

OPINION 6
TASKS FOR NEW REGIME
IN TURBULENT TIMES

WORLD 8
UK PM LOSES MP AMID CHARGE
OF INCOMPETENCE

MONEY 10
SEBI ISSUES PERIODIC REPORTING
FORMAT FOR INVESTMENT ADVISERS

Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 34 Issue 128
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

NEW DELHI, THURSDAY MAY 9, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

Established 1864

the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

RESURGENT RCB
TAKE ON PBKS IN
SURVIVAL BATTLE
12 SPORTS



Unholy Dip: Hindu numbers shrink by eight per cent

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A study titled "Share of Religious Minorities - A Cross Country Analysis (1950-2015)" by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) has revealed that the population share of the majority religion in India (Hindus) declined sharply by 7.8 per cent between 1950 and 2015, while a number of neighbouring countries saw a jump in the population of their majority community.

While the Hindu population shrunk in India, the share of minorities, including Muslim, Christian, Buddhist and Sikhs, went up. However, the number of Jains and Parsis in the population saw mix decrease. Between 1950 and 2015, the Muslim population share in India surged by 43.15 per cent, Christians saw a 5.38 per cent increase, Sikhs a 6.58 per cent rise, and Buddhists a slight increase. The study, released in May 2024, assessed trends in 167 countries across the world. The authors of

the study say, "India's performance is consistent with the larger global trends." The study highlighted that the share of the majority Hindu population decreased by 7.82 per cent between 1950 and 2015 (from 84.68 per cent to 78.06 per cent) in India. The share of Hindus in India's population saw a decrease from 84 per cent in 1950 to 78 per cent in 2015, while that of Muslims witnessed an increase from 9.84 per cent to 14.09 per cent in the same period (of 65 years). "The share of Muslim population



in 1950 was 9.84 per cent and increased to 14.09 per cent in 2015 — a 43.15 per cent increase in their share. The share of Christian population rose from 2.24 per cent to 2.36 per cent — an increase of 5.38 per cent between 1950 and 2015. The share of Sikh population increased from 1.24 per cent in 1950 to 1.85 per cent in 2015 — a 6.58 per cent rise in their share. Even the share of the Buddhist population witnessed a noticeable increase from 0.05 per cent in 1950 to 0.81 per cent. On the other

hand, the share of Jains in the population of India decreased from 0.45 per cent in 1950 to 0.36 per cent in 2015. The share of the Parsi population in India witnessed a stark 85 per cent decline, reducing from 0.03 per cent share in 1950 to 0.004 per cent in 2015," it said. The shrinking of the majority population in India (by 7.8 per cent) is the second most significant decline in the immediate neighbourhood, just after Myanmar's 10 per cent.

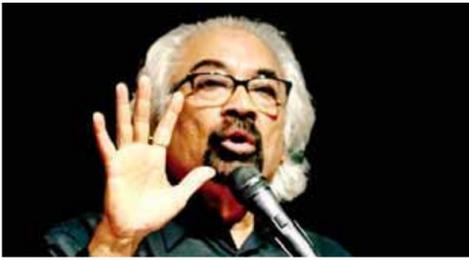
Apart from India, Nepal's majority community (Hindu) saw a 3.6 per cent decline in its share of the country's population. Buddhists, who constituted 11 per cent of the population in 1950 also witnessed a 25 per cent decrease and their share was reduced to 8 per cent in 2015. On the other hand, the share of Muslim population increased from 2.6 per cent to 4.6 per cent — a jump of 75 per cent. In 1950, the share of Christian population in Nepal was approximately zero.

Continued on Page 2

PM schools Sam on Indianness

PITRODA SAYS SOUTH INDIANS LOOK LIKE AFRICANS, QUILTS AFTER OUTRAGE

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



In the midst of a high-voltage Lok Sabha poll campaign, Congress leader Sam Pitroda once again handed enough ammunition to the BJP with his analogy depicting India's diversity. Slamming his comments as "racist", Prime Minister Narendra Modi pounced on Pitroda's comment to hit out at the grand old party and asserted that people will not tolerate attempts to insult them based on their skin colour.

Later Pitroda was forced to resign as the chairman of the Indian Overseas Congress after his controversial remarks as the INDIA Bloc leaders too disapproved of his 'racist' comments. Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said party chief Mallikarjun Kharge has accepted Pitroda's decision. At his rallies in Telangana,

Modi said he is livid with the racial profiling of Indians by the US-based "philosopher and uncle of shehzada (Rahul Gandhi)", and linked the Congress's opposition to Droupadi Murmu's presidential bid to its

mindset, which saw her as an "African" because of the colour of her skin. "I am very angry today. I do not get angry if someone abuses me. Today, the philosopher of 'shehzada' (prince) has inflicted such a big abuse that I am full of anger. Will people's abilities in our country be decided by the colour of their skin? Who has allowed the shehzada to play this game of skin?" Modi said.

As Pitroda's remarks went viral and triggered a political firestorm, the Congress once again in a weeks' time distanced itself from its overseas wing chairperson's remarks and even criticised those as "most unfortunate

and unacceptable". The BJP dismissed the Congress's stand as meaningless as it cited Pitroda's close association with the Gandhi family and launched a blistering attack. Pitroda's comments at a podcast landed his party in yet another soup, soon after his reference to inheritance tax in the United States as an "interesting law" while discussing the Congress's Lok Sabha poll manifesto gave the ruling BJP a potent handle to accuse the opposition party of eyeing citizens' assets as part of its "redistribution of wealth" policy.

Continued on Page 2

Modi questions Rahul's silence on Ambani, Adani

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/HYDERABAD



Following the trend of low voter turnout continuing in the Lok Sabha elections, even in the third phase, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched a frontal attack on the Opposition led by Congress, claiming their campaign was funded by black money.

This prompted a terse response from the Congress, which said the BJP has realised it is "shaking" after three phases and has now started attacking its own "friends," showing the "real trend" of the result.

In a public speech, the PM asked the INDIA Bloc leader Rahul Gandhi as to why he

has stopped criticising corporate giants like Adani and Ambani?. Modi on Wednesday for the first time during the election campaign accused the Congress of having a nexus with 'Ambani and Adani', and asked if the party has received "tempo loads of black money" from the two businessmen as Rahul has now stopped "abusing" them.

In what appeared to be changing the narrative on the issue that was until now

used by the Congress to attack Modi and his Government at the Centre, the PM also demanded that the party should explain to people why it has stopped raising the 'Ambani-Adani' issue as its 'shehzada' used to do for the past five years and asked if it has struck a 'sauda' (deal). The Congress has been accusing the Prime Minister of favouring the top five industrialists in the country, including Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani. Congress said the 'man' who collected ₹8,200 crore of Electoral Bonds for his party — a scam so egregious that even the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional — is today levelling allegations on others.

Continued on Page 2

Staff woes ground Air India Express flights



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Hundreds of passengers, including political leaders and workers, were left stranded and staged protests at various airports across the nation after Air India Express cancelled over 86 flights due to the cabin crew going on a "mass sick leave" on Tuesday night.

The major airports — Kochi, Calicut, Delhi and Bengaluru — witnessed chaotic scenes as most flight disruptions happened here. The international and domestic flights were cancelled after about 300 senior cabin crew members reported sick at the last minute and switched off their mobile phones. According to sources, southern regions have reported major cancellations. Air India Express CEO Alok Singh said there will be more curtailment of flights over the

next few days amid cabin crew woes. "Flight curtailment being done to cope with non-availability of crew, recover schedules," the CEO said in a statement. Many of them said the delayed flights could result in them losing their jobs as their work visas were about to expire while some political leaders and workers could not reach their destinations to attend the rally of their leaders in the upcoming fourth phase of the Lok Sabha elections. Passengers also complained that the airline provided no accommodation, leaving them stranded until their rescheduled flight takes off. Some passengers claimed they were forced to spend the night at the airport. Some of them claimed that they were informed about the cancellations after the completion of security

checks. Taking note of the incident, the Ministry of Civil Aviation on Wednesday sought a report from Air India Express on cancellation of flights after a section of cabin crew reported sick evidently to protest against changes in the human resources policy. Meanwhile, Air India Express has offered a full refund or flight rescheduling but some passengers are demanding instant refunds and same-day rescheduling. This is the second time in about a month that a Tata Group owned airline is facing flight disruptions (Vistara too had to cancel flights due to crew unavailability in the first week of April). Among thousands of flyers who were hit by the sudden cancellations of the Air India Express flights on Wednesday was Jammu & Kashmir former Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad who said Air India should be shut and nothing will come out of it because its culture is bad. The stinging comment came from a former Civil Aviation Minister who said he never travelled by Air India. Videos of furious passengers gathered at Delhi, Kochi, Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram airports have gone viral on social media.

Continued on Page 2

JJP favours toppling BJP Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI

The BJP's former ally Jannayak Janata Party (JJP) on Wednesday said it is ready to help the Congress bring down the BJP Government in Haryana, a day after three Independent MLAs withdrew support to the ruling party. Claiming that the BJP Government is reduced to a minority, the Congress, on its part, demanded the imposition of the President's rule and early Assembly elections in the State. However, Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini asserted that his Government is not in any trouble. His predecessor and party colleague M L Khattar also claimed that many MLAs are in touch with the BJP and there is "nothing to worry".

Independent MLAs Sombir Sangwan (Dadri), Randhir Singh Gollen (Pundri) and Dharampal Gonder (Nilokheri) withdrew support to the ruling BJP in Haryana on Tuesday and announced that they would back the Congress.

The fast-paced political developments in the State come at a time when Lok Sabha polls are just a fortnight away and Assembly elections are scheduled to be held in October.

Speaking to media in Hisar, JJP leader Dushyant Chautala



said if a no-confidence motion is brought in the Assembly, they will vote against the Saini Government. "I want to tell Leader of Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda that going by the present numbers in the Assembly, when this Government is in a minority, if a step is taken that this government is brought down during (Lok Sabha) elections, then we will fully consider to support them in this from outside". "Now, the Congress has to think whether they will take a step to bring down the BJP government," Chautala said. Reacting to this, Congress leader Hooda said, "They should write to the Governor (that Government is in a minority)". Dushyant Chautala also ruled out reviving his party's alliance with the BJP. The two parties had snapped ties in March. "I have made it quite clear that JJP will not go with BJP now," Chautala said and

demanding that Saini should either prove majority or submit his resignation. The 90-member Haryana Assembly at present has an effective strength of 88 with Karnal and Rania Assembly seats being vacant. The BJP has 40 MLAs, the Congress 30 and the JJP 10 in the House. INLD and Haryana Lokhit Party has one member. Independents are six. The Government has the support of two of the Independent legislators. Independent MLA Nayan Pal Rawat said he had given unconditional support to the BJP in 2019 and it is continuing even now. "The Government is not in any trouble, it is working strongly," Chief Minister Saini told reporters at Sirsa while replying to queries on the withdrawal of support. However, Hooda said the Saini Government is in a minority and it has no moral right to stay in power.

Continued on Page 2

AstraZeneca recalls Covid vaccine amid side effects storm

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Months after admitting in a UK court that its COVID-19 vaccine, which is being sold as Covishield in India, may have a potential rare blood clot side effect known as Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS), pharma giant AstraZeneca has recalled the job made in collaboration with Oxford University.

The British-Swedish multinational pharmaceutical company faces lawsuits from more than 50 alleged victims and their families who claim fatalities or permanent brain injuries following vaccination during Covid pandemic. The company's COVID-19 vaccine is being sold as Vaxzevria in Europe. AstraZeneca had in February this year admitted in the court that its COVID-19 vaccines could in very rare cases have the potential to cause Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS), a condition that leads to blood clots and low platelet count. However, the company in a statement said that withdrawal has been initiated due to a surplus of available updated vaccines since the pandemic. It has voluntarily withdrawn the "marketing authorisation" for the vaccine within the European Union, and similar applications are expected to be made in other countries where the vaccine was approved.

However, it remains unclear whether the vaccine will be withdrawn in India, where it is manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII). The SII has not yet commented on the developments. The vaccine has come under the lens of the Supreme Court in India which two days ago agreed to hear a petition on a rare side-effect associated with the job.

A date for the hearing has not been set but Chief Justice of the Apex Court



Chandrachud acknowledged the issue, which includes demands for an expert panel to investigate the side-effect and for the Government to provide compensation for families of those who may have died after taking the drug. An early hearing of the petition, though, has been ruled out. According to reports, the SII has a stock of 250 million doses of Covishield at its Pune facility, which could be used for any future eventuality. Sources at the SII had in 2022 indicated plans to halve the production of Covishield as it had a 500 million doses inventory at its facility. Half of these were finished doses, while the remaining were bulk doses that were not converted to formulation.

Meanwhile, the European Medicines Agency, the medicines regulator for the European Union (EU), issued a notice on Tuesday to confirm that Vaxzevria — known as Covishield in India — is no longer authorised for use in the 27-member economic bloc after AstraZeneca (AZ) voluntarily withdrew its authorisation in March. "AstraZeneca has therefore taken the decision to initiate withdrawal of the marketing authorisations for Vaxzevria within Europe. We will now work with regulators and our partners to align on a clear path forward to conclude this chapter and significant contribution to the COVID-19 pandemic," it said.

Continued on Page 2

India tops in dollar remittance with 111 billion paycheck

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS

India received over USD 111 billion in remittances in 2022, the largest in the world, becoming the first country to reach and even surpass the USD 100 billion mark, the United Nations migration agency has said.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), in its World Migration Report 2024 launched Tuesday, said in 2022, India, Mexico, China, the Philippines and France were the top five remittance recipient countries. "India was well above the rest, receiving more than USD 111 billion, the first country to reach and even surpass the

USD 100 billion mark. Mexico was the second-largest remittance recipient in 2022, a position it also held in 2021 after overtaking China, which historically had been the second-biggest recipient after India," the report said. According to the report's data, India was the top country receiving remittances in 2010 (USD 53.48 billion), 2015 (USD 68.91 billion), and 2020 (USD 83.15 billion), with the remittances crossing the USD 100 billion mark to reach USD 111.22 billion in 2022. It noted that with a very large number of migrant workers from the subregion, Southern Asia receives some of the largest inflows of remittances



globally. Three countries in Southern Asia-India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, rank among the top ten recipients of international remittances in the world, underscoring the significance of labour migration from the

subregion. "With India estimated to have received more than USD 111 billion in 2022, it is by far the largest recipient of international remittances in the world and the first country to ever reach that figure," the report said.

Pakistan and Bangladesh were the sixth and eighth largest international remittance recipients in 2022, receiving nearly USD 30 billion and USD 21.5 billion respectively. The report however noted that while remittances remain a lifeline for many people in the subregion, migrant workers from these countries continue to face a myriad of risks, including financial exploitation, excessive financial debt due to migration costs, xenophobia and workplace abuses.

The Gulf States remain significant destinations for migrant workers from around the world, and the 2022 football World Cup further underscored the importance

of migrant labour to the subregion as well as rights violations. Migrants continue to comprise high proportions of the total populations in many Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States. In the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Qatar, migrants made up 88 per cent, nearly 73 and 77 per cent of the national populations, respectively.

Most migrants — many of whom come from countries such as India, Egypt, Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Kenya — work in sectors such as construction, hospitality, security, domestic work and retail.

Continued on Page 2

BJP accuses TMC of digging up ground at Modi rally venue

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■
BANDEL

The Bengal BJP has alleged that the Trinamool Congress administration has dug up a ground at Barrackpore in North 24 Parganas and strewn garbage all over it where Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to address an election rally on May 12. Barrackpore BJP candidate Arjun Singh on Wednesday complained that the district administration at the instance of the TMC had dug up the ground so as to hamper the electoral meeting. "The Prime Minister is scheduled to address a rally at a ground at Jagaddal in Barrackpore constituency but the TMC has made the administration to dig it up and dump garbage all over the place," Singh who returned from the TMC to BJP just before the elections were declared to once again get a saffron ticket said. "My question is this why this fear? Why is this petty mindset... is this a sign of capitulation before the defeat?" Singh said. Rejecting Singh's allegation local TMC MLA Somnath Shyam said that the land had



been dug up not to hinder any rally but "as a part of the district administration's exercise to level it up so that the local youth can train here ahead of the recruitment tests in the Army and other paramilitary forces." He said that the district administration was doing so after it was requested by some local organizations. Singh however questioned the timing of the act asking whether the administration could not wait for a couple of days more to do what it intended to do. Meanwhile, Bengal Chief Minister continued her tirade against the BJP Government saying her party was determined to throw the BJP out of

power in Delhi. Attacking the BJP for "playing with the honour of mothers and sisters at Sandeshkhali where they faked a movement to garner electoral points," the Chief Minister said "BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi only stands for lies and falsehoods." Asking the people to back the TMC so that it can play a role in Delhi to dislodge the Modi Government Banerjee told a rally at Balagarh in Hooghly parliamentary constituency, "I want your help and support to dislodge BJP from power... they are responsible for the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act, National Register for Citizens and

Uniform Civil Code." It was another matter that the crowd would not respond to her slogan: "Gali Gali Mein Shor hai BJP Chor hai (there is a word everywhere that BJP is a thief)" prompting the Chief Minister even to rebuke the crowd asking "what had happened to your voices" and "whether you really want to end the saffron misrule." She said, "BJP in Bengal is splurging their ill-gotten money to win votes... they are the same Harbans of the CPI(M) that had once tormented the people of Bengal and they require to be taught a lesson... so as you discarded the Leftists you discard the BJP"

Rival candidates make last ditch bid to woo voters in Srinagar

MOHIT KANDHARI ■
JAMMU

As the poll fervour is catching up in Srinagar, the three rival candidates belonging to the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, Peoples Democratic Party, and APNI Party are making last-minute efforts to reach out to the electorate. Compared to previous elections held in the region the summer Capital is witnessing a hectic political activity in the run-up to the polls. All the contesting candidates are roaming freely and organizing street corner meetings, road shows, and public rallies even in downtown areas of Srinagar. The social media platforms are also abuzz with intense debates for and against their favorite candidates in the fray. Elaborate security arrangements have been made with adequate deployment of central forces in the region to ensure peaceful conduct of the elections happening for the first time after the Abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019. The Srinagar Lok Sabha seat comprises 18 Assembly segments and is spread over five districts — Srinagar, Budgam, Ganderbal in central Kashmir,



and Pulwama and Shopian in south Kashmir, will go to polls on May 13. The Lok Sabha seat remained a stronghold of the National Conference. The party won the seat 12 times out of 15 parliamentary elections since 1947. The party has faced a defeat only once in 2014 when Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) candidate Tariq Hameed Karra defeated his rival Dr Farooq Abdullah. This time PDP's youth leader Waheed ur Rehman Para is once again giving a tough fight to the JKNC candidate Aga Syed Ruhullah Mehdi, an influential Shia cleric.

The entry of APNI party's Mohammad Ashraf Mir, supported by the Peoples' Conference, in the fray is set to make it a triangular contest. There are 21 other candidates in the seat, most of them Independents. According to poll pundits, the real contest is between the JKNC and PDP candidates. In almost all his election campaign meetings, Para focuses on sending a crisp message to the electorate. "We need representatives who will not be silent bystanders but the voice of the people inside the Parliament." He also reminds the electorate

that Assembly elections were held in 2014. "We are all sitting quietly inside our homes. Everyone is afraid to speak for fear of being picked up by the police... This election is an opportunity to voice your opinion without fear." The JKNC candidate is also harping on the same theme. In his election meetings, he repeatedly said the ongoing election has allowed the people of Jammu and Kashmir to vent their anger by casting a vote against the 2019 decision of the Government of India on J&K. To woo the migrant voters, JKNC candidate also apologized to Kashmir Pandits for the party's failure to stop their migration in the wake of growing militancy in the 1990s. According to the Returning Officer, 17.41 lakh voters including 8.68 lakh women, 8.73 lakh men, and 58 third gender are eagerly waiting for their turn to exercise their right to vote. Out of these 2.0 lakh are the first-time voters, in the age group of 18-20. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, NC's Farooq Abdullah won the Srinagar seat by a margin of 69,976 votes, securing 1,06,596 votes. The runner-up was Aga Syed Mohsin of the PDP.

X takes down Karnataka BJP video on Muslim quota row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Social media platform 'X' has taken down an animated video shared by the Karnataka unit of the BJP related to the row over reservation for the Muslim community after an Election Commission direction. The poll panel on Tuesday directed the microblogging site to "immediately" take down the video. In a letter to the nodal officer of 'X', the Election Commission(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. EC officials on Wednesday said after the fresh directive to 'X', it has taken down the controversial video from its site. The Karnataka Congress had filed a complaint with the Chief Electoral Officer of the state, accusing the BJP of pro-



moting enmity and hatred between the Muslim and the SC/ST communities. The complaint pertains to the 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, 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.

Unholy Dip: Hindu...

From Page 1
By 2015, it had grown to almost two percent of the total population. On the Indian subcontinent, all the Muslim majority countries witnessed an increase in the share of the majority religious denomination except Maldives where the share of the majority group (Shafi'i Sunnis) declined by 1.47 per cent. In Bangladesh, there was an 18 per cent increase in the share of the majority religious group which is the largest such increase in the Indian subcontinent. Pakistan witnessed an increase of 3.75 per cent in the share of the majority religious denomination (Hanafi Muslim) and a 10 per cent increase in the share of total Muslim population despite the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. The

demographic shocks inflicted upon the Hindu population in Pakistan is evidenced by a decline in their share - from constituting 13 per cent in 1950 to just 2 per cent in 2015. This is a monstrous 80 per cent decrease over a 65-year period where minorities on average increased by 22 per cent globally. Intriguingly, the share of Christians in Pakistan almost doubled from 1 to 2 per cent in the same period. The share of the Buddhist population in Myanmar declined by 10 per cent from 84 per cent in 1950 to 75 per cent in 2015. In the same period, the share of Christian population almost doubled (from 4 per cent to 8 per cent) and the share of indigenous religions (such as Animism and Shamanism) witnessed a 25 per cent increase (from 7 per cent to 9 per cent).

