have nine rounds of rapid and 18 rounds of blitz to decide the winner. The tournament favourite is none other than world number one Magnus Carlsen



of Norway who starts as the top seed. The USD 175000 prize money event has as many as six wild cards in the first of the five events. The tour also has a bonus prize pool of USD 175000 for the top three finishers out of which a UDS 100000 is reserved for the winner. The four players who have signed up for the entire tour are Gukesh, Praggnanandhaa, Anish Giri of Holland and Nodirbek Abdusattarov of Uzbekistan. All of them will take part in four out of five events out of which two will be classical and remaining

three will be rapid and blitz. Besides Carlsen and Arjun, the other four wild cards have been given to Wei Yi of China, Duda Jan-Krzysztof of Poland, Vincent Keymer of Germany and Kirill Shevchenko of Romania. Set to play four out of five events in the tour, Gukesh looks like one of the tour favourites. The Chennai-based player also has a World Championship match to play later this year against Ding Liren of China and he surely has his hands full. Praggnanandhaa is a known expert in the faster version of the game and has beaten Carlsen a few times already. If there is one opponent that creates fear for the opposition — that's this 18-year-old Praggnanandhaa.

Arjun might have missed out on a Candidates berth very narrowly but has quickly put that setback aside. Banking on open events that elite players seldom play, Arjun struck back like a hurricane and briefly became top Indian rated player too till Gukesh surpassed him. Arjun is one uncompromising player in the world who fears none and wants to be his best, no matter who the opposition is. For Carlsen, the biggest opposition will come from the Indian trio only, both in Rapid and Blitz. Gukesh may not be the best when it comes to faster version of the game but the reason why he is playing is a clear signal that he wants to get better at it.



## India's Kavin Quintal bags top 10 finish 2024 FIM Junior GP World Championship

**PTI ■ CHENNAI**  
Ace Indian rider Kavin Quintal made a stunning debut in the 2024 FIM JuniorGP World Championship with a top-10 finish in the Stk European class in Round 2 at the Circuito do Estoril, outside Lisbon, Portugal. Fifty Motorsport team, Kavin clocked 23:19.001s for the 11 laps, just 34.866s adrift of the winner Adrian Rodriguez of Spain (SF Racing) and just 16.092s off fifth-placed Lorenzo Della Porta (Yamaha GV Racing) the current championship leader and 2019 Moto3 champion. The 18-year-old faced early setbacks as he crashed during out-lap in qualifying and had to start the race from the 30th position on the grid. The stock race was red flagged due to deteriorating track conditions in the rain in the second lap, but Kavin had

already moved up to 19th place by then. He navigated through the treacherous conditions overtaking his competition one-by-one and crossed the finish line in an impressive ninth position, for a top-10 finish among 36 riders. The stock race is a stepping stone for Moto2 and JuniorGP World Championship, a new FIM event for juniors on to the road for MotoGP. Having begun racing as a 13-year-old, Kavin became the youngest rider to bag points in the FMSCI Indian National Motorcycle Championship in 2018, switched to Honda Talent Cup in 2019. He made his international debut in the Asia Talent Cup in 2020 and represented India thrice in the Asian Road Racing Championships, with two top-10 finishes in 2023. Kavin's next race will be Round 3 of the JuniorGP Stk at Barcelona from May 16-19.

## Thiago Silva to return to Brazilian club Fluminense after leaving Chelsea at the end of the season

**AP ■ RIO DE JANEIRO**  
Veteran defender Thiago Silva will return to Brazilian club Fluminense after leaving Chelsea at the end of the season. The 39-year-old Silva said last week he was not extending his contract with Chelsea and Fluminense announced Tuesday that the center back is joining on a

free transfer. The defending Copa Libertadores champion posted a picture of Silva wearing a Fluminense shirt on social media with the text: "The monster is back." Silva played for Fluminense between 2006 and 2008. He left for AC Milan in 2009, and three years later joined Paris Saint-Germain. The Brazilian joined Chelsea in



2020 and won the Champions League the following year. The defender was in Brazil's squad for the last four World Cups. He also won the 2013 Confederations Cup and the 2019 Copa America with the national team. Silva is expected to join Fluminense once Brazil's transfer window reopens in July.



