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MARKETS SNAP THREE DAYS WINNING RUN

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SUNRISERS LOOK TO SEAL PLAYOFF BERTH
12 SPORTS

Mamata promises to back INDIA in power

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Often proudly claiming to be the true architect of the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had previously decided to contest elections in Bengal without the Congress and the Left. However, on Wednesday, she announced that she would support INDIA Bloc from the outside if it came to power.

Addressing an election rally at Chinsurah in Hooghly district, Mamata said, "After the Modi Government goes we will provide the leadership to the INDIA Bloc and support it from outside and ensure that the people of Bengal — including those who have not been paid the wages for hundred days' work — get back their rights."

Mamata's claim came a day after she told another rally that the first four phases of polling have clearly indicated that the weather for the BJP is changing and that INDIA Bloc would win 315 seats against 195 that would fall in the saffron party's bag. "Modi is going and there will be no Modi in Delhi… and Didi will ensure that the INDIA Bloc comes to power at the Centre," she said.

Notwithstanding her "outside support" pledge for INDIA Bloc, Mamata said by INDIA she did not mean the Left and the Congress of Bengal. "I don't mean the Left and the Congress of Bengal, who are the agents of the BJP and are fighting the elections separately. I am talking about the Congress that is in Delhi," she said, leading to a lot of criticism from both the Left and the State Congress ranks.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee greets supporters during an election roadshow for the Lok Sabha polls, in Howrah, on Wednesday PTI

"Didi is also afraid because she is thinking that if the INDIA Bloc comes to power, then she might have to turn to them to save her leaders, her nephew, and herself. So, she is trying to separate the national leadership and the State leadership of the INDIA parties. However, they are not fools. She has managed to save herself by striking a deal with Modi, but after there is no BJP in Delhi, she will have to answer for her misdeeds," said CPI(M)'s Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya.

Back to the rallies both Mamata and Union Home Minister Amit Shah traded relentless fire.

Shah referred to the Sandeshkhali incident saying the Chief Minister had developed her own modus operandi where "she lets her men first commit crimes… and to hide it she gets more crimes committed... Sandeshkhali is a classic example of this."

On the other hand, Mamata attacked the Prime Minister calling him a publicity man. "Here is a *Prachar Babu* who wants to get photographed everywhere… asking him to appear in new dresses and get photographed and he has no problem because he wants publicity only… publicity and lies are his two weapons," Mamata said questioning the Prime Minister's earlier claims that he was giving cooking gas, ration and other facilities to the people for free.

"He promised ₹15 lakh in every account… did you get it… he promised 2 crore jobs per year… did you get that job… he is telling you that he is giving gas and ration for free… but that is also not true… he is only a prachar babu who thrives on publicity," she said.

USCIS plans extra time for laid off Indian H-1B workers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a possible relief to scores of Indians, laid-off H-1B workers can stay beyond 60 days in the US. This directive by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) comes amid a slew of layoffs by tech companies in the US, which have impacted thousands of employees, including Indians.

The USCIS clarified that laid-off H-1B visa holders could stay in the US beyond the 60-day period.

To remain in the US beyond the grace period, the laid-off H-1B workers can apply for a new employer, change visa status, or adjust their visa status. H-1B non-immigrants can work for a new employer after filing a new H-1B petition. Tech companies like Google, Meta, Apple, Dell, Twitter, Amazon, and Microsoft, among many others, have terminated scores of non-immigrant employees living in the US, including many Indians.

There is a general assumption that laid-off staffers have to leave the US within 60 days. However, the USCIS has clarified this in its latest statement. "When non-immigrant workers are laid off, they may not be aware of their options and, in some cases, may wrongly assume that they have no option but to leave the country within 60 days," stated the USCIS in its latest release.

The tech industry continues to grapple with lay-offs, with news of new job cuts surfacing every month. So far, a total of 237 tech companies have laid off 58,499 employees in 2024.