"Of the 45 major countries, the share of the majority population has decreased in 32 countries between 1950 and 2015 while the religious majority has increased its share in the population in 13 countries," the study said. "Contrary to the noise in several quarters, careful analysis of the data shows that minorities are not just protected, but indeed thriving in India," the authors said. For the 167 countries in our analysis, the average value for the share of the majority religious denomination in the baseline year of 1950 is 75 per cent. This means that globally the share of the majority religious denomination has gone down by approximately 22 per cent. In other words, the world has become more heterogeneous in the period under study.

India tops in dollar...

From Page 1

The report said nearly 18 million or 1.3 per cent of the total population, India is also the origin of the largest number of international migrants in the world, with large diasporas living in countries such as the United Arab Emirates, the United States and Saudi Arabia. India came in 13th as the destination country for immigrants, with 4.48 million. United Arab Emirates, India - US, India - Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh - India were among the top 10 international country-to-country migration corridors, the report said. Mexico is now the second largest recipient of international remittances in the world after India. China had long held the second spot but it was surpassed by Mexico in 2021, with the Central American country estimated to have received more than USD 61 billion in 2022, while China received about USD 51 billion. "The contraction of remittance flows to China has been attributed to multiple factors, including demographic shifts that have resulted in the shrinking of the working age population and the country's zero-COVID policy, which prevented people from travelling abroad for work," the report said. The report further said countries in Asia are the origins of the largest number of internationally mobile

students in the world. In 2021, more than one million internationally mobile students were from China, by far the highest number globally and more than double the number of students from India, which ranks second (around 508,000). The US is the largest destination country for international mobile students in the world (more than 833,000), followed by the UK (nearly 601,000), Australia (around 378,000), Germany (over 376,000) and Canada (nearly 318,000). China is also an important destination for international students, especially those from the Republic of Korea, Thailand, Pakistan and India. The report said there are more female than male international migrants in destination countries in Europe and Northern America, such as the US, Canada, France, Spain and Italy, but also in India. India has a slightly higher share of female immigrants than males. Countries with a significantly high proportion of male emigrants include India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Irregular migration to the US remains an ongoing challenge and major policy issue, with increasing numbers of arrivals from atypical origin countries. There were 2.4 million encounters at the United States-Mexico border in 2022, the highest on record. "Encounters" constitute both apprehensions and expulsions, and these statistics also include many migrants who tried to enter the US several times without authorisation. For years, most irregular migrants were overwhelmingly from

Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras but in 2022 and for the first time, there were more encounters with migrants from Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua. "There were also a large number of arrivals from Haiti, Brazil and from countries outside the region such as India and Ukraine," it said. "The shift in origin country geography has also been attributed to Title 42, which suspends the right to claim asylum under United States and international law on the basis of preventing the spread of COVID-19," it said. The report noted that the impact of the pandemic has been severe on both internal and international Indian emigrant workers, particularly low-skilled emigrants on short-term contracts, migrants working within the informal economy and undocumented workers. Loss of jobs along with wage theft and lack of social security during the pandemic has plunged many Indian migrants into deep debt and insecurity. "The pandemic has had an overwhelming effect on internal labour migration patterns and has reshaped work in both rural and urban areas. There has been a decline of almost 10 per cent in blue-collar workforce mobility towards cities, which has drastically cut the labour supply for major industries. The official estimate of reverse internal migration is 51.6 per cent for men and 11 per cent for women," the report said citing experts and official data. Since 2000, IOM has been producing its flagship world migration reports every two years.

PM Modi AstraZeneca recalls Covid vaccine amid side effects row

From Page 1
Pitroda, an advisor to former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, said, "We have survived 75 years in a very happy environment where people could live together, leaving aside a few fights here and there. We could hold the country as diverse as India together. Where people in the east look like the Chinese, people in the west look like the Arabs, people in the north look like, maybe, white and people in the south look like Africans." "It does not matter. All of us are brothers and sisters. We respect different languages, different religions, different customs, different food," Pitroda said in the interview that was widely circulated on social media. As a row erupted, Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said the analogies drawn by Pitroda to illustrate India's diversity are most unfortunate and unacceptable. The Indian National Congress completely dissociates itself from these analogies. The BJP dismissed the Congress's disassociation with the controversial comments as it noted at a press conference that Pitroda has a history of making "insulting and demeaning" comments, including on terrorism and the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. His "hua to hua" (so what) reaction to a question on the 1984 communal violence and "it happens all the time" reference to the Pulwama terror attack, both in 2019 as the country was gearing up for the general election, had also created massive rows, while his party had sought to distance itself from those.

PM Modi AstraZeneca recalls Covid vaccine amid side effects row

From Page 1
"We will partner with regulatory authorities globally to initiate marketing authorisation withdrawals for Vaxzevria, where no future commercial demand for the vaccine is expected," it was quoted by The Daily Telegraph as saying. The company said, "We will now work with regulators and our partners to align on a clear path forward to conclude this chapter and significant contribution to the COVID-19 pandemic." AstraZeneca added that the company was "incredibly proud" of the role Vaxzevria played in ending the global pandemic. "According to independent estimates, over 6.5 million lives were saved in the first year of use alone and over three billion doses were supplied globally. Our efforts have been recognised by Governments around the world and are widely regarded as being a critical component of ending the global pandemic," the company said. In a statement issued last week AstraZeneca had expressed sympathy for those who have lost loved ones or reported health problems, but reiterated its commitment to patient safety and adherence to "stringent standards to ensure the safe use of all medicines..."

Staff woes...

From Page 1
The videos show flyers in heated arguments with airport staff as they claimed their flights were cancelled last minute. In Delhi, a video showed a group of passengers swarming the Air India Express counter and shouting at the ground official with their luggage in their hands. Several flyers took to social media platforms on May 8 to complain about the sudden cancellation of flights. In response to a passenger's post on X, Air India Express apologised and said the

flight was cancelled "due to operational reasons". A section of our cabin crew has reported sick at the last minute, starting last night, resulting in flight delays and cancellations. An Air India Express spokesperson said the airline is engaging with the cabin crew members to understand the reasons for reporting sickness and also apologised for the flight disruptions. In a letter to Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, Congress leader KC Venugopal said the flight cancellations are causing agony to fellow citizens,

especially those going to the Middle East. He said Air India Express is a low cost airline that is essential to connect our hard working middle class workers across the world to their homeland. Hundreds of passengers were left stranded in various airports in the country including Delhi, Kochi, Kannur, Varanasi, and Thiruvananthapuram, he said, adding that flights from major international airports such as Sharjah, Muscat, Abu Dhabi and Bahrain to various sectors in the country were also cancelled.

JJP favours...

From Page 1
INLD's lone MLA Abhay Singh Chautala said either the Government should prove it has a majority or else "Governor's rule should be imposed". Hitting out at the Congress, Saini said the Opposition party's actions are only aimed at fulfilling the personal aspirations of some people. But the people of Haryana will not let the Congress' designs succeed, the chief minister said, adding the entire country is witnessing the "misdeeds" of the Opposition party. Later in Karnal, Saini said Congress has been rejected by various sections and is sinking. About the three Independent MLAs, Saini said, "They are able legislators. How did they fall into the (Congress) trap... Four days ago I called them and spoke to them," said Saini. Former Chief Minister ML Khattar downplayed the developments. "During election season, who is going

where is not going to have much impact. Many MLAs are in touch with us also, so no one should worry about this," he told reporters in Karnal. In Chandigarh, while replying to a question, Haryana Assembly Speaker Gian Chand Gupta said the Saini Government had won the trust vote on March 13. "How can we say that the Government is in a minority? It is intact and running as it was earlier," he told reporters. Asked if a no-confidence motion can be brought against the Government, the Speaker said, "Usually, when a no-confidence motion is brought, another one can only be brought six months after that. It is a technical matter." Haryana Congress chief Uday Bhan said the party will write to the Governor stating that the Saini Government is in a minority and that it should be dismissed, the President's Rule imposed in the state and fresh polls announced.

Modi questions Rahul's silence on Ambani, Adani

From Page 1
"Since his Rafale issue got grounded, he started chanting about 'five industrialists'. Then he started saying Ambani-Adani. But ever since elections have been announced, these people (Congress) have stopped abusing Ambani-Adani. I want to ask from Telangana soil, let the shehzada announce how much has been lifted from Ambani-Adani. Has tempo loads of money reached the Congress? What deal has been arrived at, that abusing Ambani-Adani has stopped overnight?" he said while addressing an election rally at Vemulawada in Telangana. "Certainly something is fishy. For five years, (they) abused Adani-Ambani and it stopped overnight. It means you have received some tempo loads of 'chori ka maal' (loot)...Kaale dhan ki kitni boriya bharkar ke



rupaye maare hai (how many sacks of black money you have taken) You have to answer the nation," the PM said. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the times are changing. "Dost dost na raha...! (Friends are no longer friends...!) After the completion of three phases of elections, today the Prime Minister has

started attacking his own friends. It is becoming clear that Modi's chair is shaking. This is the real trend of the results," Kharge said in a social media post. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also said the PM knows that people now understand the reality that he has handed over all wealth to big businessmen and he is clarifying after getting nervous. Another party leader Pawan Khara said Modi is disturbed after three phases of elections and realises that the ground is shaking. He claimed the PM had collected Rs 8,200 crore from his "friends" and when he was losing the polls, he had turned against them. "When you cannot be theirs, how can you be ours or anyone else's in the country," he posed, adding that the Congress does not fear anyone or anything. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi responded through a

video message claimed that this was the first instance when the prime minister took the name of industrialists Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Adani publicly. He challenged the prime minister to launch a probe by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) or Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) against the industrialists. "Normally, you (Modi) take the name of Ambani-Adani behind closed doors. You took their names in public for the first time. You also know that Adani-Ambani send money in tempo? Is this your personal experience? Do one thing: send CBI and ED to them. Get a thorough investigation done, don't panic," Rahul said. "The amount of money that PM Modi has given to them, we will give the same to the poor in India. We will make many 'lakhpaties' with the 'Mahalakshmi Yojna' and 'Pehli Naukri Yojana," the former Congress president added.

Congress no more nationalistic, rewards tukde tukde gang leaders: Lovely

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI
Former Delhi Congress Chief Arvinder Singh Lovely, who returned to BJP on Saturday, made scathing remarks against the Congress while stating that the party which was once used to be a nationalistic and patriotic party has now leaders of the 'tukde tukde gang'. Lovely, who resigned from his post in Congress on March 28, shared an anecdote of his college days when he used to be in the National Students' Union of India (NSUI) and said that they were made to hear a recording of a speech by former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. "In my NSUI days we were made to hear a recording of Indira Gandhi's speech in which she said 'mai apne khoon ka katra katra in desh k

liye lagati hu'. Now the ideology of the party has changed from 'Katra, Katra' to 'tukde, tukde,' he said while taking a jibe at joint INDIA alliance and Congress candidate Kanhaiya Kumar from Northeast Delhi. Previously, he had quit the Congress and joined the BJP along with Malik in April 2017. However, within a few months he switched back to the Congress in 2018. Since then he was in the Congress that he left over differences with the party leadership over choice of candidates for the Lok Sabha polls in Delhi. "Last time I had taken the decision to quit the Congress due to anger. This time, however, we have taken the decision with a cool head and much thought. Now, we will do politics here (in BJP) only or

quit politics instead of leaving the party," Lovely told reporters at Delhi BJP office. He further said that once if you talked in favour of the nation, people assumed you were a Congress supporter but it's not the same anymore. "When we used to talk about anything which is related to the nation's growth and development, people assumed you were from the Congress party but it is not the same anymore. Now when you say so, people assume you are from BJP," he said. Moreover, he also attacked the joint INDIA alliance and Congress candidate Udit Raj for the North west Delhi seat and claimed he asked Dalit to not go to the temple. "What can you say to someone like that?" he asked. Lovely, who has switched sides for the third time, also asserted that if he



Photo: The Pioneer

doesn't remain in BJP, he will even then not join the Congress. "I will give up my political career rather than going anywhere other than BJP," he said.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva, who accompanied Lovely, said that he and other leaders will be free to decide their role in the party. Lovely said that in any party, the role

of a worker is most important and he will assume that role and campaign for the party wherever he is asked to go. Further, the former Delhi Minister has also been named

as the star campaigner by the saffron party ahead of the Lok Sabha 2024 elections. Former Congress MLAs Raj Kumar Chauhan, Naseeb Singh and Neeraj Basoya and former Youth Congress President Amit Malik were also present at the event. He also called the INDIA alliance "unnatural between parties". Taking a dig at the opposition bloc, Lovely said that recently the Delhi unit chief of the NCP, Yoganand Shastri, was weaned away by the Congress. The NCP is a constituent of the INDIA bloc. "I don't understand how alliance partners can break each other's party. What is this alliance? Hence, I say it doesn't come together well," he remarked. He thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP chief JP

Nadda, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and the Delhi BJP for his entry into the saffron outfit, saying he earlier also had friendly relations with many leaders in the party. Lovely asserted that after joining of former Congress leaders like himself and Chauhan, there was no contest left in East Delhi and North East Delhi constituencies lying in trans Yamuna part of the city, hinting to the role they would play to spoil the chances of the INDIA bloc candidates on the two seats. Lovely claimed that the AAP campaigning in four seats in Delhi was not even using the name of the Congress and its leaders and was still expecting to get the votes of the party workers and supporters which was not going to happen this time.

Modi, Nadda, Shah, Rajnath to campaign in Delhi from May 16

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president Jagat Prakash Nadda will campaign between May 16 to May 22 for the seven seats in the national Capital. The elections in the national Capital will be held on May 25. According to BJP sources, the Prime Minister is expected to hold rallies in the Capital between May 18 to May 20 on two different locations in which one can be held in the Ramliya Maidan. BJP stalwart and Minister for Road, Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari on Wednesday campaigned for two candidates of the BJP in the national capital. While he took part in a jansabha (public meeting) for the BJP candidate for Chandni Chowk Praveen Khandelwal in Delhi's Shastrji Nagar area, he addressed the public in



Photo: The Pioneer

Burari area to support BJP's South Delhi Candidate Ramvir Singh Bidhuri. Along with Gadkari, former Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and Rajasthan Minister Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore also campaigned for different BJP candidates in the city. While Rathore held a road show to campaign for the party's East Delhi candidate Harsh Malhotra, the former Haryana CM addressed a public gathering to support

the BJP's South Delhi Candidate Ramvir Singh Bidhuri. With four leaders of the ruling party already on the ground to facilitate BJP's aim to win all seven candidates in the national Capital and repeat their two times successive win, more leaders are expected to campaign for the parties in the successive days. According to sources, it is expected that apart from the big leaders or the 'grade one

leaders', rest will be on the ground campaigning for the party and its candidate before May 16. Several Union Ministers including Piyush Goyal, Hardeep Singh Puri, Smriti Irani and Arjun Ram Meghwal are also included in the list of star campaigners. Further, Chief Ministers of various states will also be taking part in the processions and campaigns by BJP. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Madhya Pradesh

Chief Minister Dr Mohan Yadav, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma are also included in the list. The list encompasses various senior BJP leaders as part of the campaign in Delhi where AAP and Congress have come together under the INDIA alliance to present a joint opposition against the saffron party.

AAP to launch next phase of jail ka jawab vote se

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) will launch the next phase of its "Jail Ka Jawab Se" Lok Sabha poll campaign on May 13 with multiple events, such as "Mahila Samvad" and "Trade Town Hall", in the four Delhi constituencies from where it has fielded its candidates. The AAP has come up with an idea to woo rural, women and poorvanchalis voters for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls here. Addressing a press conference here, senior AAP leader and Delhi Minister Gopal Rai, who is also the AAP's Delhi state convener, said during the campaign running from May 13th to 23rd, four different sections of the society will be targeted. The campaign will start with holding Trade Town Hall in East Delhi, Gramin Panchayat in West Delhi, Mahila Samvad in New Delhi and Purvanchal Samagam in South Delhi. This campaign of ours will be held at different places in all the Lok Sabha constituencies, in which we will tell the public what work



File photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

the Kejriwal government has done for Delhi's all-round development in the last 9 years. At the same time, our already running election campaigns, 'Door-to-door', 'Jail Ka Jawab, Vote Se' Sankalp Sabha and Smt. Sunita Kejriwal's road show will continue. "These are four key segments that have a huge bearing on the election. We will start these four events from these areas and then take those to the other constituencies. For instance, Mahila Samvad will also happen in East Delhi. It is just that we are starting it from the New Delhi seat," Rai said. The AAP leader said as the third phase of elections concluded in India on Tuesday and voting has taken place on

more than half the total Lok Sabha seats in these phases. "The news coming from all over the country shows that the country does not accept the BJP's slogan of '400 Paar'. People are gathering to stand against the plan of the BJP to change the Constitution after winning 400 plus seats," he said. Under a seat-sharing arrangement between the Congress and the AAP, the former has fielded candidates from three Lok Sabha seats in Delhi while the latter is contesting from the remaining four. Delhi will go to polls in the sixth phase of the seven-phase election on May 25 and the counting of votes will be taken up on June 4.

BSES launches limited AC replacement scheme

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to reduce energy expenses while using air conditioners and coolers to beat the heat, the BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL) and BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL) have launched a limited AC Replacement Scheme in partnership with leading air conditioner manufacturers. Announcing the scheme here on Wednesday, discom officials said summers of 2024 are anticipated to be intense, with temperatures already reaching 40°C in Delhi and expected to rise even higher. To combat the heat, many households rely on coolers and air conditioners. However, cooling can account for up to 50% of a household's or company's annual energy expenses. Switching to a 5-star energy-efficient air conditioner can significantly reduce this cost. To reduce this cost, BRPL and BYPL have launched a limited-period 'AC Replacement Scheme' in partnership with leading air conditioner manufacturers. This initiative will help domestic consumers of South, West, East, and Central Delhi replace their old ACs with new, energy-efficient 5-star ACs, including next-generation inverter technology models, at discounts of up to 63% off the MRP. Under the scheme, around 40 window and split ACs of leading brands like LG, Bluestar, Godrej, Voltas and Lloyd are on offer on a first cum first serve basis. A domestic consumer, residing in South, West, East and Central Delhi, will be eligible to exchange a maximum of 3 ACs against a unique CA number. To avail the scheme, an eligible BRPL consumer, residing in South and West Delhi, has to call BRPL's helpline number 19123 or the register on the website. A BYPL consumer, residing in



East and Central Delhi, on the other hand has to call 011-40746103 or visit the discom's website. They will be contacted by the respective officials of the AC company through their empanelled vendors to take the enquiry forward after registration. Besides the substantial discount on the energy efficient AC, a consumer can save around 3000 units annually on the running costs of an AC, depending on the model type of the AC and usage. In monetary terms, this translates into annual savings of over Rs 29,000. Moreover, the estimated payback period under the scheme ranges from around 8 months to 3.3 years, depending on the type of AC and usage. Commenting about the scheme, a BSES spokesperson stated, "As a leader in social responsibility, BSES remains dedicated to promoting energy conservation initiatives. We have been powering the adoption of sustainable technologies, including LED lighting, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, and rooftop solar net metering. Now, through the BSES AC Replacement Scheme, consumers can upgrade to 5-star energy-efficient air conditioner at a significant discount. This not only lowers annual electricity costs and monthly expenses but also bolsters our collective efforts toward a more sustainable and greener future."

SC to deliver order on Kejriwal bail on May 10

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court will deliver its order on granting interim bail to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in a money laundering case linked to the alleged excise policy scam on May 10. Justice Sanjiv Khanna, who headed the bench which heard Kejriwal's petition against his arrest in the case, said, "We will pronounce the interim order (on interim bail) on Friday. The main matter related to the challenge to arrest will also be taken on the same day."

Justice Khanna, who was sitting in a different combination with Justices MM Sundresh and Bela M Trivedi, made the remark after Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, who was appearing for the Centre in a matter related to Goods and Services Tax, sought clarification on the listing of Kejriwal's plea. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader was arrested on March 21 and is currently lodged in Tihar Jail under judicial custody. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who also appeared for the probe agency, had 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. The bench has divided the hearing on Kejriwal's petition against his arrest into two parts. During the hearing Additional Solicitor General SV Raju told the Supreme Court that the agency has "evidence" against the AAP chief. The ASG further asserted that the ED was in no way concerned with the politics surrounding his arrest. On May 7, the bench, also comprising Justice Dipankar



File photo

Datta, had reserved its verdict on interim bail to Kejriwal. The two-judge bench had

risen without pronouncing order on granting Kejriwal interim bail to enable him to campaign in the Lok Sabha elections. The bench had reserved its decision after hearing the arguments put forth by senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi and Additional Solicitor General S V Raju, who appeared for Kejriwal and the Enforcement Directorate, respectively. His main petition challenges his arrest by the ED and seeks to be declared as illegal, while the second aspect pertains to grant of interim bail keeping in mind the ongoing Lok Sabha polls. The

court reserved the order on the issue of grant of interim bail. On Tuesday, a Delhi court has extended Kejriwal's judicial custody in the money laundering case till May 20. The Delhi High Court had on April 9 upheld Kejriwal's arrest, saying there was no illegality and the ED was left with "little option" after he skipped repeated summonses and refused to join the investigation. The matter relates to alleged corruption and money laundering in the formulation and execution of the Delhi government's now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22.