## Late Baldé header steals dramatic 4-3 win for Lyon at Lille

**AP ■ LILLE**  
Lyon scored a dramatic last-minute winner to beat Lille 4-3 in a topsy-turvy French league thriller. Mama Baldé got the winner with a superb header in the second minute of stoppage time to shock a home side that led 1-0, 2-0, and 3-2. Lyon's fourth win in five league games ended Lille's run of three consecutive home victories. Bafodé Diakité put Lille ahead with a fine header after 20 minutes, and Edon Zhegrova added a second 16 minutes later when he fired a low shot home from outside the box. Goals from Said Benrahma in the 65th and substitute Malick Fofana eight minutes from time brought Lyon level. Bafodé Diakité gave Lille the lead again three minutes later with his second goal. Alexandre Lacazette made it 3-3 with two minutes remaining and Baldé grabbed the spotlight. Lyon moved into seventh place in Ligue 1, two points behind Lens.

# Olympic bound Preeti among seven Indians to win gold at Asian U-22 & Youth Boxing Championships

**PTI ■ ASTANA (KAZAKHSTAN)**  
Paris Olympics-bound Preeti was among seven Indian boxers to have clinched the gold medal as the country's medals tally hit a high of 43 at the conclusion of the Asian U-22 & Youth Boxing Championships here. Preeti (54kg) made a remarkable comeback after going down 0-5 in the first round to register a 3-0 win in the final against Kazakhstan's Bazarova Elna. The Indian boxers won 12 gold, 14 silver and 17 bronze medals to finish second behind hosts Kazakhstan who

bagged a total of 48 medals. The first gold medal on Tuesday went to Vishvanath Suresh in the 48kg category with the reigning defending Kazakhstan's Karap Yernar 5-0. Nikhil (57kg) defeated Sabyr Yerbolat of Kazakhstan with a referee stopped contest (RSC) win in the third round. Akash Gorkha (60kg) secured a 4-1 win over Kazakhstan's Ruslan Kuzeubayev to win India's third gold medal in the men's category. In the women's category, Poonam Poonia (57kg) and Prachi (63kg) defeated Kazakhstan's Sakysh Anel and

Anar Tursynbek respectively with an identical 4-1 scoreline. Later, Muskan (75kg) was made to work hard by Uzbekistan's Zokirova Aziza for a 3-2 split decision but one that gave India's its seventh gold medal. Preet Malik (67kg), Guddi (48kg), Tamanna (50kg), Saneh (70kg) and Alfiya Pathan (81kg) finished their campaigns with silver medals after going down in their respective finals. The Indian U-22 team grabbed a total of 21 medals including seven gold, five silver and nine bronze medals.



**LIST OF MEDAL WINNERS:**  
**Youth medallists:** Gold - Men's: Brijesh Tamta (48kg), Aryan Hooda (51kg), Yashwardhan Singh (63.5kg); Women's: Laxmi (50kg), Nisha (52kg); Silver - Men's: Sagar Jakhar (60kg), Priyanshu (71kg), Rahul Kundu (75kg), Aryan (92kg); Women's: Tamanna (54kg), Nikita Chand (60kg), Shrushti Sathe (63kg), Rudrika (75kg), Khushi Pooniya (81kg); Bronze - Men's: Sumit (67kg), Sahil (80kg), Lakshay Rathi (92+kg); Women's: Annu (48kg), Yatri Patel (57kg),

Parthavi Grewal (66kg), Akansha Phalasalwal (70kg), Nirjhara Bana (+81kg). **U-22 medallists:** Gold - Men's: Vishvanath Suresh (48kg), Nikhil (57kg), Akash Gorkha (60kg); Women's: Preeti (54kg), Poonam Poonia (57kg), Prachi (63kg), Muskan (75kg); Silver - Men's: Preet Malik (67kg); Women's - Guddi (48kg), Tamanna (50kg), Saneh (70kg), Alfiya Pathan (81kg); Bronze - Men's: M Jadumani (51kg), Ajay Kumar (63.5kg), Ankush (71kg), Dhruv Singh (80kg), Jugnoo (86kg), Yuvraj (92kg); Women's - Devika (52kg), Kajal (66kg), Ritika (+81kg).





# INCONSISTENT SRH TAKE ON LSG IN PUSH FOR PLAYOFFS SPOT

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Sunrisers Hyderabad will be eager to move on from their underwhelming batting display when they host Lucknow Super Giants in a crucial Indian Premier League match here on Wednesday.

Both teams are locked in at 12 points from 11 games with SRH making the top four cut based on a slightly superior net run rate of -0.065 compared to LSG's -0.371.