According to the Press release, when a non-immigrant worker's employment ends, either voluntarily or involuntarily, they typically may take one of the following actions, if eligible, to remain in a period of authorised stay in the United States.

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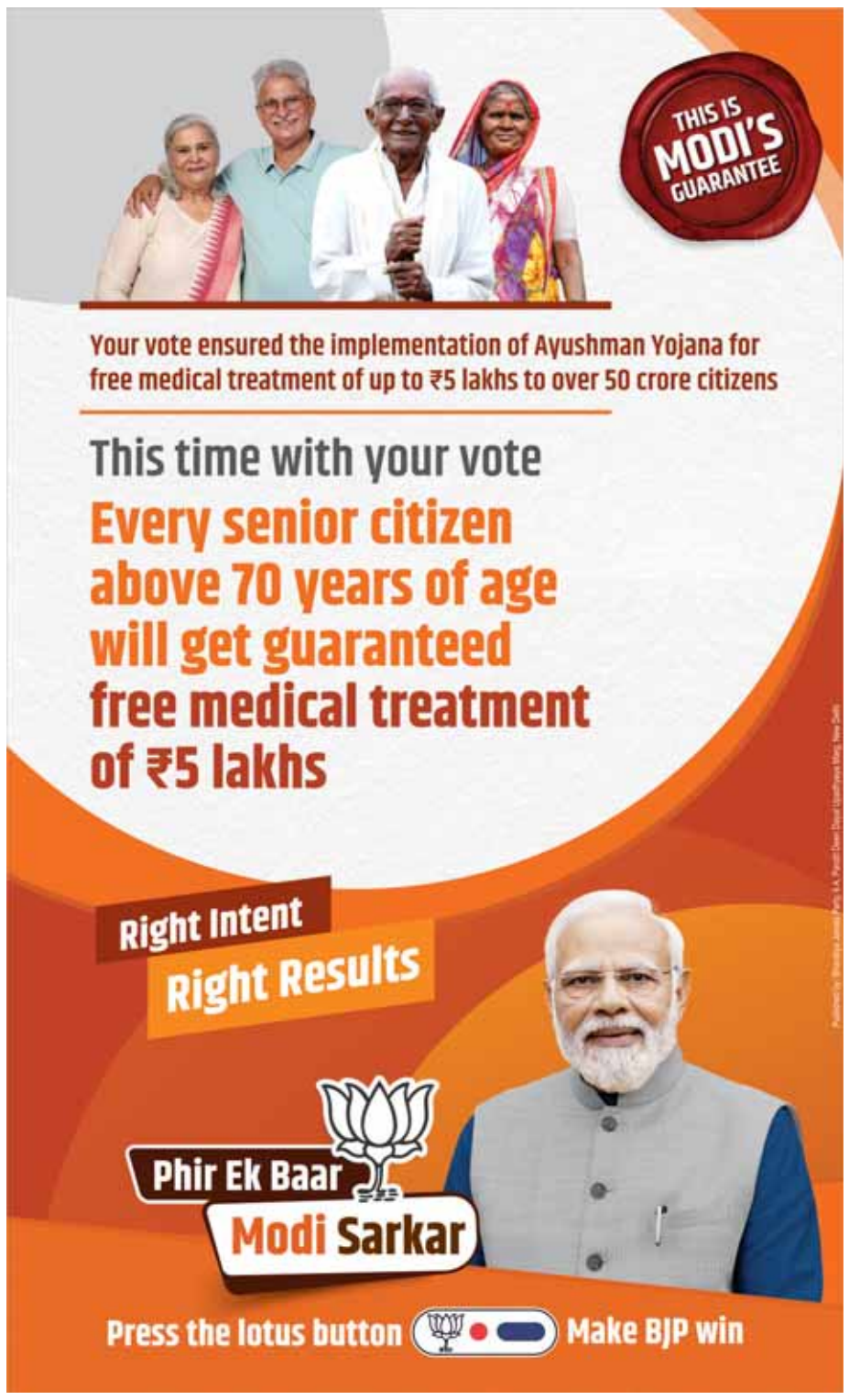

Photo: The Pioneer

Ram temple, Modi aura will see me through: Bidhuri

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, a veteran in the politics of the national Capital, is vying for the South Delhi Lok Sabha 2024 seat as a BJP candidate. He claimed that the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya will have a significant impact on the voters of his constituency, who will vote for him to give Prime Minister Narendra Modi a third term in a row.