Work on Nuh to Firozpur Jhirka four-lane to start soon: Inderjit

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

BJP candidate from Gurugram Lok Sabha Rao Inderjit Singh said that the DPR of Nuh to Firozpur Jhirka four-lane is ready, and work will start soon. The process of approving the DPR by the Central Government is in the final stage. "After the formation of Gurgaon Lok Sabha, I am contesting the Gurgaon Lok Sabha elections for the fourth time and I am waiting for the support of Mewat voters," he said. Rao said that after becoming

MP from Gurgaon Lok Sabha, he never made any distinction between Mewat and other districts. "Whenever the people here came to me asking for help, I worked to provide help for development without any discrimination," he said. Rao on Wednesday was addressing election meetings in Pinagwa City, Rural, Hinganpur Raipur, Paimakheda, Bisru, Indana, Binchor, New Rohingya Kalan, Punhana Office of Punhana Assembly. He said that the BJP government has taken out Delhi Mumbai

Express worth Rs 1 lakh crore from the land of dispute to provide employment opportunities to the youth of Mewat. "Industrial development will increase with this expressway and employment opportunities for the people here will also increase," he said. "I am not new to Mewat. In future, the work of bringing overflow water from Yamuna during floods will be done so that the problem of drinking water along with the farmers of Mewat can be solved," he added.



Vice Chancellor of University of Delhi, Bollywood actor Rajkumar Rao Saina Nehwal during the Run for Viksit Bharat at Delhi University

Denmark Diplomat shares video of garbage dumped on service road in city

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Denmark's diplomat to India, Freddy Svane on Wednesday posted a video on social media platform showcasing a service road in New Delhi with heaps of garbage on either side of the road. Expressing his sadness with the state of affairs, the diplomat captioned the video "Lovely and green New Delhi. Many words but no action. Saddened by this." The service road falls in between the Danish and Greek embassies in New Delhi and is filled with trash, as shown in a video posted by the diplomat's X (formerly Twitter) handle "@svane_freddy". Svane tagged Denmark in India, Chief Minister Office Delhi and Lieutenant Governor Delhi office in the post. In the video, Svane was seen standing on the road full of trash. In the video, which revealed the dirty road, he said, "Welcome to great, green and trashy New Delhi." Further, pointing towards the embassies on either side of the service road, he said, "Here we have the Danish embassy and here we have the Greek embassy. This used to be a service lane, but you see, it is just full of trash, and people come here to do whatever they like to do here." The Danish diplomat also hoped that someone would see the video and take action on it. "So, I hope somebody will listen to this and take action," he said while sounding disappointed. "No more nice words, just actions, my friend," he said while ending the video with a "dhanyawad (Thank you)" in Hindi. The diplomat tagged the official X account of the Royal Danish Embassy in India, Delhi Chief Minister's Office, and the Delhi Lieutenant Governor.



The video garnered more than two lakhs views in less than four hours with varied response from the users. While some blamed the jailed Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for the cleanliness, others commented that the issue pertains to New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC), which comes under the Centre. Some users also called this "embarrassment on global level."

BJP slams Congress over Pitroda remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

After heading the Indian Overseas Congress for about two decades, Sam Pitroda, who was forced to resign from his post on Wednesday, had twice brought embarrassment for his party which is leading the crucial Opposition parties INDIA Bloc. The BJP latched on to Pitroda's remarks and said the Opposition party is getting increasingly unmasked as the Lok Sabha polls progress.

Senior BJP leaders Rajeev Chandrasekhar and Sudhanshu Trivedi said Pitroda has highlighted the idea of India that Congress bigwigs, such as Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, believe in. They claimed that Pitroda's "racist" comments have betrayed the Congress's bid to divide the country on the lines of race, religion and caste. Union Minister and BJP candidate from Amethi, Smriti Irani, alleged that it (Congress) tries to divide the countrymen on the basis of who is of which colour and who belongs to



which region. She also accused the Congress of always dividing the country in the name of religion and caste.

Even INDIA Bloc major stakeholder Aam Admi Party's AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh said none of the members of the INDIA Bloc support Pitroda's remarks and accused the BJP of "hating" the Dalits.

Pitroda has been a "mentor" to Rahul Gandhi, who has often run down the Indian democracy and the country's institutions during his foreign trips, Chandrasekhar said while Trivedi

mentioned the ongoing Lok Sabha polls have now become a battle between those under the influence of a foreign mindset in their definition of India and an India that is "aatmanirbhar" (self-reliant) and brimming with self-pride.

"Sam, Pity-roda on you!" Union Minister Anurag Thakur said in a social media post. "While for us, all Indians look like Indians, the Congress insists on categorising them based on foreign ethnic lines such as Chinese, Arab, White and African. Only a party with a colonial mindset like Congress could indulge in such deplorable racism.

"Having failed to stir division between the north and the south, Congress now seems intent on sowing ethnic discord. It's only a matter of time before the Shehzaada, following in the footsteps of his mentor, champions this divisive strategy," Thakur said.

In the podcast interview to a media house, Pitroda said, "As a Gujarati, I love dosa, I love idli. That is my food,

that is no longer south Indian food. That is the India I believe in, where everybody has a place and everybody compromises a little bit.... That idea of India, which is rooted in democracy, freedom, liberty, fraternity, is being challenged by the Ram temple and Ram Navami and the prime minister going to temples all the time and talking not as a national leader, but as a leader of the BJP."

"That view centres around the Ram temple, god, history, heritage, Bhagwan Hanuman, Bajrang Dal and all kinds of issues. I respect their view. There is another group which says our founding fathers fought against the British Raj not for a Hindu Rashtra, but for a secular nation. Pakistan decided to create a nation based on religion and see what happened to them. We are a shining example of democracy in the world," Pitroda said.

Earlier, the Congress leader had stirred up a controversy by talking about the inheritance tax, which the BJP turned into a poll issue.

JP Nadda, Amit Malviya summoned by Bengaluru police over social media post

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/BENGALURU

Bengaluru Police has summoned BJP President J P Nadda and the party's IT cell head Amit Malviya in connection with a social media post allegedly intimidating members of SC and ST community not to vote for a particular candidate, officials said on Wednesday. They have been asked to join the probe at the High grounds police station here.

"For the purpose of investigation of the said case, you are hereby directed to appear before the undersigned investigation officer at 11 am at High grounds police station within seven days of receipt of this notice," the summons read.

The move comes after an FIR was registered against Nadda, Malviya and BJP's Karnataka unit chief B Y Vijayendra in connection with a social media following a complaint filed by the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) with the Election Commission and police on May 5 alleging violation of model code of conduct. They were booked under sections of Representation of



People Act and section 505 (2) (Statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes) of the Indian Penal Code, a senior police officer said.

In the complaint, the KPCC cited the video uploaded on social media platform 'X' by the official account of Karnataka State BJP which, it alleged, is operated by Malviya, on instructions of Nadda and Vijayendra, BJP State President and Social Media incharge- Karnataka BJP, on May 4.

"The said video posted on social media featured animated characters of (Congress leader) Rahul Gandhi and (Chief Minister) Siddaramaiah. In the clip, SC, ST and OBC community are portrayed as "eggs" in a nest and it also suggested Rahul Gandhi planting a big egg labelled as Muslim community. It is projected as though funds are being fed to the chick depicting the Muslim community, which then kicks out SC, ST and OBC community," it alleged.

"The act of the accused person (s) is to wantonly provoke rioting and promote enmity between different religions and is prejudicial to maintenance of harmony apart from intimidating members of SC/ST community not to vote for particular candidate and causing enmity against members of SC/ST community," the complaint alleged.

CBI takes over probe in INLD Haryana unit president murder case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has taken over the investigation into the killing of the Indian National Lok Dal's Haryana unit president Nafe Singh Rathee and a party worker by

unidentified gunmen in February in Bahadurgarh near Delhi, officials said.

During the attack, three private gunmen hired by Rathee for security had also sustained injuries when the assailants opened fire on the former MLAs SUV.

The CBI has re-registered the

case on the recommendation of the Haryana government, the officials said, adding that it was routed to the agency by the Centre through a notification on April 26.

The central probe agency has named seven accused, including former BJP MLA Naresh Kaushik, in its case,

the officials said.

The other six accused are Karambir Rathee, Ramesh Rathee, Satish Rathee, Gaurav Rathee, Rahul and Kamal, they said.

They added that an FIR filed under IPC sections of criminal conspiracy, murder, among others has been filed

against the accused in the case.

The 67-year-old MLA from Bahadurgarh and INLD worker Jai Kishan were killed when unidentified assailants opened fire on Rathee's SUV on February 25. Rathee was elected from Bahadurgarh twice in 1996 and 2005.



MoU signed to enhance desi content in shipbuilding

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and Jindal Steel and Power (JSP), on Tuesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) here for the supply of indigenous marine grade steel to enhance the indigenous content in shipbuilding, defence ministry said here on Wednesday.

Giving details, officials said through this partnership, both entities have committed to foster indigenisation, enhance capabilities to produce and use these items in the Nation's interest.

The MoU underscores the importance of public-private

partnerships in addressing complex security challenges, emphasising the need for collaboration between government agencies and the private sector.

Several key benefits including quality, grades and dimensions along with the designated steel plants to manufacture the product are stipulated in the MoU as an assurance to the shipbuilding yards for a timely supply of marine-grade steel for the ICG.

The MoU was signed by Deputy Director General (Materiel & Maintenance), ICG IG HK Sharma and Chief Marketing Officer, JSP S K Pradhan in the presence of senior officers of the ICG.



IIT Madras raises ₹513 crore from its alumni, donors

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras raised a record funding of Rs 513 crore from its alumni, industry and individual donors during 2023-24, officials said on Wednesday.

The institute also attracted total new pledges of Rs 717 crore from alumni and corporate partners during FY 2023-24.

"The funds received would be used for technology research and development as well as for deploying technology already built by IIT Madras, in various parts of the country based on the societal needs. In addition, it is also used to support deserving students with scholarships as well as the Sports Excellence Admission programme which is also being supported from this year's philanthropic funds

raised.

"Steep academic growth needs steep rise in funding. Thanks to all CSR partners and alumni of IIT Madras for trusting and support us in raising this all-time high quantum of funding," V Kamakoti, Director, IIT Madras said.

For the second consecutive year, the institute set a new record for the highest funding raised in one financial year by an academic institute to undertake tech research, student projects as well as to develop cutting-edge infrastructure in the campus.

"This historic high of Rs 513 crore is a 135 per cent increase from the amount raised in the previous financial year of 2022-23, when Rs 218 crore was raised. The number of donors giving over Rs one crore to the institute is 48 (16 alumni donors and 32 corporate

partners).

"The funds were raised from IIT Madras alumni and individual philanthropists in addition to the CSR (corporate social responsibility) funds and grants from Indian as well as multinational corporate firms," Kamakoti said.

The fund-raising was led by IIT Madras' Office of Institutional Advancement, overseen by the IIT Madras Alumni Charitable Trust.

The total amount raised through alumni alone during 2023-24 was Rs 367 crore, which is an increase of 282 per cent as compared to the previous year. Their focus areas included cutting-edge research across various social impact themes, infrastructure, and scholarships for students, besides establishing Chair Professorships for research in specific areas.

ICG rescues critically ill fisherman off Kerala Coast

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) rescued a critically-ill fisherman from Indian Fishing Boat (IFB) Jazeera, about 40 nautical miles, off Beypore, Kerala on Tuesday, defence ministry said here on Wednesday.

Giving details, officials said the fisherman experienced a near-drowning incident after he fell into the sea. He was rescued by the IFB but his health condition deteriorated due to the excess water in the lungs.

The boat, then, made a



medical distress call, which was responded to by the ICG. It mobilised its advanced light helicopter with a medical team from Kochi, along with

Aryaman and C-404 ships. The ICG assets located the IFB and the patient was airlifted to Kochi. He was later shifted to a nearby hospital.

PM pays tribute to Rabindranath Tagore



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday paid tributes to Rabindranath Tagore, an iconic talent who excelled in varied fields, on his birth anniversary.

He said on X, "I pay homage to Gurudev Tagore, on the occasion of his Jayanti. His enduring wisdom and genius continue to inspire and enlighten innumerable people across generations."

Born in present-day West Bengal, Tagore was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature and his rich contributions as a playwright, poet, composer, educationist, philosopher and social reformer have made him one of the most respected Indians.

One lakh Thalassemia patients in India: Union Health Secretary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

While Thalassemia testing has been integrated into the reproductive and child health (RCH) programmes under the National Health Mission (NHM) in some States, it is yet to be universally adopted across all regions in addressing the prevalence of this genetic disorder.

Union Health Secretary Apurva Chandra on Wednesday advocated for inclusion of compulsory Thalassemia testing in the existing reproductive and child health (RCH) programmes under NHM as a means to curtail the prevalence of the disease even as he added that some States have included this in their public health programmes and activities; other States will be urged to include and expand screening and testing for Thalassemia.

He said timely detection and prevention are the most effective strategies to tackle the genetic disorder.

Chandra, who was speaking at an event here to mark the International Thalassemia Day, said there are almost 1 lakh Thalassemia patients in the country, with approximately 10,000 new cases reported each year. The



Secretary emphasized on the urgency for proactive intervention aided by timely detection through screening. Chandra also highlighted the critical need for wide awareness around the subject. He stated that "still many people are unaware of this disease and how this can be prevented. It is imperative that all stakeholders in this arena collaborate for a nationwide campaign to enhance awareness on Thalassemia."

Dr Rahul Bhargava Director, Department of Clinical Hematology and Bone Marrow Transplant, Fortis Hospital Gurugram said, "Thalassemia is an inherited disorder which affects millions of kids. We wish to see a thalassemia-free India by 2030. It is important that all future couples should be screened before pregnancy." He explained that in case one or both the parents have this condition, it is a good idea to consult the doctor to address the risk appropriately.

Prevention and early detection are perhaps the most feasible and cost-effective ways to control this disease. The need of the hour is an integrated plan of action including mass screening for carriers before marriage and before conception, said Dr Bhargava.

Some symptoms of thalassemia include weakness, fatigue, slow growth, pale appearance, abnormal swelling, abnormal bone structure (especially on the face and skull), heart problems, and iron overload. Thalassemia usually requires lifelong treatment with blood transfusions and medication. The main treatment methods are: blood transfusions, removing excess iron or chelation therapy, stem cell or bone marrow transplants, and treating other problems.

In addition, efforts must also be directed towards motivating gynaecologists and pathologists to ensure that every pregnant woman goes through the HbA2 test before 14 weeks of pregnancy as this can help in the timely diagnosis of thalassemia, said Dr Nita Radhakrishnan, Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Pediatric Hematology Oncology, Post-Graduate Institute of Child Health, Noida.

Phase V LS polls: 695 candidates in fray

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 695 candidates are in the fray across 49 constituencies spread over eight states and Union territories in the upcoming fifth phase of the Lok Sabha polls on May 20, the Election Commission (EC) said on Wednesday.

The figure emerged after the scrutiny of 1,586 nomination forms filed for the fifth phase of the ongoing polls. Of the nominations, 749 were found



to be valid after the deadline for filing papers closed on May 3, according to a statement issued by the EC. The statement said 695 candidates will contest the polls from eight states and

Pradesh followed closely with 466 nominations, leading to 147 valid candidates across 14 constituencies.

The highest number of nominations in a single constituency was seen in Maharashtra's Chattr, which received 69 candidatures, followed by Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh with 67 nominations. Each constituency in the fifth phase is expected to witness an average of 14 contesting candidates, reflecting a diverse range of political options for the voters.

The state-wise breakdown of the nominations and valid candidates after the scrutiny showcases the dynamic electoral landscape across the country. Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Ladakh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal together form the crux of the fifth phase, encompassing a significant portion of the country's electorate, the statement said. Three phases of polling have so far been held in the seven-phase election.

Dietary guidelines released to prevent nutrient deficiencies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Council of Medical Research and the National Institute of Nutrition (ICMR-NIN) have jointly released a comprehensive set of 17 dietary guidelines aimed at preventing nutrient deficiencies and addressing the rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases in India.

These guidelines have undergone rigorous academic and scientific review to ensure their accuracy and

effectiveness, said the top research bodies.

They "are designed as easily understandable and practicable approaches for ensuring diet diversity to meet the requirements of essential nutrients and prevent NCDs among people of all age groups across India."

The guidelines focus on eating a balanced diet; vegetables and legumes; nutrition for pregnant and lactating mothers; food for infants, children, and adolescents; including nutrient-rich foods for the elderly; eating safe, clean food; and drinking adequate amounts of water.



It also calls for avoiding protein supplements for building body mass, restricting salt intake, moderating intake of oil and fats, adopting a healthy lifestyle to prevent obesity, maintaining proper exercise, minimising

ultra-processed foods, and reading information on food labels to make informed and healthy food choices.

"The dietary habits of Indians have undergone significant changes over the past few decades, leading to an increase in the prevalence of non-communicable diseases while some of the problems of undernutrition continue to persist," said Rajiv Bahl, Secretary of the Department of Health Research, Director General, ICMR.

Rajiv noted that the guidelines have been made "very relevant to the changing food scenario in India with the addition of

practicable messages and suggestions on handling food safety, choosing minimally processed foods, the importance of food labels and physical activity."

Through the dietary guidelines, we emphasise that the most logical, sustainable, and long-term solution to all forms of malnutrition is ensuring the availability, accessibility, and affordability of nutrient-rich foods while promoting consumption of diverse foods," Hemalatha R., Director, ICMR-NIN and Chairperson of the Expert Committee which brought out the guidelines, added.



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

The name game

Celebrities and influencers are equally liable for misleading endorsements, says the SC

In a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court has declared that celebrities and influencers are equally liable if they endorse misleading advertisements. Hearing a petition filed by the Indian Medical Association against Patanjali's advertisements, the Bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Ahsanuddin Amanullah has come down heavily on the influencers and celebrities who feature in such adverts. In the age of social media, celebrities and influencers wield considerable influence, with millions of followers taking their word as gospel truth. In many instances, the endorsements are misleading or false, leading to consumer detriment and eroding trust in advertising. The Supreme Court's ruling represents a crucial step towards ensuring transparency and accountability in advertising practices. With millions of impressionable individuals looking up to them, these personalities possess a moral obligation to exercise due diligence while endorsing products or services. The failure to do so jeopardises consumer trust. Furthermore, the court emphasised the need for stricter regulations and enforcement mechanisms to deter deceptive advertising practices. While existing laws and guidelines provide some level of protection to consumers, they often fall short in holding celebrities and influencers accountable for their actions. The apex court's ruling sends out a clear message that no individual, regardless of their fame or influence, is allowed to mislead public for personal gains.



The ramifications of the Supreme Court's decision are far-reaching for celebrities and influencers alike. Moving forward, these individuals must exercise greater caution and diligence when entering into endorsement agreements. They are obligated to ensure that the products or services they endorse are truthful, substantiated and in compliance with advertising regulations. This heightened accountability serves as a powerful deterrent against unethical marketing practices and underscores the importance of transparency and authenticity in influencer partnerships. Of late, many film stars promote chewing pan masala under the guise of a mouth freshener. Other celebrities have promoted online gaming sites which are actually gambling sites smartly packaged as gaming sites. However, it is just the beginning and there is a long way to go before such advertising endorsements can be curbed. There have to be clear and concise guidelines (the existing ones are not enough) to stop surrogate ads. Moreover, to be fair to celebrities, they often do not know what they are promoting. Hollywood star Pierce Brosnan once featured in a chewing tobacco ad which he later said he was told was a mouth freshener. He can be given a long rope for not understanding the difference but Indian celebrities are supposed to know such underhand tactics. As celebrities and influencers navigate this evolving guideline, they must prioritise integrity and ethical conduct to maintain the trust and loyalty of their audience. This would be good for their reputation as well as for the society.

They are obligated to ensure that the products or services they endorse are truthful, substantiated and in compliance with advertising regulations. This heightened accountability serves as a powerful deterrent against unethical marketing practices and underscores the importance of transparency and authenticity in influencer partnerships. Of late, many film stars promote chewing pan masala under the guise of a mouth freshener. Other celebrities have promoted online gaming sites which are actually gambling sites smartly packaged as gaming sites. However, it is just the beginning and there is a long way to go before such advertising endorsements can be curbed. There have to be clear and concise guidelines (the existing ones are not enough) to stop surrogate ads. Moreover, to be fair to celebrities, they often do not know what they are promoting. Hollywood star Pierce Brosnan once featured in a chewing tobacco ad which he later said he was told was a mouth freshener. He can be given a long rope for not understanding the difference but Indian celebrities are supposed to know such underhand tactics. As celebrities and influencers navigate this evolving guideline, they must prioritise integrity and ethical conduct to maintain the trust and loyalty of their audience. This would be good for their reputation as well as for the society.

PICTALK



A child bathes his dog in a waterbody on a hot summer day, in Jammu

Tasks for new regime in turbulent times



KS TOMAR

As the nation braces for a new Government, all eyes are on the horizon of challenges awaiting the new administration

Keeping in view the confidence of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister, Amit Shah and the BJP to cross a magic figure of "Chaar Sau Paar" nothing is certain in politics but a new regime will take shape in New Delhi after the results of general elections on June 4. In this backdrop none can deny that the new regime is poised to confront hordes of new challenges which include giving top priority to advancements in emerging technologies, adapting to shifting geopolitical equations, the rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and formulating a long-term strategy to counter China's expansionist policies and security threats in the region. These challenges are pivotal for India's aspirations to join the League of developed nations in the future.

Experts say that Indian PM, Narendra Modi's push for digital technologies which proved a boon during Covid19 crisis for the delivery of services besides emphasising renewable energy, a mission mode to put India back on the map of semiconductor production, setting a new target in space arena and formulation of a strategy to accelerate India's capabilities in AI has helped India to position itself to give a fillip to innovate and catch up with the US and China which have been trying to master the technological revolution to be relevant in future.