The Sunrisers find themselves in a fierce competition for the top four spot with Kolkata Knight Riders (16), Rajasthan Royals (16) and Chennai Super Kings (12) stationed above them on the points table. The winner of the duel will take a leap in the playoff race. The Pat Cummins-led side has ample talent but has been unable to hold on to a winning run recently. Sunrisers have lost three of their last four matches, mainly because their destructive batting line-up hasn't delivered.

In their last match against Mumbai Indians, which they lost by seven wickets, they failed to put up a good target on the board, which has been



their strong suit this season. Barring Travis Head, who has been their stand out performer, the other batters in the side have faced a recent slump. After displaying his power-hitting ability, young opener Abhishek Sharma has

breached the 30-run mark just once in the last four games. And while SRH head coach Daniel Vettori has conceded that the openers are not expected to do the job all the time, the middle order needs to step up.

The flamboyant Heinrich Klaasen has also been unable to strike the ball consistently and Nitish Reddy too has been patchy. The bowlers have fared better compared to their batting counterparts. T Natarajan has been

consistent with the ball while seasoned seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar also seems to have found his mojo after his incisive spell helped SRH eke out a one-run win against RR. LSG, on the other hand, have to get over their overall lacklustre display against Kolkata Knight Riders, when they not only conceded the first-ever 200 plus score at the Ekana Stadium but also folded their innings at 137.

It was a day when skipper KL Rahul failed to anchor the innings while the likes of Marcus Stoinis and Nicholas Pooran were unable to get the big shots when needed. Ayush Badoni has had a subdued run in this IPL and the uncapped Indian player would be keen to shrug off the rustiness. LSG's struggles with the ball have been majorly due to the lack of firepower in their pace-bowling department.

With tearaway pacer Mayank Yadav ruled out of the IPL and left-arm pacer Mohsin Khan also picking up an injury, the onus will be on Afghan quick Naveen-ul-Haq, young Yash Thakur, Stoinis and spinners Krunal Pandya and Ravi Bishnoi to deliver.



# No plans to rest Bumrah yet: MI batting coach Pollard

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai Indians have no plans to rest ace India pacer Jasprit Bumrah ahead of the T20 World Cup even though they are out of contention for the IPL playoffs, said batting coach Kieron Pollard.

MI defeated Sunrisers Hyderabad by seven wickets here on Monday after Suryakumar Yadav (102 not out) struck his second IPL century to help his team chase down a target of 174 with 16 balls to spare.

The win helped MI end their four-match losing streak and record only their fourth win in 12 matches. "I certainly haven't had any discussions about that," Pollard told media after the game when asked if there are any plans to rest Bumrah from MI's remaining two matches keeping in mind the upcoming T20 World Cup. "I don't think that's my role and function at this point in time. But let's see what happens. We are all here to play an entire IPL. Sometimes when we think too far ahead of different things, thinking about World Cups, all these things could affect performances even from before the team was selected. "For us and in our camp, the most important thing is finishing off the IPL and let's see what happens after that. When he leaves the IPL and he goes into the Indian team, I think that's where that concession will take place."

MI's last IPL game is against Lucknow Super Giants at home on May 17. The T20 World Cup, to be co-hosted by USA and the West Indies, will begin on June 1.

Pollard said as a batting coach the most difficult aspect of coaching an all-round batter like Suryakumar is to curb his attacking instinct. "He's one, who, by nature, instinctively, is very aggressive. He wants to take the bowler's on more often than not. At times it's just a matter of understanding the situation and respecting the new ball when it's moving around," Pollard said.

"If the conditions are not suitable for a certain amount of shot making, having that discipline in order to be there for a period of time and they'll get into your work. "I think that would be the hardest thing - to try to curb the attacking instinct. But it's not something you want to curb too much and get them in a defensive frame of mind because of the direction the sport is heading now in terms of the amount of runs being scored."

**SRH'S ASSISTANT COACH HELMOT DOFFS HIS HAT TO SURYAKUMAR:** SRH's assistant coach Simon Helmot said Suryakumar played an exceptional innings to take the game away from his side and the world No 1 T20I batter will have a lot of influence in the T20 World Cup. "On some days you just have to

take your hat off and say well played and well played to him. He's an exceptional cricketer and he's always going to demand a spot in the Indian team and I'm sure he'll have an influence in the World Cup," he said.