The sitting MLA from Badarpur and Leader of the Opposition said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is not an alternative to Modi.

Having an experience in the political domain for 53 long years, Bidhuri told The Pioneer in the midst of his campaign that people have made up their minds.

"They are going to vote for Modi above caste, religion and community. In front of people, there is no alternative to Modi. Rahul tries to be his alternative but people are not taking him seriously. I believe that last time, the BJP candidates had 57 per cent to 60 per cent votes. This time, BJP is going to get more than 70 per cent votes. BJP is winning all seven seats in Delhi because people have a lot of faith in Modi," he said.

Born and brought up in a family of farmers in South Delhi's Tughlakabad village, he said he will get votes in the elections to make Modi secure a third term again, who he claims will get the same respect from the countrymen as Lord Ram and Krishna got.

Continued on Page 2

Uttarakhand Chief Secy feels SC heat

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Slamming the Uttarakhand Government for its "lackadaisical" approach in controlling forest fires, the Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the State's Chief Secretary to personally present himself before it on May 17 to give explanation, including on utilisation of funds and vacancies in forest department.

Terming it a "very sorry state of affairs", the apex court said the State was just trying to find some excuse or the other.

A bench headed by Justice B R Gavai directed that the staff and vehicles of the forest departments of States shall not be requisitioned for election purposes or any other purposes like the 'Char Dham Yatra'.

"We are at pains to say the approach of the State of Uttarakhand in controlling the fires is, to say the least, lackadaisical. Though action plans have been prepared and finalised, no steps are being taken for implementation of the same," said the bench, also comprising Justices SVN Bhatti and Sandeep Mehta.

The top court was hearing a plea on raging forest fires in Uttarakhand. The bench said when funds from the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) were available and also sanctioned by the Central authority, it saw no reason as to why only ₹3.41 crore out of the ₹9.12 crore was utilised for forest related activity in Uttarakhand in 2023-24.

The bench observed it also saw no reason as to why the balance amount was not utilised for forestry.

"Another issue that needs to be addressed is with regard to huge vacancies in the forest department of the State of Uttarakhand," it said.

The bench noted that one of the grievances raised by the state was regarding failure of timely disbursement of the national disaster management fund or state disaster management fund.

Continued on Page 2

Rajmata Scindia passes away at AIIMS

PNS ■ GWALIOR/NEW DELHI

Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia's mother Rajmata Madhavi Raje Scindia died on Wednesday morning at AIIMS, Delhi, where she was on a ventilator for the last few days. She was undergoing treatment for the last three months and suffered from pneumonia, along with sepsis, sources said.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and senior Congress leaders Digvijaya Singh and Kamal Nath expressed grief over the death of Rajmata. People from the Gwalior-Chambal region mourned her demise and many took to social media to express grief.

In this April 23, 2002 photo, Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia's mother Madhavi Raje Scindia attends an event in New Delhi. She died on Wednesday morning at AIIMS in Delhi PTI

Continued on Page 2

Nomadic bird haven turns a swamp

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Kabartal Lake, Asia's largest freshwater lake nestled in Bihar's Begusarai district and designated as a Ramsar Wetland site in 2020, is gasping for breath due to the State Government's inaction.

The unchecked expansion of human settlements, agricultural activities, and infrastructure development around this lake, once a paradise for large numbers of winged birds, has encroached upon its natural habitat.

The development has a debilitating impact on the oxbow shape lake leading to reduction in its size from its original 7,000-hectare expanse to just over 2,620 hectares.