Foreign policy experts highlight India's growing concerns over China's increasing influence in the region, particularly its impact on security along the Line of Control (LOC). Consequently, the new administration must focus on devising a strategic plan, possibly in collaboration with the United States, to address these concerns. China's recent tactics involve enticing India's neighbours with debt policies and offering substantial loans for projects like the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and defence-related ventures. For instance, China signed a "military assistance" deal with the Maldives, providing non-lethal weapons and free training to Maldivian security forces, a significant



departure from the earlier training provided by India and the United States.

Ahead lies the crucial task for New Delhi to formulate an ambitious and practical long-term plan to counter China's advancements in "new productive forces," a term coined by President Xi Jinping. This involves focusing on economic development through innovation in advanced sectors. China's aim to surpass the United States in the production of advanced science and technologies poses challenges for India as well. Therefore, India must intensify its efforts to support the United States in its global technology coalitions with allies like Japan, Australia and India, along with the CHIP Alliance, while fostering deep bilateral partnerships in emerging critical technologies.

China's expanding ties in the region are evident and India needs to tread cautiously to counter its influence, as seen in the case of Nepal. The recent political shift in Nepal towards a communist Government ideologically aligned with China is concerning, especially considering China's "Debt Trap" strategy. Pakistan serves as a stark example, with China extending a massive debt of \$23 billion, a substantial portion of which is tied to the Belt and Road Initiative. Pakistan's mounting debt to China, totalling \$67.2 billion from

2000 to 2021, underscores the risks associated with this debt dependency. Despite facing economic collapse, Pakistan remains indebted to China, highlighting the potential peril of falling into a debt trap. Experts suggest that the incoming Government in Delhi may find solace in the recent normalisation of ties with Sri Lanka. A severe economic crisis in Sri Lanka had pushed it perilously close to the edge, but India stepped in with a \$4 billion economic assistance package and humanitarian aid, surpassing even the IMF's 48-month special package to stabilise the country. This move showcased India's commitment beyond traditional diplomacy and responded to the dire needs of its neighbour. It's noteworthy that China, previously involved, withdrew its support, while India's intervention has been perceived positively, reflecting a shift in Sri Lanka's outlook. Interestingly, former president, Mahinda Rajapaksa had blamed India for interfering in the Sri Lanka elections which led to his ouster in 2015. The trend continued when Gotabaya Rajapaksa, president cancelled the East Container Terminal (ECT) agreement in the Colombo airport in violation of a 2019 project contract signed amongst three partners including Japan, India and Sri Lanka. Now Sri Lanka's speaker, Mehinda Yapa

Abeyardera thanked India for saving his country from the 'blood path' hence China stands exposed in the eyes of the people of this country. India's relations with Bangladesh remain strong, exemplified by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts. During a joint event on November 23, 2023, Modi referred to India as Bangladesh's largest development partner, emphasising mutual benefits.

One of the notable features of election campaigning by all parties, unlike developed nations, is the lack of debates, discussions and narratives to enlighten the people about the relevance and significance of foreign policy. The manifestoes may dwell upon foreign relations and future strategy but no effort is made to emphasise its importance in achieving the goal of joining the elite club of developed nations. India's independent stand to import crude oil from Russia, despite economic sanctions by the United States and allies owing to the Ukraine war, has demonstrated to the world that such decisions are primarily governed by keeping national interest supreme. India's strategic approach towards Maldives and Nepal needs to be flexible and innovative to counter China's growing influence effectively.

(The writer is a journalist and political analyst, views are personal)



AHEAD LIES THE CRUCIAL TASK FOR NEW DELHI TO FORMULATE AN AMBITIOUS AND PRACTICAL LONG-TERM PLAN TO COUNTER CHINA'S ADVANCEMENTS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POLL BATTLE CONTINUES

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Poll battle enters crucial Phase III," published on May 7, this is my response. The upcoming third phase of Lok Sabha elections is poised to be a crucial battleground, with political heavyweights from both ruling and opposition parties vying for victory. The BJP, having secured a significant number of seats in the 2019 elections, faces the challenge of maintaining its dominance, especially in key States like Gujarat, Karnataka, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. With over 1,300 candidates, including a notable presence of women, contesting across 12 States and Union Territories, the electoral landscape reflects a diverse array of voices. The extensive deployment of security forces underscores the significance of ensuring a free and fair electoral process.

Of particular interest are the contests in constituencies like Guna in Madhya Pradesh, where Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia seeks to reclaim lost ground and Baramati in Maharashtra, where dynastic politics adds an intriguing dimension to the electoral dynamics. As voter turnout fluctuates amidst challenging weather conditions, the outcome of this phase remains uncertain, with implications for the broader political landscape. It's a testament to the vibrancy of Indian democracy and the diverse aspirations of its citizens.

Anika Patel | Kolkata

CORAL CRISIS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Marine heatwave scorches pristine coral reefs of Lakshadweep," published on May 7, this is my response. As someone who reads the news daily, the plight of Lakshadweep's vibrant corals strikes a chord. It's disheartening to witness the gradual decline of such natural wonders due to prolonged marine heatwaves. Beyond the aesthetic loss, the ecosystem repercussions are immense. The warnings from scientists about coral bleaching and its cascading effects on marine life sound alarms for the delicate balance of nature.

More allegations against Kejriwal



Apropos the news article, "LG recommends NIA probe against Kejriwal," published on May 7, this is my response. The recent recommendation for an NIA probe against Arvind Kejriwal by Delhi's Lieutenant Governor raises serious concerns. The accusation of receiving funding from extremist groups is alarming and demands a thorough investigation. However, the

timing, just before the Supreme Court's bail consideration and the political backdrop surrounding it raise questions of motive and agenda. The intertwined narratives of terrorism, politics and justice in this case create a complex scenario. On one hand, there's the gravity of allegations involving a banned terrorist organisation; on the other, there are claims of political conspiracy and manipulation.

As a reader, navigating through these intricate details leaves one perplexed and sceptical. The need for transparency and impartiality in the investigation is paramount to uphold the integrity of the democratic process and ensure justice prevails. However, amidst the political fervour surrounding elections, separating truth from propaganda becomes increasingly challenging.

Vihaan Singh | Ahmedabad

Moreover, the socioeconomic impact on coastal communities underscores the urgent need for action.

The Government's attention to Lakshadweep's marine ecosystems is crucial, especially considering the region's ecological and economic significance. The initiatives by CMFRI to study and develop resilience-based strategies offer hope amidst the crisis. However, collective efforts are imperative to mitigate the escalating threats and safeguard these invaluable treasures for future generations. The news serves as a reminder of our responsibility to preserve and protect our natural heritage in the face of environmental challenges.

Aaradhya Sharma | Mumbai

EMPOWERING WOMEN

Madam — Apropos the news article, "CHHAYA: A contraceptive beyond family planning," published on May 6, this is my response. The recent approval of Centchroman, a non-hormonal contraceptive pill, signifies a significant stride in bolstering women's reproductive health rights. Branded as "Chhaya" in public health facilities and "SAHEL" in the mar-

ket, this pill offers a hormone-free alternative, expanding choices for family planning. Its versatility is commendable, catering to women regardless of age, marital status, or childbirth history. Notably, its compatibility with breastfeeding ensures maternal health without compromising lactation.

Centchroman's introduction aligns with India's commitment to reproductive rights and gender equality. By providing a safe and accessible contraceptive, the Government empowers women to make informed decisions, underscoring family planning as a human right crucial for social and economic development. However, dissemination of information remains pivotal. Comprehensive education on contraception can dispel misconceptions, enabling women to navigate their reproductive health confidently. In essence, Centchroman heralds a new era of inclusivity and empowerment, promising a future where women have agency over their bodies and futures.

Kabir Malhotra | Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Insights into India's growing heart health crisis



NAVEEN BHAMRI

Aortic stenosis with a high mortality rate is a significant cardiovascular concern. Non-surgical aortic valve replacement emerges as a game-changer

Aortic stenosis stands as one of India's most prevalent valvular heart diseases, trailing only hypertension and coronary artery disease. Its prevalence surges with age, affecting roughly one in ten individuals aged 75 or older. The condition, characterised by a narrowing of the aortic valve opening, often manifests with symptoms such as chest pain, fatigue and shortness of breath, impacting the quality of life for affected individuals.

The primary causes include degenerative valve disease, congenital bicuspid aortic valve disease and rheumatic heart disease, the latter being the leading global cause of aortic stenosis (AS), particularly among children and young adults.

Despite an initially asymptomatic phase that may last for several decades, the prognosis dramatically changes once symptoms develop. Without timely intervention, such as aortic valve replacement, the average survival rate dwindles to a mere 2-3 years, elevating the risk of sudden death. The early symptoms of aortic stenosis are frequently over-



looked or misattributed to other causes. Nevertheless, recognising the significance of symptoms and promptly seeking medical attention is critical in mitigating the progression of the disease. For individuals diagnosed with aortic stenosis, heart valve replacement surgery often becomes a necessary course of action. This surgical intervention aims to repair or replace faulty heart valves, restoring proper blood flow and alleviating symptoms. According to a report by GlobalData, approximately 69,592 heart valve surgeries are conducted each year in India.

The heart's proper function relies on valves, ensuring blood flows in one direction. When valves malfunction, surgery becomes necessary to repair or replace them. This may involve fixing leaflets that don't open wide enough or don't close tightly, ensuring blood flows properly through

the heart chambers and arteries. Replacement valves can be sourced from animals, human tissue, or synthetic materials. TAVI & TAVR for AS Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation/Replacement (TAVI/TAVR) is a groundbreaking alternative procedure to open heart surgeries. TAVI/TAVR is a minimally invasive procedure that involves inserting a new valve inside the damaged aortic valve, often without removing the old valve entirely. The procedure itself involves inserting a catheter through an artery in the groin, which is then guided to the heart.

The number of patients afflicted with blocked arteries and co-morbidities like hypertension, diabetes and chronic kidney disease is increasing day after day. The ideal solution for such patients is TAVI procedure, as it offers significant benefits over traditional treatments. However, only a small percentage end up opting for it. Addressing aortic stenosis early, especially in patients with multiple co-morbidities, is crucial for improving outcomes and enhancing quality of life.

TAVI Therapy Helps

Mrs. Patel, a 78-year-old woman, was struggling with severe degenerative aortic stenosis. Mrs. Patel's condition, made it hard for blood to flow through her heart properly.

This caused her heart to work harder, leading to symptoms like chest pain and feeling breathless. Her doctor suggested a treatment called TAVI (Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation), a less invasive procedure where a new valve is placed inside the damaged one. The deployment of the valve was successful, with Mrs. Patel responding positively to the procedure. Remarkably, within just three days, Mrs. Patel was discharged from the hospital. Subsequent assessments revealed no signs of valve issues or blockages in her heart. Her journey underscores the remarkable impact of interventions like TAVI in restoring health and well-being.

(The writer is Senior Director and Head of Interventional Cardiology at Max Super Speciality Hospital, Delhi; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

PROFOUND INFLUENCE OF HABITS

Habits sculpt our lives by fostering discipline and perseverance



SAKSHI SETHI

In the words of F.M Alexander, 'People don't decide their futures. They decide their habits and their habits decide their futures.' From the moment we wake up to the moment we retire to bed, habits silently guide individual behaviours, often without even realising it. They can either propel us towards success or lead us down a path of mediocrity or failure. Habits have a profound impact on an individual's personal development and well-being. They are the fabric of daily existence, weaving through routines and decisions and ultimately, shaping the course of an individual's life. By establishing a consistent routine, an individual creates a framework within which they can operate efficiently and effectively.

The individual becomes disciplined and learns self-control and perseverance... the qualities that are essential for achieving long-term goals and overcoming obstacles. Habits play a crucial role in the social sphere, shaping relationships and interactions with others. They are the invisible architects of every individual's life, decisions and ultimately, destiny. Shared habits, such as participating in team sports or volunteering in the community, foster a sense of camaraderie and belonging. Whether consciously or unconsciously, it is the habits that dictate what an individual eats, how the free time is to be spent and even which people to surround with. By understanding and intentionally cultivating positive habits, one can steer oneself towards choices that align with their goals and values. Undoubtedly, habits are the silent architects of one's actions, often operating beneath the conscious awareness yet exerting a profound influence on thoughts.



By establishing a consistent routine, one can create a framework within which they can operate efficiently and effectively. Habits indeed hold far more significance in everyone's life than one can often realise. From the moment an individual wakes up until they retire to bed, habits silently guide behaviours, often influencing outcomes far more than one can acknowledge. One of the most powerful aspects of habits is their ability to create momentum. Once a habit is established, it becomes easier to maintain and even expand upon. This momentum propels the individual to move forward, making it easier to achieve their goals and aspirations. By starting with small, achievable habits and gradually building upon them, one can harness this momentum to make positive changes in their life.

There is no denying the fact that good habits lie behind many of the positive changes while conversely, negative habits, such as procrastination, excessive screen time and unhealthy habits, hinder progress and undermine an individual's potential. Human connection is fundamental to happiness and fulfilment and this shows how habits play a crucial role in shaping one's daily experiences, behaviours and outcomes across various domains of life. It is the habits that contribute to a sense of belonging, support networks and emotional fulfillment. They encompass a wide range of actions, from simple everyday tasks to complex behaviours and thus play a significant role in shaping lives. They are not mere trivialities but powerful forces that permeate every aspect of our lives. By intentionally cultivating positive habits and breaking free from detrimental ones, one can create a life that is aligned with our values, goals and aspirations. Whether they are positive or negative, habits are and will always be an integral part of one's life. They form a crucial part of the everyday conceptual scheme used to explain normal human activity. Remember, an individual only becomes what they think they can. One cannot change the habits one does daily. The secret of an individual's success is found in their daily routine as rightly said there are no overnight transformations.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Rationalise regulations for e-commerce



UTTAM GUPTA

When the Government expects foreign companies to do almost everything that a retailer does, how can it deny these firms the right to sell?

Way back in 2019, Delhi Vyapar Mahasangh (DVM) an organisation of retail traders in the national capital had lodged a complaint with the Competition Commission of India (CCI) alleging anti-competitive behaviour by Amazon Seller Services (ASS) and Flipkart Internet Private Limited (FIPL).

The CCI is an authority established under the Competition Act, of 2002. The Act prohibits anti-competitive agreements and abuse of dominant position by enterprises and regulates mergers, amalgamations acquisitions etc to ensure that there is no adverse effect on competition. Amazon and Flipkart are global giants operating e-commerce marketplaces in India through their subsidiaries, the ASS and the FIPL.

DVM argued that ASS and FIPL had entered into exclusive sales agreements with smartphone makers to sell certain phones through a small number of preferred sellers. It also alleged that they had given preferential treatment to certain sellers by giving them higher search rankings and offering to pay for part of the discount that such sellers would offer during key sales periods such as Flipkart's Big Billion Days and Amazon's Prime Day.

On January 13, 2020, the CCI initiated an investigation under Section 26(1) of the Competition Act, 2002. Prima facie, the CCI agreed with DVM's contention and ordered a probe by the Director General (DG) - Investigation. ASS and FIPL approached the Karnataka High Court (KHC) with a plea to quash the CCI order. The KHC refused to quash it. The duo challenged the order in the Supreme Court (SC). In August 2021, the SC too dismissed their applications and ordered that "the CCI - DG will complete the probe.

Now, the CCI-DG has come up with its findings.

The investigation has charged Amazon and Flipkart with violation of antitrust laws. Leveraging their substantial financial resources, they have indulged in 'predatory pricing' and forged exclusive partnerships with selective sellers. Predatory pricing is the illegal business practice of setting prices extremely low albeit by offering heavy discounts to consumers in an attempt to eliminate the competition and establish a monopoly. This has resulted in the shutdown of thousands of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

It has specifically targeted Amazon for certain practices, especially with Cloutail India Pvt Ltd (a firm set up by a JV namely Prione Business Services (PBS) established by Amazon, in collaboration with an Indian entity owned by Narayan Murthy of Infosys) a "preferred" seller on Amazon's marketplace and other in-house sellers. Similarly, Flipkart has been investigated for its links to platform sellers, which contravenes new e-commerce regulations.

What has led to the violations? This can't be attributed solely to the use of financial muscle by these companies as alluded to by the CCI - DG. This has a lot to do with the rules introduced in early 2016, through which the Government allowed 100 per cent foreign direct investment (FDI) under the so-called e-commerce marketplace model.



THE GOVERNMENT IS ALSO WORKING ON A COMPREHENSIVE POLICY ON FDI IN E-COMMERCE. IF IT GOES AHEAD WITH SUCH A POLICY, IT WILL BE TANTAMOUNT TO A RETROSPECTIVE CHANGE OF POLICY AND SEND A WRONG SIGNAL TO FOREIGN INVESTORS

The marketplace is a platform where vendors sell their products directly to consumers even as its owner (read: Amazon/Flipkart) merely acts as a facilitator by providing services such as booking orders, raising invoices, arranging delivery, accepting rejections etc. She can't hold inventory or undertake direct selling. The policy intent was abundantly clear. The foreign investor in the marketplace wasn't supposed to invest in the inventory model.

However, the intent wasn't reflected in the Press Note (PN) issued by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) in the Ministry of Commerce and Industries. While drafting the fine print, a clever bureaucrat blurred the demarcation between the marketplace where 100 per cent FDI was allowed and the inventory model where it wasn't. The PN (2016) prescribed two conditions. First, the foreign entity owning marketplace cannot permit more than 25 per cent of total sales on the marketplace from one vendor or its group companies. Two, it cannot directly or indirectly influence the sale price.

In the absence of specifying who that vendor should be, it made way for a company linked to the owner of the marketplace to get in. The latter could set up four companies (call them subsidiaries or JVs) and control 25 per cent of each of the total sales on the platform. Contrary to the policy intent, which prohibited foreign investors from direct selling, the fine print did just the opposite. Having allowed its entities to control almost all of the sales made on the marketplace, it

would be naive to expect that an anti-competition situation won't emerge. With such rules in place, it was a foregone conclusion that Amazon et al would have exclusive partnerships with selective sellers who - acting in concert with the former - would indulge in predatory pricing and give heavy discounts leading to the annihilation of thousands of SMEs. Following a complaint from the SMEs, on December 26, 2018, the DPIIT clarified that "the owner of the marketplace or its subsidiary or its joint venture (JV) with an Indian company can't have ownership of the seller." Further, "a seller on the platform can't source more than 25 percent of its inventory from a firm connected with the latter."

Foreign investors can circumvent the first rider by having less than 50 per cent shareholding in the seller firm and arguing that they have no control (majority) over the latter. The marketplace owner can also sell his own product - albeit through its wholesale arm - on the platform. All that the wholesale arm needs to ensure is to restrict supplies to the seller within the 25 per cent threshold.

The clarification/modification in the conditions through December 26, 2018, hasn't helped much in improving the situation.

A few sellers, some of them still maintaining connection with the marketplace owner continue to dominate the e-commerce platform. For instance, only three dozen firms out of the 400,000 sellers on the ASS platform account for 67 per cent of sales on it. Meanwhile, in 2020, the Department of Consumer Affairs

(DCA), in the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, issued the Consumer Protection (e-commerce) Rules, under Section 101 of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. The rules bar affiliated entities from selling on e-commerce platforms, restrict 'flash sales', and disallow sellers from using the name or brand associated with the marketplace e-commerce entities for the promotion of goods. In 2021, DCA made amendments to restrict business-to-business, or B2B, sales in e-commerce and a provision to prevent an 'abuse of dominant position' by e-commerce firms.

The Government is also working on a comprehensive policy on FDI in e-commerce that will give primacy to the above rules. If it goes ahead with such a policy, it will be tantamount to a retrospective change of policy and send a wrong signal to foreign investors. The present mess owes it to the very idea of the marketplace which is flawed. When, the Government expects foreign companies to do almost everything that a retailer does viz. booking orders, raising the invoices, arranging the delivery, accepting rejections and so on, how can the former deny the latter right to sell? The way forward is to shun this idea; instead, allow 100 per cent FDI in retail. The bureaucrats had already done it but in a 'subtle' way. The Government should make it obvious and straightforward. Moreover, 100 per cent FDI should be permitted to all retailers, online or offline, big or small for a level playing field.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Empowering rural women through the 'Umeed' scheme

Despite its success in empowering many women, this scheme's benefits are still not fully accessible to all in the region

In remote villages of Jammu and Kashmir, a silent revolution is underway as these regions are witnessing women coming out of their houses to explore the avenues of self-employment through the 'Umeed Scheme' - Jammu and Kashmir State Rural Livelihood Mission (JKRLM). This transformative initiative aims to reach out to 66% of the rural population across the erstwhile 125 blocks, linking them to sustainable livelihood opportunities and nurturing them till they come out of poverty and enjoy a decent quality of life.

In December last year, Mission Director JKRLM, Indu Kanwal Chib, while sharing the JKRLM Vision



MANIMA AKHTAR

2024-30 informed that JKRLM has successfully federated 725,000 women and formed 87,000 self-help groups (SHGs) across the Union Territory of J&K. These SHGs are working in various areas such as livelihood, financial inclusion, gender and social inclusion, and other related fields. However, certain rural pockets remain unaware of this significant scheme, lacking

comprehensive knowledge to capitalise on its benefits. One such area is Baila village in Mandi Tehsil of the border district Poonch, which is located approximately 230 kilometres from Jammu city. Although the scheme has been operational in the nearby Mandi tehsil since 2016, its reach in Baila village remains limited. When asked about the 'Umeed Scheme', the response from the women of this remote village was a unanimous lack of awareness. When they were informed about the benefits of the scheme, they expressed eagerness to understand its workings, underscoring its importance for including women in the workforce and towards their economic freedom.