"It's very difficult (to bowl at Suryakumar) and you guys have seen him close up for many years as I have. He's a very difficult batsman to match up with when he's in that sort of frame of mind, that sort of mood." Helmot said the conditions assisted swing bowling with the new ball in both the innings which forced the batters to adjust their game.

"Travis (Head) has been one of our best players this season at the top of the order. But even he found it difficult at times to time the ball out in the middle on this particular track and that will happen at different times during the season," he said. Helmot said not losing their fourth spot in the IPL points table was the biggest positive for SRH in a resounding defeat. "The positives are that we're still fourth in the ladder. It's a really tight competition; one of the tightest competitions we've had in IPL for years that I can remember," he said. "For us, we've got our very first fly tomorrow (Tuesday) and then play the next day against Lucknow (on Wednesday). For us, it's (about) very quickly get through over this game," he added.

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Former Australia captain Michael Clarke does not read much into Rohit Sharma's string of poor scores, but suggests that the "fatigued" Indian skipper take a break to freshen up ahead of the T20I World Cup. Rohit, who will lead India in the next month's 20-team global showpiece, has four single-digit scores in his last five outings for his franchise Mumbai Indians in the ongoing IPL. The 37-year-old has had a busy season this year with an intense five-Test series preceding the IPL for Mumbai Indians, who are all but eliminated from the race to the playoffs this year. "Rohit, being the wise judge of his own performances, will

# 'Fatigued' Rohit Sharma needs break to freshen up ahead of T20I World Cup: Michael Clarke

undoubtedly be disappointed, especially considering his strong start. In my view, he might be feeling a bit fatigued as well," Clarke told Star Sports. "A break to freshen up could do wonders for him, but as the Indian captain and a key player for Mumbai Indians, you're not getting a break. He's going to have to find form," Clarke continued. Rohit played as an impact substitute in their match against Kolkata Knight Riders last week, raising some concerns for the Indian camp. However, he played a full game



against Sunrisers Hyderabad three days later. Clarke said it is only a matter of time before Rohit gets back to his usual elements as a batter.

"He was in a great mood. He's happy, which is a really good sign. He doesn't seem to be struggling with his timing; it's just a matter of getting out," he

said. "With someone like Rohit, it's only a matter of time before he finds his form again. Hopefully, he stresses less and focuses on his game because he's too talented to keep missing out. He's at his best when he's timing the ball, rather than trying to force it," he added. Clarke, meanwhile, also had praise in store for Rohit's deputy for the World Cup and MI skipper Hardik Pandya, who returned with 4-0-31-3 in their seven-wicket win over SRH on Monday.

## OTHER SPORTS

# Man United in crisis: Transfers, tactics and takeover helped lead up to 4-0 humiliation at Palace

AP ■ MANCHESTER (ENGLAND)

A bad season just keeps on getting worse for Manchester United. The 20-time English champion was routed 4-0 by Crystal Palace on Monday and faces the prospect of its lowest finish in the Premier League era, as well as a season without European soccer. Champions League qualification was already beyond Erik ten Hag's troubled team before its latest defeat. Now, sitting eighth in the standings, even the third-tier Conference League could end up out of reach.

On current form, United might need to beat Manchester City in this month's FA Cup final to secure a place in the Europa League. On current form, there is little chance of that happening. One of the world's most storied clubs is in a mess and the humiliation at the hands of

Palace was the latest evidence of that. A record of 13 league defeats is the most United has suffered in a Premier League campaign. In all competitions that number rises to 18, including four losses in six games as United crashed out of the Champions League at the group stage. Ten Hag's team has conceded 81 goals in all competitions, which is the most since 1976-77. According to stats company Opta, United has also spent more time in a losing position in league games this season than a winning one. Its only win in its last seven league games was against last-placed Sheffield United. United's lowest finish in the Premier League era - which it long dominated, winning 13 titles under former manager Alex Ferguson - was seventh under David Moyes in 2013-14. Here are some of the reasons



behind United's fall this season. **INJURIES:** United's substitutes' bench against Palace included six teenagers and two goalkeepers, such as the level of the injury crisis which has gripped Ten Hag's team. Jonny Evans, the veteran 36-year-old center back, was rushed back from injury to cover for the absent Harry Maguire and midfielder

by absences. Even Ten Hag accepted there was no excuse for Monday's performance. "The players who were available should do better. It's a deserved defeat," he said. **TACTICS:** Last season United had one of the meanest defenses in the Premier League, with only treble-winning City and Newcastle conceding fewer goals. It's been a very different story in Ten Hag's second season in charge, with the openness of his team a consistent problem. To compound the issue, United has found goals hard to come by at the other end of the field. A total of 52 scored is the joint lowest in the top half of the standings, level with 10th-place Bournemouth. Luton - which is in the relegation zone - has scored 49. United is too open in midfield, too fragile in defense and not potent enough in attack. And it falls on Ten Hag to come up with the solutions.



# KKR players spend night in Varanasi after flight diverted multiple times due to bad weather

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Kolkata Knight Riders players had a harrowing experience as they were forced to spend a night at Varanasi after their flight from Lucknow to Kolkata was diverted multiple times due to bad weather. Following their massive 98-run win over Lucknow Super Giants on Sunday, the Shreyas Iyer-led side left on Monday evening for Kolkata at 5:45pm. The team was scheduled to arrive at 7:25pm. But the charter flight had to be diverted to Guwahati first and then to Varanasi after adverse weather conditions made it impossible to land the plane in Kolkata.

The KKR media team provided an update at 8:46pm, saying, "Due to inclement weather over Kolkata, the KKR charter flight has been diverted to Guwahati. We've just landed here." Then another update at 9:43pm said, "We've got clearance to fly back to Kolkata now, from Guwahati. Estimated arrival: 11pm."

However, the ordeal was not over for the players and support staff as multiple attempts to land the flight failed, forcing the officials to divert the flight mid-air to Varanasi. "Flight took off from Guwahati to Kolkata, was scheduled to land at 11 PM. Couldn't land once again due to bad weather, despite several attempts. Diverted mid-air to Varanasi now. Just landed here," said an update at 1:15 am. The KKR team then spent the night at Varanasi and will be travelling to Kolkata this afternoon. "The team would be checking into Varanasi hotel for overnight stay. Return flight to Kolkata TBD on Tuesday (7 May) afternoon," the KKR media team said in the final update at 3:00 am. Fortunately, KKR's next game is against Mumbai Indians at Edens Garden on May 11. The two-time former champions will play Gujarat Titans in Ahmedabad on May 13 and Rajasthan Royals in Guwahati on May 19 for their final two league matches.

# Bengal, Haryana win women hockey nationals ties

PTI ■ RANCHI

Bengal and Haryana registered identical victories by margins of 2-1 over Odisha and Maharashtra respectively in the National Women's Hockey League 2024 here on Tuesday. Bengal showed relentless attacking prowess and swift passing throughout the game. Their breakthrough came in the second quarter when Shanti Horo (23) manoeuvred past Odisha's defence before unleashing a thunderous shot into the net. The momentum swung

further in Bengal's favour in the second half when Shanti Horo (39) capitalised on an unmarked opportunity in the D area, slotting home her second goal with precision. Odisha managed to score a goal in the final quarter through Dipi Monika Toppo (51), who converted a penalty corner. Nevertheless, Bengal held on to their lead to emerge winners. Despite the loss Odisha, remained on top of the points table with 12 points from six matches. In the day's other match, Haryana dominated possession from the start.



The breakthrough came through Manju Chorsiya (12), who capitalised on an opportunity to score from open play, putting Haryana in the lead. In the second half, Haryana strengthened their position with Pooja (37) converting a penalty corner. Despite Maharashtra's efforts and multiple opportunities, including four penalty corners, they could only convert one, with Sukanya Dhaware (55) scoring a field goal in the dying minutes to narrow the deficit for her team.



# Badosa shows signs of her old form in a win over Andreeva at Italian Open

AP ■ ROME

Paula Badosa showed signs of her former top-five form during a 6-2, 6-3 victory over 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva in the first round of the Italian Open on Tuesday. Badosa was ranked as high as No. 2 before she missed the second half of last year due to a back injury that has also slowed her this season. She's now No. 126. Badosa jumped out to a 5-1 lead in the first set before a 45-minute rain delay and then picked up where she left off against the 40th-ranked Andreeva, who was the WTA tour's newcomer of the year in 2023. Badosa reached the quarterfinals in Rome last year but that turned out to be her penultimate tournament of the season. It was Badosa's first win since beating Simona Halep at the Miami Open last month in Halep's return from a doping ban. It also ended Badosa's six-match losing streak against players ranked in the top 40 that had stretched back to Rome last year. Also on the red clay at the Foro Italico, Shelby Rogers routed Italian wild-card entry Lisa Pigato 6-1, 6-0.