In this context, Matina Akhtar, an 18-year-old resident of Baila, shared her perspective: "Despite living just two kilometres away from Mandi, we remain unaware of this scheme. There is this wide gap between secluded corners of our country and the development schemes. This gap leaves us, women from remote areas, bereft of its advantages. We only learn about it when the scheme is on the verge of closure. Our remoteness is the reason why we haven't received any information about this scheme. How are we supposed to engage with it if we're in the dark?" "When I needed funds for my grocery store, I was short on cash. So, I resorted to



selling some wood from my house to procure materials. Had I known about this scheme earlier, I wouldn't have sold those timbers," lamented 37-year-old Farida Akhtar from the same village. When asked "If they have awareness about any

scheme?" resident Zareena Akhtar, aged 23, responded that within their community, the only scheme recognised is the Anganwadi Scheme (ICDS), highlighting a significant gap in knowledge and accessibility to Governmental initiatives beyond this singular program.

There is also a lot of fear among the people of the village as well - both women and men. They have the fear of failure - what if they will not succeed in their endeavour? Salma Akhtar, 19, from Baila, confirms the notion. She expressed fears about potential repercussions and uncertainties associated with loan acquisition under the scheme. There is a need to dispel the

apprehensions lingering in the hearts of these women and endeavour to convey to them that this scheme is not a threat, but rather a boon. They need to be assured that this initiative can usher positive transformations into their lives. They must be made aware that this scheme is tailored specifically for women and designed to work towards their financial freedom.

According to Naima Akhtar, the Cluster Head of the Umeed Scheme in Mandi Tehsil, the Government has allocated decent funding under this scheme for women to benefit from it. "I urge other women who may be unaware of this scheme to join us. Numerous individuals, both men and women,

in the Mandi Loren area have secured rewarding opportunities through this Scheme. They are sustaining their households without needing to engage in manual labor.

Regrettably, the women of Baila remain oblivious to this exceptional program. Meanwhile, women from other regions are harnessing its benefits, propelling themselves up the ladder of progress. They are not only achieving financial independence but also cultivating self-reliance. This brings hope for a transformative change in the lives of the women of Baila."

(The author is grassroots writer from Poonch, J&K; views are personal. Charkha Features)

Israel reopens Gaza crossing post-rocket attack

UN says no aid allowed across

AP ■ JERUSALEM/CHICAGO

The Israeli military said on Wednesday that it has reopened the Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza, a key terminal for the entry of humanitarian aid that was closed over the weekend after a Hamas rocket attack killed four Israeli soldiers nearby. But the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees said no aid has yet entered and there is no one to receive it on the Palestinian side. Workers fled during an incursion by an Israeli tank brigade on Tuesday that captured the nearby Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt, which remains closed. That limited incursion did not appear to be the start of the full-scale invasion of Rafah that Israel has repeatedly promised. But the prolonged closure of the two main crossings could exacerbate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where the UN says a "full-blown famine" is already underway in the north. The United States paused a shipment of bombs to Israel last week over concerns that Israel was approaching

a decision on launching a full-scale assault on Rafah, in a further widening of divisions between the two close allies. The US says it is concerned over the fate of around 1.3 million Palestinians crammed into Rafah, most of whom fled fighting elsewhere. Israel says Rafah is Hamas' last stronghold and that a wider offensive there is needed to dismantle the group's military and governing capabilities. The US, Egypt and Qatar are meanwhile ramping up efforts to close the gaps in a possible agreement for at least a temporary cease-fire and the release of some of the scores of Israeli hostages still held by Hamas. Israel has linked the threatened Rafah operation to the fate of those negotiations. The Rafah crossing has been a vital conduit for humanitarian aid since the start of the war and is the only place where people can enter and exit. Kerem Shalom is Gaza's main cargo terminal. Israel now controls all of Gaza's crossings for the first time since it withdrew troops and settlers from the territory nearly two decades ago, though it has maintained a blockade with Egypt's cooperation for most of that time. Associated Press journalists heard sporadic explosions and gunfire in the area of the Rafah crossing overnight, including two large blasts early

Wednesday. The Israeli military reported six launches from Rafah toward the Kerem Shalom crossing on Tuesday. COGAT, the Israeli military body in charge of Palestinian civilian affairs, said the Kerem Shalom crossing reopened early Wednesday. But Juliette Touma, the director of communications for UNRWA, said no aid had entered as of midday on Wednesday and that the UN agency had been forced to ration fuel, which is imported through Rafah. Gaza's Health Ministry meanwhile said at least 46 patients and wounded people who had been scheduled to leave Tuesday for medical treatment have been left stranded. UN agencies and aid groups have ramped up humanitarian assistance in recent weeks as Israel has lifted some restrictions and opened an additional crossing in the north under pressure from the United States, its closest ally. But aid workers say the closure of Rafah, which is the only gateway for the entry of fuel for trucks and generators, could have severe repercussions, and the UN says northern Gaza is already in a state of "full-blown famine". COGAT said 60 aid trucks entered through the northern crossing on Tuesday. Some 500 trucks entered Gaza every day before the war.

The war began when Hamas militants breached Israel's defences on October 7 and swept through nearby army bases and farming communities, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting another 250. Hamas is still believed to be holding around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others after most of the rest were released during a November cease-fire. The war has killed over 34,700 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, and has driven some 80 per cent of Gaza's population of 2.3 million Palestinians from their homes. Israel's military campaign has been one of the deadliest and most destructive in recent history, reducing large parts of Gaza to rubble. Biden has repeatedly warned Netanyahu against launching an invasion of Rafah. But Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners have threatened to bring down his government if he calls off an offensive or makes too many concessions in the cease-fire talks. The US has historically provided Israel enormous amounts of military aid, which has only accelerated since the start of the war. The paused shipment was supposed to consist of 1,800 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) bombs and 1,700 smaller ones, with the US

concern focused on how the larger bombs could be used in a dense urban setting, a US official said on Tuesday on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter. The official said no final decision had been made yet on proceeding with the shipment. Meanwhile Police began to clear a Pro-Palestinian tent encampment at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., early Wednesday, hours after dozens of protesters left the site and marched to President Ellen Granberg's home. "Officers gave their third and final warning to demonstrators to move at about 3:30 a.m., saying all who remained in U-Yard and the stretch of H Street in front of the plaza would be arrested," according to GW Hatchet, the university's independent student-run newspaper. University officials had warned in statements of possible suspensions for students engaging in protest activities on University Yard. "While the university is committed to protecting students' rights to free expression, the encampment had evolved into an unlawful activity, with participants in direct violation of multiple university policies and city regulations," the university said in a statement.

US halts bomb shipment to Israel amid Rafah invasion concerns

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The US paused a shipment of bombs to Israel last week over concerns that Israel was approaching a decision on launching a full-scale assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah against the wishes of the US, a senior administration official said on Tuesday. The shipment was supposed to consist of 1,800 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) bombs and 1,700 500-pound (225-kilogram) bombs, according to the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive matter, with the focus of US concern being the larger explosives and how they could be used in a dense urban setting. More than 1 million civilians are sheltering in Rafah after evacuating other parts of Gaza amid Israel's war on Hamas, which came after the militant group's deadly attack on Israel on October 7. The US has historically provided enormous amounts of military aid for Israel. That has only accelerated in the aftermath of Hamas' October 7 attack that killed some 1,200 in Israel and led to about 250 being taken captive by militants. The pausing of the aid shipment is the most striking manifestation of the growing daylight between Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government and the administration of President Joe Biden, which has called on Israel to do far more to protect the lives of innocent civilians in Gaza. It also comes as the Biden administration is due to deliver a first-of-its-kind formal verdict this week on whether the airstrikes on Gaza and restrictions on delivery of aid have violated international and US laws designed to spare civilians from the worst horrors of war. A decision against Israel would further add to pressure on Biden to curb the flow of weapons and money to Israel's military. Biden's administration in April began reviewing future trans-

fers of military assistance as Netanyahu's government appeared to move closer toward an invasion of Rafah, despite months of opposition from the White House. The official said the decision to pause the shipment was made last week and no final decision had been made yet on whether to proceed with the shipment at a later date. US officials had declined for days to comment on the halted transfer, word of which came as Biden on Tuesday described US support for Israel as "ironclad, even when we disagree". Press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre declined to square the arms holdup with Biden's rhetoric in support of Israel, saying only, "Two things could be true." Israeli troops on Tuesday seized control of Gaza's vital Rafah border crossing in what the White House described as a limited operation that stopped short of the full-on Israeli invasion of the city that Biden has repeatedly warned against on humanitarian grounds, most recently in a Monday call with Netanyahu. Israel has ordered the evacuation of 100,000 Palestinians from the city. Israeli forces have also carried out what it describes as "targeted strikes" on the eastern part of Rafah and captured the Rafah crossing, a critical conduit for the flow of humanitarian aid along the Gaza-Egypt border. Privately, concern has mounted inside the White House about what's unfolding in Rafah, but publicly administration officials have stressed that they did not think the operations had defied Biden's warnings against a widescale operation in the city. White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Israel described the operation along the Gaza-Egypt border in eastern Rafah as "an operation of limited scale and duration" aimed at cutting off Hamas arms smuggling, but also said the US would monitor the fighting.

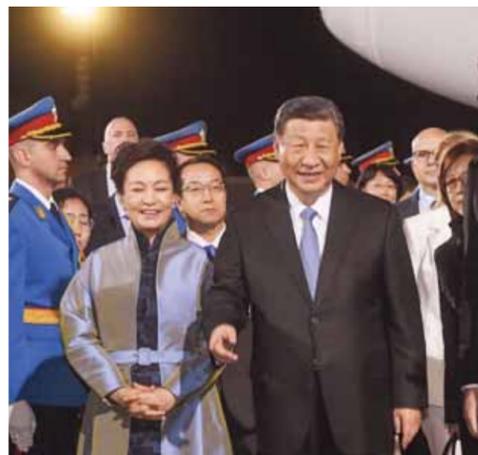
Another German politician attacked

Berlin (AP): A prominent Berlin politician was violently assaulted and suffered injuries to her head and neck, police said Wednesday, in the latest attack on elected officials that raises concern over rising political violence in Germany. Franziska Giffey, the city's top economic official, a former mayor and an ex-federal minister, was attacked at an event in a Berlin library on Tuesday by a man who approached her from behind and hit her with a bag containing a hard device, police said. Giffey was taken to a hospital and treated for head and neck pain, police said. A 74-year-old man was detained and police searched his home, police said. They said the suspect was known to police, but did not give any indication for a motive.

China, Serbia sign pact to build 'shared future'

AP ■ BELGRADE

China and European Union candidate Serbia signed an agreement on Wednesday to build a "shared future," making the Balkan country the first in Europe to agree on such a document with Beijing. After meeting in Belgrade, Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Serbian President Vucic announced they would "deepen and elevate the comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Serbia," and "build a new era of a community with a shared future between China and Serbia." Xi launched the term "community for shared future" over 10 years ago. While it may not denote a specific initiative, experts believe it has an underlying significance as another term for an alliance. "Eight years ago, Serbia became China's first comprehensive strategic partner in the Central and Eastern European region, and today Serbia is the first European country to build a community of destiny with China, fully reflecting the



In this photo provided by the Serbian Presidential Press Service, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, right, welcomes Chinese President Xi Jinping, center, and his wife Peng Liyuan during a welcome ceremony upon his arrival at the Nikola Tesla airport in Belgrade, Serbia, Tuesday. AP/PTI

strategic, special and high level of China-Serbia relations." Xi said during a press conference after signing the agreement. It was not immediately clear

how the EU would respond to Serbia getting even closer to China. Russia's war on Ukraine has pushed the integration of six Western Balkan countries, including Serbia, into the EU at the top of the 27-nation bloc's agenda. China has claimed neutrality in the Ukraine conflict, but has refused to call the Russian assault an invasion and has been accused of bolstering Russia's military capacity. Serbia has condemned the Russian invasion but has refused to join international sanctions against Moscow. Xi arrived in Serbia to a warm welcome on Tuesday evening from France, where he had a high-stakes state visit dominated by trade disputes and Russia's war in Ukraine. Thousands of people chanting "China-Serbia" and waving flags were bused in from across Serbia to attend a welcoming ceremony for Xi on Wednesday in front of the Serbia Palace, in the new part of Belgrade where the talks were held. Serbia's populist president addressed the crowd from a balcony, calling Xi an "iron-clad" friend. He said his visit to Serbia was "historic" because it opened the path for even closer ties.

"We are writing history today although it doesn't seem so to many," Vucic said. "We thank President Xi. He hasn't come to Europe in five years and he has again chosen our little Serbia." At the start of the official meeting on Wednesday, Xi said "we are first-hand witnesses that the Serbian people view Chinese people as iron-clad best friends." "This is truly a two-sided and truthful friendship ... I truly hail this and it really made an extremely deep impression on me," Xi said, according to the state RTS television. Xi is travelling to Hungary later on Wednesday. Like Serbia, Hungary is seen as one of China's more friendly partners in Europe. Signs of pro-China sentiments were visible throughout the Serbian capital. 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.

UK PM loses MP amid charge of 'incompetence'

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Wednesday suffered a humiliating defection from his party benches as a Conservative member of Parliament walked across the floor of the House of Commons to join the Opposition Labour ranks. Natalie Elphicke, MP for Dover, said the Tories under Sunak "have become a byword for incompetence and division" in a resignation statement just moments before the weekly Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs). The 43-year-old British Indian leader went on to face off with Labour Leader Keir Starmer, who made the most of the shock move which marks the second defection from the Tories to Labour in two weeks

and comes on the back of bruising local election results for the governing party. "When I was elected in 2019, the Conservative Party occupied the centre ground of British politics. The party was about building the future and making the most of the opportunities that lay ahead for our country," Elphicke, a staunch critic of the Labour Party until only a few days ago, said in her resignation letter. "Since then, many things have changed. The elected prime minister was ousted in a coup led by the unelected Rishi Sunak. Under Rishi Sunak, the Conservatives have become a byword for incompetence and division. The centre ground has been abandoned and key pledges of the 2019 manifesto have been ditched," she said. She added that the Labour

Party under Starmer has "changed out of all recognition" and its policies "can be trusted". "We need to move on from the broken promises of Rishi Sunak's tired and chaotic government," she declared. The dramatic moment of her crossing the floor of the House was followed by Starmer asking Sunak: "What is the point of this failed government staggering on?" when the Tory MP on the front line of the small boats migration crisis on the coastline of Dover has openly attacked Sunak's handling of a priority issue like illegal migration. "If he thinks his own MPs joining the Labour Party are wrong if he thinks anyone believes any of the nonsense that he spouts, why doesn't he put it to the test and call a general election," questioned Starmer, in a series of stinging attacks during PMQs.

how the EU would respond to Serbia getting even closer to China. Russia's war on Ukraine has pushed the integration of six Western Balkan countries, including Serbia, into the EU at the top of the 27-nation bloc's agenda. China has claimed neutrality in the Ukraine conflict, but has refused to call the Russian assault an invasion and has been accused of bolstering Russia's military capacity. Serbia has condemned the Russian invasion but has refused to join international sanctions against Moscow. Xi arrived in Serbia to a warm welcome on Tuesday evening from France, where he had a high-stakes state visit dominated by trade disputes and Russia's war in Ukraine. Thousands of people chanting "China-Serbia" and waving flags were bused in from across Serbia to attend a welcoming ceremony for Xi on Wednesday in front of the Serbia Palace, in the new part of Belgrade where the talks were held. Serbia's populist president addressed the crowd from a balcony, calling Xi an "iron-clad" friend. He said his visit to Serbia was "historic" because it opened the path for even closer ties.

Glory to HK protest song banned after court overturns ruling

AP ■ HONG KONG

An appeals court on Wednesday granted the Hong Kong government's request to ban a popular protest song, overturning an earlier ruling and deepening concerns over the erosion of freedoms in the once-free-wheeling global financial hub. "Glory to Hong Kong" was often sung by demonstrators during huge anti-government protests in 2019. The song was later mistakenly played as the city's anthem at international sporting events, instead of China's "March of the Volunteers," in mix-ups that upset city officials. It was the first time a song has been banned in the city since Britain handed the territory back to Chinese rule in 1997. Critics have said prohibiting broadcast or distribution of the song further reduces freedom of expression since Beijing launched a crackdown in Hong

Kong following the 2019 protests. They have also warned the ban might disrupt the operation of tech giants and hurt the city's appeal as a business center. Judge Jeremy Poon wrote that the composer intended for the song to be a "weapon," pointing to its power in arousing emotions among some residents of the city. "We accept the assessment of the executive that prosecutions alone are clearly not adequate to tackle the acute criminal problems and that there is a compelling need for an injunction," he said. He said the injunction was necessary to persuade internet platform operators to remove "problematic videos in connection with the song" from their platforms. The operators have indicated they are ready to accede to the government's request if there is a court order, he added. The ban would target anyone who broadcast or distributed the song to advocate for the separation of Hong

Kong from China. It would also prohibit any actions that misrepresent the song as the national anthem with the intent to insult the anthem. The song can still be played if it is for lawful journalistic and academic activities. Failure to comply with the court order may be considered as contempt of court and could be liable for a fine or imprisonment. Authorities have previously arrested some residents who played the song in public under other offenses, such as playing a musical instrument in public without a permit, local media reported. As of mid-afternoon on Wednesday, "Glory to Hong Kong," whose artist is credited as "Thomas and the Hong Kong people," was still available on Spotify and Apple Music in both English and Cantonese. A search on YouTube for the song also displayed multiple videos and renditions. Google said in an email to the AP that it was "reviewing the

court's judgment." Spotify and Apple did not immediately comment. George Chen, co-chair of digital practice at The Asia Group, a Washington-headquartered business and policy consultancy, said it would be most practical for tech companies to restrict access to the content in question in a certain region to comply with the order. Chen called on the government to consider how to ease public concerns over the order's chilling effect on free speech. He said he hoped such bans will not become "the new normal" and establish a precedent. "This will get people really worried about how free Hong Kong's internet will be like tomorrow," he said. Beijing imposed a sweeping national security law in 2020 to quell the months-long unrest. That law was used to arrest many of the city's leading pro-democracy activists. In March, the city enacted a home-grown securi-

ty law, deepening fears that the city's Western-style civil liberties would be further curtailed. The two laws typically target more serious criminal acts. After the judgement was handed down, Lin Jian, a spokesperson for China's Foreign Ministry, said stopping anyone from using the song to incite division and insult the national anthem is a necessary measure for the city to maintain national security. Hong Kong's Secretary for Justice Paul Lam insisted the injunction was not aimed at restricting the normal operation of internet service providers. He said the government would do its best to preserve the city's free flow of information. Lam argued that the acts covered by the ban could be constituted as criminal offenses even before the court order, and that the scope of the injunction was "extremely narrow."

Biden visits Wisconsin to tout Microsoft facility, meet voters & subtly troll Trump

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden is racing into yet another battleground state Wednesday, continuing to push a contrast with Donald Trump on economic policy as his own reelection campaign readies a new USD 14 million advertising blitz aimed in part at Black, Latino and Asian American voters. Biden is traveling to Racine, Wisconsin, where he'll highlight a decision by Microsoft to build a USD 3.3 billion data center that is expected to create roughly 2,000 jobs. It's also the same spot where Trump, to much fanfare, lauded a plan by Taiwan-based electronics giant Foxconn plan to build a USD 10 billion manufacturing facility that was supposed to eventually employ 10,000 people. Except it was never completed. Conscious of that history, Microsoft's president Brad Smith said in an interview



with The Associated Press that Microsoft had a "steadfast commitment to under-promising and over-delivering" and praised the Biden administration and Democratic Gov. Tony Evers for economic policies that set the stage for the developments announced Wednesday. Trump's campaign didn't address Foxconn, but the former president often says the economy was in a much better position when he was in

office, and it will be again should he win. Meanwhile, Biden's reelection team is sharpening their outreach to minority voters on the airwaves, with the fresh, seven-figure digital and television ad campaign launching Wednesday that follows the USD 30 million effort that began after his State of the Union address in early March. One of the ads that is a part of the fresh campaign will also be released Wednesday and focuses on Trump's failed yet determined push to repeal the Affordable Care Act. After his speech, Biden is making a campaign stop to speak with Black voters about the stakes of the November election. The Biden campaign wants to capitalize on the fundraising advantage it's enjoyed over Trump, hoping to bury them on the airwaves while amassing significant resources on the ground in key battleground

states to force Republicans to play catch-up much later in the year. "Equally important as our own historic investments is the complete lack of investment on the other side," Michael Tyler, the Biden campaign's communications director, told reporters. "Trump's paid media strategy can only be described as anemic and inefficient." A significant portion of the USD 14 million campaign starting Wednesday will go into Black and Hispanic media, as well as Asian American print and radio, according to the campaign. Campaign officials also said Biden will continue to do targeted interviews with media that serve primarily minority audiences, while the campaign plans to launch more coalition groups in May that focus on specific blocs of voters. So far, the Biden campaign has started groups to engage women, Latinos and educators.

Dali crew to stay onboard during demolition to remove fallen bridge from ship's deck

AP ■ BALTIMORE

The crew of the Dali will remain on board the grounded container ship while demolition crews use explosives to break down the largest remaining span of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge, officials said Tuesday. Of the crew members, 20 are from India and one is Sri Lankan. The steel span landed on the ship's bow after the Dali lost power and crashed into one of the bridge's support columns on March 26. Since then, the ship has been stuck amid the wreckage, and Baltimore's busy port has been closed to most maritime traffic. The controlled demolition, which is expected to take place in the coming days, will allow the Dali to be refloated and guided back into the Port of Baltimore, officials say. Once the ship is removed, maritime traffic can begin returning to normal, which will provide relief for thousands of longshoremen, truckers and small business owners who have seen their jobs impacted by the closure. Officials previously said they hoped to remove the Dali by May 10 and reopen the port's 50-foot (15.2-meter) main

channel by the end of May. The Dali's 21-member crew will shelter in place aboard the ship while the explosives are detonated, said Petty Officer Ronald Hodges of the Coast Guard. Engineers have been working for weeks to determine the best way to remove this last major piece of the fallen bridge. The explosives will send it tumbling into the water. Then a massive hydraulic grabber will lift the resulting sections of steel onto barges. Video footage released by Coast Guard officials last week showed entire sections of roadway sitting on the ship's deck. Hodges said the crew's safety was a top concern as officials considered whether they should remain on the ship during the demolition. He said engineers are using precision cuts to control how the trusses break down. "The last thing anybody wants is for something to happen to the crew members," Hodges said. They haven't been allowed to leave the Dali since the disaster. Officials said they've been busy maintaining the ship and assisting investigators.

A spokesperson for the crew didn't immediately respond to an email seeking comment Tuesday afternoon. The National Transportation Safety Board and the FBI are conducting investigations into the bridge collapse. Danish shipping giant Maersk had chartered the Dali for a planned trip from Baltimore to Sri Lanka, but the ship didn't get far. Its crew sent a mayday call saying they had lost power and had no control of the steering system. Minutes later, the ship rammed into the bridge. Officials have said the safety board investigation will focus on the ship's electrical system, including whether it experienced power issues before leaving Baltimore. Six construction workers were killed in the collapse. Five bodies have been recovered from the water, but one remains missing. All the victims were Latino immigrants who were working an overnight shift filling potholes on the bridge. Police officers were able to stop traffic moments before the collapse, but they didn't have enough time to alert the workers. Maryland leaders said last week that they plan to rebuild the bridge by fall 2028.

Albanese dismisses China's claim blaming Aus for aircraft encounter

AP ■ MELBOURNE
China's account blaming Australia for a dangerous clash between their military aircraft in international airspace over the Yellow Sea failed to undermine Australian objections, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said Wednesday.
The Chinese and Australians lodged official protests and blamed each other for a Chinese warplane's extraordinary use of flares against an Australian navy helicopter Saturday. The Seahawk's pilot had to "take evasive action" to avoid flares that were dropped in the helicopter's flightpath by a Chinese Chengdu J-10 fighter jet, Australian officials said.
There was no injury or damage done, although experts warned the helicopter could have been forced to ditch at sea if an engine had been



In this undated photo provided by the Australian Defence Force, a Seahawk helicopter prepares to take off from the deck of HMAS Hobart during flying operations while on a regional presence deployment off northern Australia. 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. **AP/PTI**

struck by a flare. Australia publicly accused China of unprofessional and unacceptable behavior, while China retorted that the Seahawk deliberately flew close to China's airspace in a "provocative move."
Albanese said he rejected China's argument that the Australians had been at fault. He highlighted Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian's statement that the helicopter "flew within close range of China's airspace" in attacking the Chinese case. "That's a confirmation that this chopper was in international air space," Albanese told Perth Radio 6PR.
Albanese also noted the helicopter had been upholding international law at the time as part of the crew an Australian air warfare destroyer that was enforcing U.N. Security Council sanctions against North Korea.

Maldives minister says Chinese research ship's activity unrelated

AP ■ MALE
The Maldives government does not believe that a high-tech Chinese ship conducted any research related to the archipelagic nation despite docking in Male twice and skirting its territorial waters for three months before departing, a senior minister said on Wednesday.
Fisheries Minister Ahmed Shiyam was talking about the 4,500-tonne high-tech Chinese research ship "Xiang Yang Hong 03" that returned to Maldivian waters, two months after it spent a week docked at different ports in this nation. It docked at Thilafushi Industrial Island's harbour on April 25. This ship is currently in the Java Sea near Indonesia, Adhadhu.mv reported on Wednesday, quoting the satellite AIS tracking.
"We don't know that they did anything that would have affected us. Or else we weren't

unaware that the research vessel did anything related to us and I don't believe that they did," Shiyam told the news portal. If the Chinese vessel conducted such research, Shiyam said he believed it would have been done in collaboration with the Maldives government and added that he would "share further information after clarification." In February, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said the research ship's activities complied with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). China's scientific research activities in relevant waters are for peaceful purposes and aimed at contributing to humanity's scientific understanding of the ocean," he said, adding that the vessel's activities are in strict compliance with the terms of UNCLOS. Meanwhile, Shiyam said, "The current government previously cancelled a hydrography agreement with India for underwater research." His statement comes on a day

when Maldives' Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer left on his first official visit to India. Xiang Yang Hong 03, described as the most modern research vessel in the Chinese fleet, had begun its journey to the Maldives on January 14, barely 24 hours after President Mohamed Muizzu concluded his state visit to China. The Chinese ship arrived near the Maldives on January 29 and docked in Male for the first time on February 22. After heading back to the boundary of the Maldives' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the vessel returned after a month and docked in the Thilafushi harbour on April 25. The Foreign Ministry had earlier confirmed that Xiang Yang Hong 03 was visiting Maldives for the replenishment of stocks and the rotation of its crew. However, according to Adhadhu.mv's report on April 26, the Maldives government had "not disclosed the reason for its return."

Ex-Chinese defense min emerges after long absence

Beijing (PTI): China's former defence minister Gen. Wei Fenghe whose prolonged absence from the public view sparked speculation about his fate has resurfaced, suggesting that he was politically safe, a media report said on Wednesday. A floral tribute by Wei at the funeral of a senior Chinese legislator on Monday suggests the 70-year-old general could be politically safe, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. However, there is no word about the fate of Wei's successor Gen. Li Shangfu who disappeared from the public and was later sacked.
Former foreign minister Qin Gang too suffered a similar fate. Both were not seen in public yet. Wei's name was spotted on a wreath at the funeral of Ouyunqemag, 81, who served as vice-chairwoman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee from 2008-2013.
In a prime-time news bulletin on state broadcaster CCTV, Wei's tribute was visible among those from other former state councillors at the side of the funeral hall, with wreaths from President Xi Jinping and other incumbent officials in the middle. Wei, who headed the PLA Rocket Force, the new name for China's missile force from its formation on December 31, 2015, as part of Xi's military overhaul, disappeared from the public eye after his successor Li was abruptly sacked as defence minister in October last year, without explanation. Li, who like Wei spent most of his career in the PLA's rocket wing, was also stripped of his rank as a state councillor and removed from the top decision-making body - the Central Military Commission (CMC). Wei's indirect reappearance indicates he may have escaped the purge of the People's Liberation Army's top brass, including commanders of the rocket force - which manages China's nuclear arsenal - that followed Li's disgrace, the Post report said. Direct and indirect appearances in official settings are important indicators of political fate in China's opaque system, where little information is given away.



French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte Macron, Chinese President Xi Jinping, and his wife Peng Liyuan watch folklore dancers on Tuesday at the Tourmalet pass, in the Pyrenees mountains. French president is hosting China's leader at a remote mountain pass in the Pyrenees for private meetings, after a high-stakes state visit in Paris dominated by trade disputes and Russia's war in Ukraine. French President Emmanuel Macron made a point of inviting Chinese President Xi Jinping to the Tourmalet Pass near the Spanish border, where Macron spent time as a child visiting his grandmother. **AP/PTI**

Britain to expel Russian defense attaché over dangerous activities

AP ■ LONDON
Britain is expelling Russia's defense attaché after accusing him of being an undeclared military intelligence officer, one of several measures it is taking against Moscow for malicious activities, the government said Wednesday.
Home Secretary James Cleverly said the measures were aimed at what he called the "reckless and dangerous activities of the Russian government across Europe."
The government said the Russian Federal Security Service had targeted members of Parliament in recent years by hacking and had leaked UK-US trade documents.
It said the Russian government planned to sabotage military aid for Ukraine in Germany and Poland and carried out espionage in Bulgaria and Italy, along with cyber and disinformation activities and air space violations.
"In the coming days we should

expect accusations of Russophobia, conspiracy theories and hysteria from the Russian government," Cleverly said in Parliament. "This is not new and the British people and the British government will not fall for it, and will not be taken for fools by Putin's bots, trolls and lackeys."
The UK will also rescind the diplomatic status of several Russian-owned properties because they are believed to have been used for intelligence purposes, and impose new restrictions on Russian diplomatic visas and visits, he said. The Russian ambassador to the UK will be notified of the measures and told that Russia's actions will not be tolerated, the Ministry of Defense said.
"Our message to Russia is clear: Stop this illegal war, withdraw your troops from Ukraine, cease this malign activity," Cleverly said. The UK has had an uneasy relationship with Moscow for years, accusing its agents of a range of

Poland detains Russian who illegally crossed from Belarus

Warsaw (Poland) (AP): Poland's security officials said Wednesday that a 41-year-old man from Russia had been detained and was being questioned after illegally crossing in from Russia's ally Belarus.
The Border Guard confirmed that a 41-year-old "deserter" from Russia has been detained.
Deputy Interior Minister Czeslaw Mroczek said that officials were trying to establish whether the man was a deserter from Russian army "trying to flee the horrors of the war" or whether he was assigned to carry out secret tasks in the European Union for Russia.
"We must determine what his intentions were," Mroczek said. "The question is whether we are dealing here

with someone who was carrying out tasks for Russian (secret) services." Polish media reported the man was not armed and was in civilian clothes, but was carrying a written contract with the Russian army that included participation in actions being part of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine.
The detention came as Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk was meeting with top security officials over alleged Russian influences in Poland and its leadership. The development also came shortly after a controversial Polish judge, who had access to sensitive information, defected to Belarus this week, which Tusk described as "high treason."

Taliban reject claims of Afghan involvement in recent attacks

Islamabad (AP): The Taliban on Wednesday rejected claims of Afghan involvement in recent attacks in Pakistan, calling it "irresponsible and far from the reality." Pakistan's military said Tuesday a suicide bombing that killed five Chinese engineers and a Pakistani driver in March was planned in neighbouring Afghanistan and that the bomber was an Afghan citizen.
Maj. Gen. Ahmad Sharif, a spokesman for Pakistan's army, has said that four men behind the March 26 attack in Bisham, a district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, had been arrested. Enayatullah Khawarazmi, a spokesman for the Taliban's Ministry of Defence, said in a statement on Wednesday that "blaming Afghanistan for such incidents is a failed attempt to divert attention from the truth of the matter and we strongly reject it."

'Split in JSP-N would not affect stability of Prachanda-led govt'

PTI ■ KATHMANDU
Deputy Prime Minister and Chairperson of the Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal (JSP-N) Upendra Yadav on Wednesday said that he will approach the court against the "unconstitutional move" to divide his party when he was abroad as he insisted that the split won't affect the stability of the coalition government. The JSP-N, one of the coalition partners in Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda-led government, suffered a division early this week when Yadav was in the US to attend an event. The Election Commission on Monday officially recognised a faction of JSP-N led by Ashok Rai as a new political party.
"The party was unlawfully divided in my absence. This division, driven by personal ambitions, is unconstitutional," Yadav said during a press conference in Balkumari. Yadav said they will approach the court as the split of the party was "illeg



gal and unconstitutional". He termed the move by Ashok Rai to form a new party namely, Janata Samajbadi Party, a "conspiracy hatched out of power hungry and egoistic attitude". Yadav, a senior Madhesi leader, said that Rai divided the party only for his vested interest and blamed it as having no value as it jeopardized federalism and the issue of the identity of Madhesi people. He said that his party won't quit the Prachanda-led coalition government. The split in the JSP-N won't affect the stability of the coalition government," he said, amidst speculation that the split

in the Madhesi party could jeopardize the survival of the government.
"I talked to the Prime Minister and assured my party's continued support to the coalition government," said Yadav. Yadav claimed that a majority of lawmakers of his party are with him and he enjoys two-thirds majority support in the Central Working Committee of the party. He also dismissed the rumour that he was planning with the Nepali Congress-led by Sher Bahadur Deuba and CPN-Unified Socialist led by Madhav Kumar Nepal to topple the Prachanda-led government. Before the split, in the 275-member federal lower house, the ruling coalition had 154 seats - 16 more than the magic number of 138. Among them, the CPN-UML has 79 seats (including the Speaker and one suspended lawmaker), the CPN (Maoist Centre) has 32, the Rashtriya Swatantra Party has 21, the JSP-N has 12 seats and the CPN (Unified Socialist) has 10 seats.

SL looks for USD 17 billion debt reduction from restructuring

PTI ■ COLOMBO
Sri Lanka is looking at a reduction of approximately USD 17 billion from its overall debt burden in the ongoing debt restructuring process, Foreign Minister Ali Sabry said here on Wednesday and highlighted his government's efforts to foster strong ties with major partners and creditors, including China and India, for further negotiations with the IMF.
Sabry's statement comes days after the visiting Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa said Tokyo expected cash-strapped Sri Lanka to sign early MoUs with the official creditors to reach a "transparent and comparable" debt restructuring agreement with all the creditors.
Japan is leading the international discussions on Sri Lanka's debt restructuring as co-chair of the Official Creditors' Committee after the island nation, in April 2022,

declared its first-ever sovereign default since gaining independence from Britain in 1948. The unprecedented financial crisis led President Ranil Wickremesinghe's predecessor Gotabaya Rajapaksa to quit office in 2022. In March, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said it has reached a staff-level agreement with Sri Lanka for the next phase that would enable it access to USD 337 million from the nearly USD 3 billion bailout approved in 2023 for the country. Two tranches of USD 330 million each were released in March and December 2023 even as the global lender has praised Colombo for its macro-economic policy reforms, which it said, "are starting to bear fruit." Speaking with reporters here on Saturday, Sabry said that Sri Lanka is looking at a reduction of approximately USD 17 billion from its overall debt burden in the ongoing debt restructuring process. "This advantage may

manifest in various forms, including reductions in principal amounts, interest payments, or extended repayment timelines. Such restructuring efforts hold the potential to alleviate our debt burden by USD 17 billion," Sabry said. The current debt restructuring negotiations revolve around USD 46 billion, mainly involving private bondholders. Simultaneously, these endeavours will pave the way for the continuation of developmental activities within the country at the earliest opportunity, he said, adding, that Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena's recent visit to China, where Sri Lanka signed nine MoUs with China, reflects the same. He also expressed the government's expectations about concluding the foreign debt restructuring process by June. "The initial phase of domestic debt restructuring has been completed, with attention now turned to foreign debt restructuring. Negotiations with pri-

vat investors linked to sovereign bonds aim to finalise this phase by June, with a targeted completion before June 2024," the Minister added. Dealing with the foreign policy outlook of the government, Sabry referred to the recent visit of the Japanese Foreign Minister and the visit of the Iranian President and emphasised Sri Lanka's adherence to a "non-aligned foreign policy" coupled with its commitment to maintaining relations with all nations while safeguarding its sovereignty.
Securing support from major partners and creditors, including the US, France, India and China, was pivotal during negotiations with the IMF. "We've made progress in debt restructuring, gaining the backing of the Official Creditor Committee and comprising nations like India, Japan and the Paris Club. Our aim is to conclude debt restructuring by the end of June, with the support of all major players.

Chinese warships docked in Cambodia for 5 months; not permanent, says govt

AP ■ PHNOM PENH
Cambodia's Defense Ministry insisted Wednesday that the months-long presence of two Chinese warships in a strategically important naval base that is being newly expanded with funding from Beijing does not constitute a permanent deployment of the Chinese military in the country.
Questions had arisen after the Center for Strategic and International Studies reported last month that two Chinese corvettes that docked at the Ream Naval Base's new pier in December had maintained a nearly permanent presence there since.
Current satellite images, ana-

lyzed by The Associated Press, confirm that the two ships remained there on Wednesday, more than five months since they initially appeared. The United States and others have long worried that the new pier at the Ream Naval Base, built with Chinese funding, could serve as a new outpost for the Chinese navy on the Gulf of Thailand, but Cambodia has said that would not happen. Asked about why the two ships had been there for five months, Defense Ministry spokesperson Gen Chhum Socheat told the AP they were due to take part in a joint Cambodian-Chinese military exercise later this month, and that they were also involved in training Cambodian sailors. "We have been clear that

Cambodia is not allowing any foreign forces to be deployed on its territory," he said. "That won't happen; that point is in our Constitution and we are fully following it." He said the ships were also "testing" the new pier, and that they were on show for Cambodia, which was considering purchasing similar warships for its own navy.
"The ships are docked for the training period only, they are not staying permanently," he said.
Controversy over Ream Naval Base initially arose in 2019 when The Wall Street Journal reported that an early draft of a reputed agreement seen by US officials would allow China 30-year use of the base, where it would be able to post military

personnel, store weapons and berth warships. The base sits adjacent to the South China Sea, where China has aggressively asserted its claim to virtually the entire strategic waterway, and also provides easy access to the Malacca Straits, a critical shipping route leading from it to the Indian Ocean. The US has refused to recognize China's sweeping claim and routinely conducts military maneuvers there to reinforce that they are international waters. Cambodia's then-Prime Minister Hun Sen denied there was such an agreement. He pointed out that Cambodia's Constitution does not allow foreign military bases to be established on its soil, but said visiting ships from all nations are welcome.

Russia launches attack on Ukrainian energy facilities

AP ■ KYIV
Russia launched aerial attacks on energy facilities throughout Ukraine early Wednesday, targeting seven regions with more than 50 missiles as well as drones, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.
The attacks also damaged the railway station and tracks in the city of Kherson, across the Dnieper River from Russian-held territory, and injured two people in Brovary, adjacent to the capital Kyiv, officials said.
Russia consistently targets Ukraine's energy infrastructure. There was a major aerial attack on energy facilities on April 27 and another a week earlier.
In a social media post, Zelenskyy noted that



Wednesday's attacks occurred on the day that Ukraine observes the end of European fighting in World War II. "Massive missile attack by Nazi Putin on the Day of Remembrance and Victory over Nazism in the Second World War," Zelenskyy said. "The whole world should clearly understand who is who; The whole world has no right to give Nazism another chance." National electrical grid operator Ukrenergo said facilities were hit in the Vinnytsia, Zaporizhzhia, Kirovohrad, Poltava and Ivano-Frankivsk regions. Two energy facilities were hit in the Lviv region, which is in the country's far west and distant from the fighting's front lines, according to regional governor Maksym Kozzytskiy.

Possibility of GDP growth touching 8 per cent in FY24 quite high: CEA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran on Wednesday said there was a high possibility of GDP growth touching 8 per cent in FY24 on the back of robust growth registered during the three quarters of the financial year ended March 2024. India's gross domestic product (GDP) grew 8.4 per cent in the third quarter ended December 2023. In the second quarter, the GDP growth was 7.6 per cent while 7.8 per cent in the first quarter. "The IMF has projected a growth rate of 7.8 per cent for FY24. But if you look at the

trajectory of growth in the first three quarters, obviously, the possibility that the growth rate touches 8 per cent is quite high," he said at an event organised by NCAER here. This is higher than RBI's estimate of 7.5 per cent growth for the Indian economy in 2023-24. For the ongoing financial year, he said, the International Monetary Fund has an estimate of 6.8 per cent but the Reserve Bank of India expects a 7 per cent GDP growth for FY25. "If that materialises, of course, it will be the fourth consecutive year after COVID starting from FY22 that the economy will have grown at 7



per cent or more. The RBI forecasts of 7 per cent for FY25 turns out to be either correct or even underestimate, then it would be the fourth consecutive year of 7 or higher growth rate," he said. However, he said, a lot would depend on how the monsoon shapes up. Although the expectations are that there will be an above-normal monsoon, spatial and temporal distribution will matter. On the growth beyond FY25, he said, there is a possibility of India growing between 6.5-7 per cent because the key difference this decade compared to the last is the one

of balance sheet strength in the financial sector and the non-financial sector in the corporate sector as well. The investment made in supply-side augmentation of both physical and digital infrastructure has placed the economy to pursue non-inflationary growth, he said, adding that this also helps absorb the challenge of overheating. He also said that the household sector's net financial savings flows were lower in 2022-23 at 5.1 per cent due to the bulk of savings shifting to real sectors. Asked about the RBI's recent circular on under-construction infra project

financing, he said, this is draft guidelines and would not like to comment. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) last week proposed to lenders that they set aside higher provisions for under-construction infrastructure projects and asked them to ensure strict monitoring of any emerging stress. As per the draft norms, the RBI proposed that lenders set aside a provision of 5 per cent of the loan amount. This will be reduced to 2.5 per cent once a project is operational. Currently, lenders are required to have a provision of 0.4 per cent on project loans that are not overdue or stressed.

Sebi issues periodic reporting format for investment advisers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi on Wednesday came out with a standardised periodic reporting format for submission of information by investment advisers (IAs) pertaining to their activities, whereby they also need to disclose their social media handles. At present, the Investment Advisers Administration and Supervisory Body (IAASB) has been seeking reports from IAs on an ad-hoc basis. IAASB has been recognised by Sebi for the purpose of administration and supervision of investment advisers. Under the new format, investment advisers have to disclose details of their social media handles, bank accounts used for receiving advisory fee, NISM certification details, information about the last inspection carried out by Sebi or IAASB, details of advertisements issued during the half-year period and information on publishing of complaints against them, Sebi



said in a circular. Investment advisers have been directed to submit periodic reports for half-yearly periods ending on September 30 and March 31 of every financial year. Sebi said that IAs need to submit the periodic report for the half-year period ended on March 31, 2024, to IAASB within 15 days from the date of issuance of the circular by the supervisory body. For the subsequent half-yearly periods, IAs will be required to submit periodic reports within seven working days from the end of the half-

yearly period. Last week, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) came out with a framework for the administration and supervision of research analysts and investment advisers, whereby a stock exchange can be authorised to oversee and manage such entities. Sebi stated a stock exchange should be granted recognition as RAASB (Research Analyst Administration and Supervisory Body) and IAASB (Investment Adviser Administration and Supervisory Body).

India playing very critical role in IT sector: CEO of cloud security firm

PTI ■ SANTA CLARA

India is playing a very critical role in the IT sector and Indians are helping the world find solutions to global problems, the CEO of a top American cloud security company has said. Jay Chaudhury, CEO and founder of San Jose-based Zscaler also said the Modi government is playing a very good role in creating a tech-friendly environment in India. "I think the Indian government, especially under (Narendra) Modi, is already playing a very good role (in creating a tech-friendly environment in India)," Indian American technology entrepreneur Chaudhury told PTI in an interview on the sidelines of TIECon here last week. "In fact, when I started Zscaler, I opened my office in Bangalore for Zscaler before I opened the offices in Silicon Valley," he said. "Today about 40% of employees are in India. A lot of core development is done in Bangalore, Chandigarh, Pune, and Hyderabad. Brilliant people. You just have to work hard to find them.



Once you do, they do a great job, very cost-effective, very driven, very passionate," he said in response to a question. India is playing a very critical role in the IT sector and Indians, he said, are helping the world find solutions to global problems. "You go to any large high-tech company, it may be Zscaler or Microsoft or Google, Indians are in every level from software developments to managers, through directors to CEOs and the like," he said. "So, we are playing a very

important role. I'm very proud of it. That's because Indians come with a mathematical mindset. We have grades in schools. Some of the top schools are very good and people are hardworking. They're passionate because they want to get out there and make a difference," Chaudhury said. According to him, India is yet to catch up in the area of building software companies in India that can sell in every part of the world. "I think the IT sector that started with system integrators like Wipro and Infosys has done extremely well. The next phase is still early. There are lots of good opportunities. We're seeing investments going there. I think it's bound to happen, but it's still at an early stage," he said. "The lesson I think Indian entrepreneurs could take is that when they build these products, they need to keep the Western world in mind first. If you can be successful in selling in America and Europe, you can build a very large company. That's how Israelis do it. Israel is doing an extremely good job in building software in Israel and selling that in

the rest of the world. That's the area where Indians can improve it," Chaudhury said. The first thing the Indian government should do is get out of the way of entrepreneurs. "We do that very well. There was a time when they used to be licensed raj, license for everything. It's by and large gone. I think India is helping set up collaborations. I see in the hardware area, whether it is Apple or it's Samsung, some of those high-tech companies are being set up. They create an ecosystem of companies that help learn and evolve the ecosystem. I think it's good," he said. "What we need to do overall, is probably provide a little bit of more mentorship for Indian companies. The Indian companies need to start leveraging some of the US connections to understand how to successfully sell software solutions you build in India for the entire world. "There's some work to be done. I don't think the government needs to do a whole lot more. I think organisations like TIE can play a big role and they're doing some good job in the area," he said.

Sterlite Tech posts ₹82 crore loss in Q4



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Broadband technology company Sterlite Technologies on Wednesday reported a consolidated loss of Rs 82 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2024, mainly due to a dip in optical networking business. The company had posted a profit of Rs 63 crore a year ago. Its consolidated revenue from operations declined about 39 per cent to Rs 1,140 crore during the reported quarter from Rs 1,872 crore in the March 2023 quarter, according to a regulatory filing. "FY24 had its challenges, but we were resilient in actioning our priorities on customer, cost and cash. We see the market turning gradually, and early signs of this are visible in our customer discussions and order volumes," Sterlite Technologies (STL) Managing Director Ankit Agarwal said in a statement. For the fiscal ended March 31, 2024, STL posted a consolidated loss of Rs 57 crore, while it had reported a profit of Rs 127 crore in FY23. The optical networking business revenue of STL almost halved to Rs 777 crore during the reported quarter from Rs 1,505 crore in the March 2023 quarter. The annual revenue from the optical networking business also declined by about 30 per cent to Rs 3,830 crore from Rs 5,439 crore a year ago. The annual profit of STL declined by about 21 per cent to Rs 5,478 crore during the reported year from Rs 6,925 crore in FY23. "AI is bringing renewed excitement into the fibre space. We see 5G, fibre to the home, and data centre build-outs as the holy trinity of fibre for the years to come," Agarwal said.

कार्यालय-सहायक आयुक्त, राज्य कर, सचलदल इकाई, आशारोड़ी, देहरादून।

पत्रांक : 38 / सहा0आशारो0क0 / स0द0ई0 / आशारो0 / दे0दून / 2024-25 दिनांक : 06 / 05 / 2024

नीलामी सूचना
सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि इस कार्यालय द्वारा माल एवं सेवा कर अधिनियम 2017 की विभिन्न धाराओं में माल और/या वाहनों पर की गयी कार्यवाही में जब्त किए गए माल और/या वाहन, जिन पर आरोपित अर्धदण्ड/जुर्माना निर्धारित समय के भीतर जमा नहीं किया गया है, तथा जिनकी नीलामी किया जाना प्रस्तावित है, जिससे सम्बन्धित नीलामी की प्रक्रिया तथा शर्तों का विवरण निम्नलिखित है:-

नीलामी की शर्तें-
1- जब्त माल या/तथा वाहन कार्यालय सहायक आयुक्त, राज्य कर, सचल दल इकाई-आशारोड़ी देहरादून में भंडारित रखा गया है। इच्छुक बोलीदाता द्वारा सम्बन्धित माल या/तथा वाहन को निम्न विवरण के अनुसार उसके सम्मुख दर्शाये गये स्थान एवं दिनांक 10.05.2024 तथा दिनांक 24.05.2024 के मध्य सुबह 10:00 बजे से सायं 05:00 बजे तक देखा जा सकता है, एवं इस हेतु सहायक आयुक्त, राज्य कर, सचल दल इकाई-आशारोड़ी देहरादून के दूरभाष नं० 7055602908 पर संपर्क किया जा सकता है।

01	नीलामी की तिथि, समय तथा स्थान	25.05.2024 अपराह्न 02:00 बजे स्थान- कार्यालय सहायक आयुक्त, राज्य कर, सचल दल इकाई-आशारोड़ी देहरादून
02	मुहर्बद लिफाफे में बोली जमा किये जाना प्रारम्भ करने की तारीख	10-05-2024
03	मुहर्बद लिफाफे में बोली जमा किये की अंतिम तारीख	दिनांक 25-05-2024 मध्याह्न 12:00 बजे तक
04	पूर्व बोली निक्षेप (Pre bid deposit) की रकम जमा करने की तारीख	दिनांक 10-05-2024 से दिनांक 25-05-2024 मध्याह्न 12:00 बजे तक
05	मुहर्बद लिफाफे खोलने की तारीख, समय तथा स्थान	25-05-2024 / अपराह्न 02:00 बजे स्थान- कार्यालय सहायक आयुक्त, राज्य कर, सचल दल इकाई-आशारोड़ी देहरादून
06	सफल बोलीदाता की घोषणा की तारीख तथा समय	25-05-2024 अपराह्न 03:00 बजे या उसके पश्चात बोली पूर्ण होने पर।

2- नीलामी जहां है, जैसा है, के आधार पर की जायेगी।
3- बोलीदाता का जीएसटी के अंतर्गत पंजीकृत होना आवश्यक है।
4- नीलामी हेतु माल का न्यूनतम मूल्य निम्न प्रकार निर्धारित किया गया है।

क्र०सं०	माल का विवरण	निर्धारित न्यूनतम बोली मूल्य (कर रहित)
01	पेन्ट- 10 नग (572 ली०)	₹ 88660.00
02	बैग - 150 पीस	₹ 15000.00
03	कपड़े - 426 Pair	₹ 10650.00
04	टोपी, मोजे इत्यादि - 1091 Piece	₹ 27275.00
05	कुल	₹ 141585.00

5- ऐसे व्यक्ति, जो नीलामी में प्रतिभाग करने के इच्छुक है, पूर्व बोली निक्षेप (Pre bid deposit) की रकम (निर्धारित न्यूनतम बोली मूल्य के 5 प्रतिशत के बराबर) ₹ 7080.00 डिमाण्ड ड्राफ्ट के रूप में "सहायक आयुक्त, राज्य कर, सचल दल इकाई-आशारोड़ी देहरादून" के पक्ष में दिनांक 10.05.2024 दिनांक 24.05.2024 तक (सुबह 10:00 बजे से सायं 05:00 बजे तक) एवं दिनांक 25.05.2024 को मध्याह्न 12:00 बजे तक जमा करेंगे।
6- जहां कोई बोली प्राप्त नहीं होती है या प्रस्ताव सहभागिता की कमी के कारण या निम्न बोलियों के कारण नीलामी को अप्रतिस्पर्धात्मक समझा जाता है, वहां नीलामी की प्रक्रिया को रद्द किया जायेगा।
7- सफल बोलीदाता द्वारा नीलामी की कार्यवाही समाप्त होने पर बोली की धनराशि 15 दिन के भीतर जमा करनी होगी अन्यथा पूर्व बोली निक्षेप (Pre bid deposit) की रकम जब्त कर ली जायेगी और नीलामी अगले उच्चतम बोलीदाता, जिसकी बोली निर्धारित न्यूनतम मूल्य से कम नहीं होगी, को दे दी जायेगी।
8- किसी भी बोली को स्वीकार या अस्वीकार या नीलामी को स्थगित करने का अधिकार अधोहस्ताक्षरी के पास सुरक्षित रहेगा।
9- जब्त माल तथा वाहन के स्वामी को जब्त के स्थान पर दिनांक 24.05.2024 तक भुगतान किये जाने का समय प्रदान किया गया है। अतः यदि निर्धारित समय पर भुगतान प्राप्त हो जाता है तो दिनांक 25.05.2024 को अपराह्न 02:00 बजे प्रस्तावित नीलामी निरस्त कर दी जायेगी और इसकी सूचना ऐसे बोलीदाताओं जिनके द्वारा पूर्व बोली निक्षेप (Pre bid deposit) की रकम जमा की गयी हो, को उनके मोबाईल नं० एवं ई-मेल के माध्यम से, यदि हो, पर दी जायेगी।
10- असफल बोलीदाताओं को पूर्व बोली निक्षेप (Pre bid deposit) की रकम, नीलामी की तारीख को नीलामी प्रक्रिया पूर्ण होने के पश्चात वापस कर दी जायेगी।
11- बोलीदाता से संपर्क किये जाने के उद्देश्य से बोलीदाता द्वारा अपना पूर्ण पता, मोबाईल नंबर तथा ई-मेल आई०डी०, यदि है दाखिल की जानी होगी।
12- नीलामी के संबंध में किसी भी प्रकार के स्पष्टीकरण तथा जानकारी के लिये मोबाईल नंबर 7055602908 तथा ई-मेल आई०डी० awanish27.gst@gmail.com पर संपर्क किया जा सकता है। व्यक्तिगत रूप से कार्यालय में उपस्थित होकर भी जानकारी प्राप्त की जा सकती है।
(अवनीश कुमार पाण्डेय)
सहायक आयुक्त राज्य कर (प्रमारी)
सचल दल इकाई आशारोड़ी देहरादून



NIFTEM K aims to become like IITs and MIT

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Dr Harinder Singh Oberoi, Director, NIFTEM-K, expressed during the inaugural ceremony of the annual carnival named Edesia the institute's dedication to excellence in food technology, education, and research. He articulated the goal of elevating NIFTEM to an educational hub comparable to top prestigious institutions.

Polaris gets new ₹2,246 crore smart metering project

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Energy solutions provider Polaris on Wednesday said it has secured a contract worth Rs 2,246 crore to install 2.2 million smart meters in West Bengal. "With this order, Polaris has successfully closed orders over Rs 7,700 crore across the geographies of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Manipur, Bihar and Ladakh," the company said in a statement. The new order worth Rs 2,246 crore in West Bengal is for installation of 2.2 million smart meters in the state. Polaris Smart Metering will supply, commission, install and maintain smart meters for consumers and system metering across the consumer base in these important clusters for the next 10 years. These smart meters will be equipped with state-of-the-art technology, enabling prepaid billing, real-time energy monitoring,



accurate metering, and improved grid management capabilities. This contract comes under a Design-Build-Finance-Operate-Own-Transfer (DBFOOT) agreement. In addition to West Bengal, Polaris has also secured a contract of Rs 206 crore for smart meter installation in Manipur in the region of Imphal to install over 1.6 lakh smart meters. In January, the company had secured Rs 5,200 crore

contract for smart meter installation in Uttar Pradesh to install over 5.1 million smart meters. The primary objective of these projects is to reduce losses for discoms and to empower consumers by introducing smart prepaid meters, enabling them to have better control over their energy consumption. Jaipur-based Polaris is into manufacturing and implementation of smart metering projects.

Graduates of School of Planning recruited as Assistant Town Planners in PMDC and HPSC

PNS ■ AMRITSAR

As many as fifteen students of Guru Ramdas School of Planning, GNDU, Amritsar are selected as Assistant Town Planners in Punjab Municipal Infrastructure Development Corporation, Chandigarh and Haryana Public Service Commission, Panchkula. Professor Ashwani Luthra, Head of the Department, said its Under-graduates and Post-graduates are high in the North-Western region of India, though they are eligible for Class-I posts in other States as well. The Department offers specialised UG and PG level programmes. Its Five Years Integrated M Tech (Urban and Regional Planning) is a special

feature, which provides option to the students to exit after 4 years and get BTech. (Urban and Regional Planning) degree. The other programmes are 2 years MTech (Urban Planning), MTech (Infrastructure Planning), MTech (Transport Planning). Admission for all the programmes is starting from 8th May, 2024 by submitting admission forms online on the University website. Professor Luthra said the graduates of the department are eligible for the class I gazetted posts in the Town and Country Planning Departments, Municipal Corporations, Improvement Trusts, and many other public and private sector firms in different parts of India.

Google launches Google Wallet for Android users in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tech titan Google on Wednesday launched the Google Wallet app for Android users in India, allowing them to securely store essentials like boarding passes, loyalty cards, event tickets, and public transport passes. The digital wallet, which becomes operational in India from Wednesday, comes as a complementary service to existing payment app Google Pay, a top official said. "Google Pay is not going anywhere, it will remain our primary payment app, Google Wallet is specifically tailored for non-payment use cases," Ram Papatia, GM and India Engineering Lead, Android at Google, said.

Career with high placement avenues in urban, regional planning

PNS ■ AMRITSAR

Towns and villages are facing numerous problems and challenges related to housing, tariffs and transportation, water supply, sewerage, electricity, and many other social infrastructure. A qualified planner having specialisation in urban, regional, transportation, and infrastructure disciplines contributes quite significantly for the planned development of cities, regions, and villages. The graduates of the department are eligible for the Class I gazetted posts in the Town and Country Planning Departments, Municipal Corporations, Improvement Trusts, and many other public and private sector firms in different part of India. The graduates of the Department are also eligible for public and private sector jobs in countries like USA, Canada, Australia, Europe, etc.

prominent role in contributing to the planned development of cities, regions, and villages. Currently, the department offers four specialised programmes, i.e., MTech (Urban Planning), MTech (Infrastructure Planning), MTech (Transport Planning), and BTech (Urban and Regional Planning). The graduates of the department are eligible for the Class I gazetted posts in the Town and Country Planning Departments, Municipal Corporations, Improvement Trusts, and many other public and private sector firms in different part of India. The graduates of the Department are also eligible for public and private sector jobs in countries like USA, Canada, Australia, Europe, etc.

Dortmund beats PSG 1-0 to reach Champions League final

Mbappe cannot pull off comeback

AP ■ PARIS

When Borussia Dortmund's players rushed over to their fans wearing yellow "London 24" T-shirts and joined in the celebrations after knocking out Paris Saint-Germain to reach the Champions League final on Tuesday, Mbappé had long left the field.

Wembley Stadium on June 1 is the final stop on Dortmund's quest for the Champions League trophy, by which time Mbappé will have played his last game for PSG having failed to win the trophy the club's cash-rich Qatari owners so crave.

Central defender Mats Hummels headed Dortmund into the final as the German team won 1-0 at PSG.

Moments after Warren Zaïre-Emery missed an open goal for PSG, Hummels rose unchallenged to head in Julian Brandt's corner from the left in the 50th minute.

Dortmund advanced 2-0 on aggregate and largely contained Mbappé, who is leaving at the end of the season.

PSG exerted late pressure. Goalkeeper Gregor Kobel palmed away Mbappé's low shot, then pushed Mbappé's deflected close-range effort onto the crossbar with a superb one-handed save. The Parc des Princes crowd groaned when midfielder



Vitinha's thumping 25-meter strike rattled the woodwork. Coach Edin Terzić's team will play either record 14-time champion Real Madrid or six-time winner Bayern Munich on June 1 at Wembley Stadium. Madrid and Bayern drew 2-2 in the first leg and play on Wednesday. "Extremely proud. I'm very happy," Terzić said. "We beat a team like PSG two times and we again kept a clean sheet. We started really well and kept them away from the goal."

Dortmund is on course for its second Champions League trophy after winning in 1997 and a third European trophy, having won the now defunct UEFA Cup Winners' Cup in 1966. Dortmund also reached the Champions League final in 2013, losing to Bayern. "Indescribable. After more than 10 years, I am in the final with Borussia again," said Marco Reus, Dortmund's veteran midfielder who is leaving the team after this season. "How

we won the game, no one will ask tomorrow. Shots against the post won't matter tomorrow." For PSG, it's another season ending without raising the trophy its cash-rich Qatari owners have chased after by spending huge amounts on star players like Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Neymar, Lionel Messi and Mbappé. PSG lost its only Champions League final in 2020 to Bayern. "Efficiency, that's what we were missing," PSG captain

Marquinhos said. "We should have defended better. They scored from a corner and a counter-attack (in the first leg). We created more chances but they won both games." As Dortmund's players celebrated, Mbappé looked dejected as he trudged for the last time in a Champions League game wearing a PSG jersey. He is widely expected to join Madrid. Moments before Dortmund's goal, Zaïre-Emery somehow hit the post from two meters

out after Gonçalo Ramos flicked on Mbappé's cross from the left.

On Hummels' goal, PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma again did not move off his line to claim the ball, having not done so when Barcelona scored on a corner from the left in the first leg of the quarterfinals.

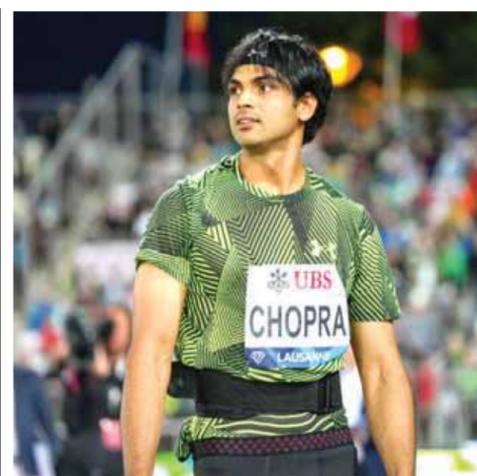
Coach Luis Enrique's players seemed nervous, playing cautiously and defending too deeply in the first half, allowing Dortmund to settle into a comfortable rhythm.

Mbappé was ineffective in attack when PSG lost the first leg and, despite their speed, Mbappé and Ousmane Dembélé struggled to find space behind a well-organized Dortmund defense with midfielder Emre Can offering good protection.

It took 30 minutes before Mbappé and Zaïre-Emery freed Dembélé on the right of the penalty area, but he failed to hit the target.

Speedy left winger Karim Adeyemi did so for Dortmund five minutes later when a rapid counter-attack exposed PSG's defense, but Donnarumma rescued PSG with a fine low save.

Hummel's goal at least woke up PSG's attack, but Ramos missed the target when well-placed either side of a stinging shot from left back Nuno Mendes hitting the left post.



Neeraj to compete in India for first time in three years at Federation Cup

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Olympic and world champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra will compete at home for the first time in three years after confirming participation in the National Federation Cup to be held in Bhubaneswar from May 12 to 15.

The 26-year-old superstar is expected to travel to India from Doha after opening his season in the first leg of the prestigious Diamond League series on May 10. "As per entries @Neeraj_chopra and Kishore Kumar Jena will compete in domestic competition starting May 12 in Bhubaneswar," the Athletics Federation of India tweeted.

Chopra's coach Klaus Bartonietz also confirmed to PTI that his ward is taking part

in the Bhubaneswar event.

The 28-year-old Kishore Jena, who won a silver in the Hangzhou Asian Games where Chopra won gold, will also be competing in the Doha Diamond League on May 10. Chopra last took part in a domestic competition at the same event on March 17, 2021, when he won a gold with a throw of 87.80m.

Since then, Chopra has won a historic gold in the Tokyo Olympics, became Diamond League champion in 2022, world champion in 2023 and defended Asian Games gold in China.

He also won three individual legs of Diamond League and claimed a silver in the 2022 World Championships.

He is, however, yet to touch the 90m mark. His personal best and national record is 89.94m.



PGA Championship invites seven LIV players to get top 100 in world

PTI ■ LOUISVILLE (US)

The PGA Championship officially has Tiger Woods in a field released that includes invitations to seven players from Saudi-funded LIV Golf, giving the major 99 of the 100 in the world ranking at Valhalla next week.

The PGA of America strives to have the top 100 in the world to maintain its reputation for having the strongest field of the four majors, although it is not part of the criteria. Those hopes ended late Tuesday when Rikuya Hoshino (No. 94) withdrew.

The PGA leans on a catch-all category of "special invitations." The group of LIV players includes Patrick Reed, whose tie for 12th in the Masters moved him inside the top 100. He is at No. 92, and the invitation keeps alive his streak of playing every major since the 2014 Masters.

The PGA Championship returns to Valhalla in Louisville, Kentucky, for the fourth time on May 16-19. Rory McIlroy won at Valhalla the last time it was there in 2014. The course is best known for Woods winning a playoff over Bob May in 2000 for his third straight major. Joaquin Niemann, who won the Australian Open in December and has two LIV Golf wins this year, already received an invitation. The surprise was Talor Gooch announcing in an X post on Monday that he had been invited.

It was a sign the PGA of America's selection committee was looking at LIV results on their own, as Gooch doesn't play much outside the Saudi

league. He won three times on LIV in 2023 and won the season points list.

Other invitations went to Dean Burmester, Lucas Herbert and Adrian Meronk, all of them inside the top 100 in the world. The seventh invitation went to David Puig, the 22-year-old from Spain who is No. 106 in the ranking. Puig has finished in the top 10 in six of his last seven tournaments on the Asian Tour, including two wins.

LIV will be represented by 16 players, down from 18 a year ago. There might have been one more, except British Open champion Louis Oosthuizen turned down his invitation. Oosthuizen, who is No. 125 in the world, won twice late last year in South Africa in tournaments co-sanctioned by the European tour.

His manager, Carlos Rodriguez, said in a text message that Oosthuizen already had some personal commitments.

The LIV group includes defending champion Brooks Koepka, who goes for a fourth PGA Championship title. He is the only active LIV player to win a major. Kerry Haigh, the championship director for the PGA of America, has said he would consider deserving players from tours around the world. Invitations were given to Tim Widing of Sweden, who has won consecutive tournaments on the Korn Ferry Tour.

Another invitation went to Kazuma Kobori, a 22-year-old born in Japan who now plays under the New Zealand flag. He has won three times this year in the Webex Players Series on the PGA Tour of Australasia.

Maradona World Cup Golden Ball trophy had mysteriously disappeared

AP ■ PARIS

It will be auctioned in Paris

Diego Maradona's Golden Ball trophy from the 1986 World Cup has resurfaced. The award, which had been missing for decades, will be auctioned in Paris next month, the Aguttes house said.

Maradona, who died in 2020 at age 60, was awarded the trophy for his scintillating play at the tournament, where he captained Argentina in its 3-2 win over West Germany in the final in Mexico City. Before that, he scored the controversial "Hand of God" goal and the "Goal of the Century" in a 2-1 win over England in the quarterfinals.

The auction house said it expects the trophy "to fetch millions due to its uniqueness. Maradona received the award - given to the tournament's best player - at a ceremony at the Lido cabaret on the Champs-Élysées in 1986. It subsequently disappeared, giving rise to rumors. Some say it was lost during a wild poker game, or sold to pay off debts, Aguttes said. Others said Maradona had stored it in a safe in a Naples bank that was robbed by local gangsters in 1989, when he played in the Italian league. According to the story told by



a reformed member of the mafia, the trophy was then melted down into gold pieces. "A far-fetched theory, given that it was made of a gold-copper alloy," Aguttes said in its auction catalogue.

Aguttes said the trophy reappeared in 2016 among other lots that were acquired from a private collection at auction in Paris.

"It was thoroughly investigated and authenticated as Diego Maradona's Adidas Golden Ball trophy," Aguttes said.

The "Hand of God" goal came when Maradona punched the ball into England's net for his team's opener. Maradona was also a magician with the ball at

his feet and four minutes later, he weaved through England's midfield and defense and then past goalkeeper Peter Shilton for what FIFA later declared the greatest goal in World Cup history.

"To say that this World Cup had it all would be an understatement ... It was also, and above all, the tournament where Diego Maradona really showed the world what he could do with his feet, and even with his hands," said François Thierry, a sports expert at Aguttes.

Bidders will be asked to make a deposit of 150,000 euros (\$161,000) to participate in the June 6 auction.

Asia needs its best players to compete in own tournaments: ATF president Yuriy Polskiy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Determined to change the face of Asian tennis in his tenure, Yuriy Polskiy, the youngest ATF President, has exhorted the best players from the region to compete in Asian events before travelling abroad and has set his sights on developing the game in smaller tennis-playing nations such as Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Syria.

The 36-year-old Polskiy had won the Asian Tennis Federation (ATF) presidential elections in December last year on the back of reforms in his home country Kazakhstan and wants to use his troubleshooting experience to help nations struggling to popularise the game. Polskiy is clear that Asia's strong players need to compete in their own events which should help upcoming players with exposure and learning, and a robust Asian tour and programme for U14 players with considerable financial support is the need of the hour.

He is also clear that ATF would work in tandem with ATP rather than competing with them and create a viable Asian tour with lots of tournaments in close vicinity that will reduce the travel expenses of players from the region.

Asia has only six players in the world's top-100 and it worries Polskiy. "Asian tennis needs the participation of the best Asian players in Asian



tournaments, because, quite often, they go to Europe, they go to North America, South America and it means that the local Asian players don't have a chance to compete with the best," Polskiy told PTI in an interview. "And to go to Europe, it's very costly. So the ones who are good, they spend a lot of money, which can be redistributed, you know, in order to increase the base, like you will send not only the best ones to tournaments, but the number two, three, four, because with the kids, you never know who will eventually be the best player.

"So, you need the competition inside the country, you need the competition inside of your region, and you need the high competition in Asia." Polskiy understands that Asia is very strong in the eastern countries such as Japan,

Korea, China, Taiwan, India, Thailand and Kazakhstan but the continent needs more tennis-playing nations.

"In recent years, Uzbekistan (grew), also Iran has a big history, and I feel that smaller nations like Iraq, Syria, Nepal, Myanmar, Timor-Leste and others, also deserve a chance, and they have big population."

Polskiy said they are now working with the Grand Slams, with ITF, in order to improve the quality of tournaments in Asia. The ATF President said the players will get incentives for playing in Asia.

"We (should) give extra incentives to good Asian players to play on Asian circuit. So they don't spend their time competing for nothing, there is something meaningful they get, they get the ranking, they get the grants, there is an Asian team of the best players in each age

category, so they can get in there and get extra support from ITF."

Asia's highest-ranked player is world No. 17 Alexander Bublik from Kazakhstan. The next best is China's Zhizhen Zhang (56) and is followed by Kazakhstan's Alexander Shevchenko (60), Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka (80) and Taro Daniel (82) and India's Sumit Nagal (93).

"We should do better in ATP and WTA rankings. And I see several challenges which we need to overcome in that regard. First of all, Asia is quite divided and many big nations like Japan, China, India, many players do not participate in international tournaments.

"They play a lot inside their countries, they compete with local players. But to some extent, it can work. But for 16 year old (players), it's very difficult to stand the competition of countries located in Europe, where they compete with each other from a very young age.

"And in that regard, we do a lot of talking to nations, bringing new initiatives and hosting different tournaments. So everybody will come on board."

In the past, ATF had launched a closed-door circuit only for Asian players but it did not work. While it offered a lot of money to Asian players, absence of ATP ranking never allowed it to grow. Polskiy said he won't restart any such programme because he does not want to compete with ATP.

High hopes from Aman Sehrawat at last Olympic Qualifying event in Istanbul

PTI ■ ISTANBUL

The immensely-talented Aman Sehrawat and the experienced Deepak Punia will be followed keenly when they take to the mat to lock the men's freestyle quotas for Paris Olympics at the World Qualifiers beginning here on Thursday.

It is the last event to secure spot for the Paris Games.

There were high hopes that U23 world champion Aman would qualify for the Games either at the World Championships or the Asian Qualifiers in Bishkek but both the chances were lost.

While Aman (57kg) bumped into a strong opponent in Gulomjon Abdullaev in the quota-deciding bout in Bishkek, both World Championships silver medalist Deepak (86kg) and Sujet Kalkal (65kg) could not reach Bishkek on time after being stuck in Dubai due to storm.

Now it's a do-or-die situation for all Indian wrestlers at Istanbul where the two finalists in each category will be awarded the quotas. A third quota will be given to the wrestlers who emerges winner in the bout between the two bronze medalists. The tournament will begin with Greco Roman style and followed by women's and freestyle on the last two days of the four-day qualifying competition.

None of the Indian men's wrestlers has so far got a quota and drawing a blank



will be a huge embarrassment for the country that took some major strides in international wrestling before the protest against former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh halted the progress. Endurance has always been the strong point of Indian wrestlers but their preparations have suffered in the absence of national camps and competitions due to protest.

Usually, the Indian wrestlers tire their opponents out but for that to happen, it is important to stretch the bout to full six minutes. It's a strategy that Bajrang Punia and Ravi Dahiya have employed although the latter has always been aggressive and finishes the bout in a jiffy. "If the bouts lasts full distance, Aman can beat any wrestler, so managing the first three minutes are crucial. He was obviously very disappointed for what happened in Bishkek," said coach Praveen Dahiya who trained him for four years before being shifted out of Chatrasal Stadium.



RESURGENT RCB TAKE ON ERRATIC PBKS IN BATTLE OF SURVIVAL

PTI ■ DHARAMSALA

Resurgent Royal Challengers Bengaluru will look for their fourth consecutive victory when they face an unpredictable Punjab Kings as the two sides fight for survival in the Indian Premier League, here on Thursday. After a horrendous start to the season, RCB have managed to claw their way back into the tournament. They have the winning momentum on their side, having won their last three games comprehensively. The wins have not only boosted their sagging morale but also taken them to the seventh spot in the points table. With eight points from 11 games, RCB can still make the playoffs if they win all their remaining three fixtures although the chances are slim. Punjab Kings too stare at a similar situation. They occupy the eighth spot, having collected eight points from 11 games. However, between the two -- only one team can reach the



all-important 14 points mark. Having beaten PBKS earlier in the season and heading to this clash with three wins on the trot, RCB will feel more confident than the hosts. Virat Kohli remains consistent at the top, while skipper Faf du Plessis broke his string of poor

scores with a belligerent knock in the last game. Will Jacks also impressed with a match-winning century against GT, and Cameron Green showcased his all-round skills with crucial contributions in runs and wickets against Sunrisers

Hyderabad. Their bowling department has started clicking with Mohammed Siraj, who is in India's T20 World Cup squad, finally finding his rhythm. Yash Dayal and Vijaykumar Vysakh also did well against GT and RCB will expect them

to continue in the same vein. PBKS, on the other hand, will be low on confidence having suffered an inexplicable batting collapse against Chennai Super Kings. The Kings showcased their very best and worst against CSK. Their bowlers were all over the CSK batters but the batting unit choked. It was an example of how Punjab's season has been this year -- unpredictable. They have showcased their potential with away wins over Kolkata Knight Riders, when they recorded the highest successful run chase in T20 cricket, and CSK. However, they have faced difficulties getting the job done at home. They won just one out of five games in Mullanpur, their main home ground. A change in venue to the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association Stadium also didn't go their way in the previous game here. The team would hope to end its home run on a high but for that to happen, the PBKS unit has to fire in unison.

RR captain Samson fined 30 per cent match fees for breaching IPL Code of Conduct

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rajasthan Royals captain Sanju Samson has been fined 30 per cent of his match fees for breaching the IPL Code of Conduct during his side's 20-run loss to Delhi Capitals at the Arun Jaitley Stadium here. The offence committed by Samson, who made 86 during RR's unsuccessful run chase of 222 on Tuesday, was not specified but it could be for arguing with the umpires when he was given out after Shai Hope took a catch just near the boundary ropes in the 16th over. The question was whether Hope's feet touched the boundary ropes while taking the catch. The third umpire ruled Samson out but the RR skipper was not happy. He initially started walking towards the pavilion, only to return to the middle and have some words with the on-field umpires. "Samson committed a Level 1 offence under Article 2.8 of the IPL's Code of Conduct. He admitted to the offence and accepted the Match Referee's sanction. For Level 1 breaches of the Code of Conduct, the



Match Referee's decision is final and binding," the IPL said in a statement. A Level 1 offence under Article 2.8 of the IPL's Code of Conduct includes "excessive, obvious disappointment with an Umpire's decision; an obvious delay in resuming play or leaving the wicket;

requesting a referral to the TV Umpire and arguing or entering into a prolonged discussion with the Umpire about his/her decision." On April 10 also, Samson was fined Rs 12 lakh after RR maintained a slow over rate during their match against Gujarat Titans in Jaipur.

We should have seen game home: Rajasthan Royals head coach Sangakkara

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Skipper Sanju Samson's departure left Rajasthan Royals in a tight spot but the team still should have won the IPL match against Delhi Capitals here, says their head coach Kumar Sangakkara. In a chase of 222, Samson got out after making 86 off 46 balls. His dismissal left the Royals with a task of getting 60 runs from 27 balls and eventually they fell short by 20 runs Tuesday night. A win would have ensured a play-offs spot for the Royals and exit for the Capitals but the result meant that the hosts stayed alive in the tournament. "Irrespective of that dismissal, we still should have probably seen that game home," Sangakkara said at the post-match press conference. "Losses happen. We had a great run at the start of the season. We bowled brilliantly in this game, especially Ashwin but once you make too many



casual mistakes, it becomes very hard. At the end of the day it's about execution." Samson was not a happy man when he left the field because there were doubts if Shai Hope, who caught him at the boundary ropes, had touched

the fence. The decision was referred to the TV umpire who ruled Samson out but the Royals skipper chose to argue with the on-field umpire before walking back. Sangakkara said it is difficult sometimes even for the third umpire

to make a call. "It depends on replays and angles, and sometimes you think the foot's touched. But it is a difficult one for the third umpire to judge. The game was at a crucial stage, so that happens in cricket. "We have different perspectives on it. At the end of the day, you have to stand by that decision in terms of what the umpires did. If we have any other kind of opinion on it, we will share it with the umpire and sort it out." The coach was happy with Samson's batting approach. "Sanju Samson has a lot of clarity about the way he should bat. There are certain stages where he seems to lose his concentration a little bit and we worked on that in the off season. It is really important for him, not just as a captain but as a batter. He is exceptionally talented," he said, adding that he takes very good care of the group.

The catch by Hope, who stumbled before regaining his balance, was hailed by Capitals' assistant coach Pravin Amre. "In IPL some moments are very crucial, and it was a deciding moment in the game," Amre said. "Sanju was batting so well. We have to give credit to the way Hope judged that catch. Umpires are there, and there is so much technology. "We also thought from the dugout that he has (touched the boundary) but it (happens) in the game, and the umpire's decision is the final decision. It wasn't an easy catch, it was really travelling. After the game also I spoke to him and he said the ball came very, very fast." Delhi Capitals moved up a place to fifth in the points table after Tuesday's win. They now have 12 points and can get a maximum of 16 while there are teams that have a chance of getting to 18 points and qualify for the play-offs.



Jaiswal has got very good chance of breaking my records: Brian Lara

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Yashasvi Jaiswal's Test career is just nine games old but the great Brian Lara feels if there is anyone who can get close to his lofty feats, including the record 400 not out, it is the 22-year-old southpaw from India. Lara's high praise for Jaiswal doesn't come out of the blue. The left two-handers share a special bond, having spent a lot of time over the past year following their "4 am conversation" during the IPL when the West Indian was coaching Sunrisers Hyderabad and the young opener was in the Rajasthan Royals' camp. A lot has changed since IPL 2023 with Jaiswal now becoming an integral part of India's Test and T20 team. His exploits in the longest format stand out as he averages close to 70 with three hundreds including two double tons in the recent home series against England. What has impressed Lara is Jaiswal's ability to change gears as per the situation of the game. "If I feel my records are threatened, Jaiswal has got a very good chance to do so. He has got capabilities, couple of double hundreds already. He is that good," Lara told PTI editors at his headquarters in an interaction arranged by Star Sports where he is a commentator and expert for the ongoing IPL. Lara, who recently turned 55, is one of the all-time greats of the game having amassed close to 12,000 runs in Tests and over 10,000 runs in ODIs. His record of the highest individual total, 400 not out against England in 2004, still stands tall. Lara fondly looked back at his first meeting with Jaiswal when asked about a light moment they shared on the sidelines of the Rajasthan Royals and SRH clash in the ongoing season. "The only thing I can reveal about that (conversation) is I think he is an outstanding young cricketer. What I like about him is that he is very humble and willing to work. The first time I met him (last year), I immediately found myself attached to him. "After the game (SRH vs Royals), I went to the hotel with a friend of mine from the Caribbean who knew Jos Buttler. It was midnight and Jaiswal found me. I promise you I left the hotel at 4 in the morning. "He just wanted to hear more and more and more. That is one of his amazing traits. His ability to want to learn as much as possible. Our conversations are about trying to make him a better cricketer. I am available for anyone that has my number. I am happy to talk cricket." Being a left-hander himself, it is natural for Lara to be biased towards that tribe. Another southpaw he has great admiration for is Abhishek Sharma with whom he spent time at SRH. "Again he is someone who I met while I was batting coach of SRH. I spent two years there. I am allowed to a bit biased when I see a left-hander. I just love a left-hander. Myself and Abhishek have developed a very good relationship, these youngsters are very humble. They want to learn. "What I like about these two, they want to get to great heights. I have great admiration for both." The legend from Trinidad reckons that usually records are threatened by batters who score quickly and Jaiswal has that ability along with the hunger to bat long. His 400 not out has not been surpassed in 20 years and Lara hopes he is still around to see the day when his record is broken.

OTHER SPORTS

I have hit energy saving mode: Nikhat Zareen on preparations for Olympic debut

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Along-cherished Olympic debut just about three months away, two-time world champion boxer Nikhat Zareen has hit "energy-saving mode" ahead of her date with destiny. So, she is off social media, is embracing solitude, devouring sweets on her cheat days, and binge-watching Netflix magnum opus 'Heeramandi'. Zareen, who is a medal favourite in the 50kg category, believes activities that might sound like leisure to many, are actually legitimate ways to ensure that she has a calm frame of mind ahead of the Games beginning in Paris on July 26. "Honestly, the feeling that I am going to be an Olympian soon hasn't sunk in yet. As days are passing, the nervousness is increasing. But I always train my brain to focus on a good performance," she told PTI in an interview from Patiala. The 27-year-old from Hyderabad is a former junior world champion. She won consecutive senior world titles in 2022 and 2023. Her 2022 season was nothing short of sensational as she remained undefeated and she would be hoping to hit similar peak in Paris. "Every competition brings with it a degree of nervousness. You have expectations from yourself and the people around you also have expectations. It all adds up to the overall weight you feel on your mind. "You cope with it by working hard, keeping your focus and



having a calm mind, basically not allow yourself to be distracted. So, I am off social media, and I also try to keep my distance from people in general," she revealed. "Basically, I have hit energy saving mode, indulge my sweet tooth on cheat days, do grocery shopping, listen to music, it helps me stay calm. Also, I watch movies or Netflix shows. I am watching 'Heeramandi' right now, it's quite interesting," she said. A believer in destiny, Zareen said she could have been an Olympian in Tokyo itself. She had lost a bitter selection trial to six-time world champion M C Mary Kom, who went on to qualify for the Games. "Everyone knows how badly I wanted to go to Tokyo. But it wasn't destined. The setback made me resolute. The day I qualified for Paris, I was so happy that it is difficult for me to describe. It was like one major dream coming true," she said. "But then it hit me that it's just half the job done." Olympic preparations are not

always about merely training, as nutrition, and psychological readiness play a role too. The mental part of it becomes all the more significant in her sport, which is often described as lonely. "But you have to fight your battles, you can sometime share your thoughts with your support staff or team but end of the day, it's you who has to fight inside the ring, you are alone there," she said. "You have to condition your mind to believe that 'acche din aayenge' (good days will come). That this is my journey and I have to endure," she explained. What helps is the fact that women's boxing is fetching material incentives now, something which wasn't the case when she started. "Once Mary didi won that Olympic medal in 2012 (a bronze), people took women's boxing seriously. I was among those who felt inspired. Boxing is not a sport that you can play for too long. Injury can happen anytime.

Andy Murray to return from ankle injury at Geneva Open this month

AP ■ GENEVA

Three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray is set to return from his ankle injury at the Geneva Open this month. Tournament organizers announced Wednesday they had given the 36-year-old Murray a wild-card entry for the clay-court event that starts May 18. Murray damaged ligaments in his left ankle during a match at the Miami Open last month.



He opted against surgery. The former No. 1 has only played sparingly since having hip surgery in 2018 and has said he will probably retire after this summer. He is a two-time Wimbledon and Olympic champion and is hoping to compete for Britain again at the Paris Games. The Geneva Open is a key warmup event for the French Open, where Murray is a former finalist but has only played once since reaching the 2017 semifinals.

Brazil bid highest for hosting 2027 Women WC

AP ■ LAUSANNE

Brazil's bid for the 2027 Women's World Cup was ranked higher than the bid submitted by Germany, Netherlands and Belgium in an evaluation report released by FIFA on Tuesday. The FIFA Congress is set to vote for the 2027 host on May 17 at its meeting in Bangkok. It will be the first time the member federations of soccer's 211-nation governing body will hold an open vote to pick the tournament's hosts. Brazil has been favored to win the 2027 contest since FIFA brokered a deal with several of soccer's continental governing bodies in October to get preferred hosts of the men's World Cup in 2030 and 2034. South American soccer body CONMEBOL agreed to take just three games for 2030 - one each in Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay for a 104-game tournament mostly to be hosted in



house panel, Brazil's bid was given an average score of 4.0 out of 5, while the joint European bid received a 3.7. The three-person evaluation team, led by FIFA's chief women's officer Sarai Bareman, determined both bids qualify for consideration "due to both having exceeded the minimum hosting requirements" in the technical evaluation. The United States and Mexico withdrew a joint bid last week. U.S. Soccer said the federations will instead focus on hosting the 2031 tournament. South Africa dropped its bid late last year, saying it would also turn to 2031. That hosting decision is due next year.