Standing ruined, the lake has now been deserted even by migratory birds, which are now seeking other sites for breeding and resting purposes. It used to be home to several aquatic flora and fauna.

To add to the woes of this water body which was once sprawled over 7,000 hectares, is the construction of embankment on the near-by Burhi Gandak river that has choked the major water inlet to the wetland.

Poaching of migratory birds, once abundant in the area, further exacerbates the ecological imbalance and undermines conservation efforts.

It was first declared a protected area by the State government in 1986, and later, a sanctuary by the Central Government, to prevent poaching of birds.

Oxbow lake like shape is typically crescent-shaped and common features in floodplains and low-lying areas near rivers, like in the cases of this water body also famously known as Kanwar Lake.

It is formed by meandering Gandak River. The site lies in Indo-Gangetic plains of North Bihar which is one of the most productive flood- plains of the world and accommodates a large population.

Intriguingly while the Centre identified it as Bihar's first Ramsar Site in a bid to put it on the global map, tourists coming here express disappointment when they see the condition of the lake, which bears no resemblance to the descriptions they have read or heard about, according to reports.

Such has been the apathy of the authorities that despite being declared a protected area by the Bihar Government in 1986 and a bird sanctuary by the Centre in 1989, overall, there has been a large-scale reduction in wetlands in Bihar as low as 2620 hectares.

Even though locals depend on farming, encroachment has been growing. Due to the encroachment of the wetland for agricultural practices, the Kabartal wetland's declining ecosystem is visible, as is the ongoing loss in the wetland area.

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This poll is about choosing PM who can take big decisions: Modi

T N RAGHUNATHA ■
MUMBAI

Projecting indirectly himself as a "strong Prime Minister who can take tough and big decisions to make India strong" and "who wants to create a foundation that will "accelerate India's dream for 2047", Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday once again attacked the Opposition Congress for indulging in "religion-based" politics and charged that it believed in allocating 15 per cent of the government budget exclusively to the minorities.

Countering the narratives put forth by Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal last week, Modi — speaking at rallies that he addressed at Dindori and Kalyan in Maharashtra — said:,"We draw inspiration from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj…This election is not just about choosing MPs, but about choosing a PM….a PM who can take tough and big decisions to make India strong.. You remember how India addressed the Corona crisis and defeated the pandemic".

"I want to create a foundation which will accelerate our dream for 2047. My mantra is to turn your aspirations into my resolve. And I dedicate every second of my life to realise those aspirations....24x7 for 2047," Modi said, amidst thunderous applause and shouts of "Modi-Modi-Modi" and "fir ek baar…Modi-sarkaar".

Modi's assertion that the "country needs a strong Prime Minister who can take tough and big decisions to make India strong" should be seen in the context of Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi's statement that Rahul Gandhi was the "real challenger" to Prime Minister Modi and Kejriwal's claim that that Modi would pass on the mantle to Amit Shah next year after he turns 75, if all NDA comes to power.

A day after he said at Varanasi in an television interview that "the day I do Hindu-Muslim, I will be unworthy to remain in public life", Modi once again lashed out at the Congress for practising "religion-based" politics and its belief that 15 per cent of the government's budget should be exclusively allocated to minorities.

"Today, I'm going to reveal this to all 140 crore countrymen for the first time. It's a serious topic that needs to be addressed. The Congress believes that 15 percent of the government's budget should be exclusively allocated to minorities, essentially budget allocation based on religion. Many years ago, Congress mooted the idea of budget allocation based on religion. Just imagine how destructive this idea is."

"For Congress, there's only one minority which is its vote bank. I recall during my tenure as CM, when the Congress proposed spending 15 percent of the budget exclusively on Muslims. I vehemently opposed it, and thanks to BJP's strong opposition, the Congress failed in its attempt. Now, they're determined to revive these old agendas," Modi said.

Claiming that the "fake" NCP led by Sharad Pawar and "fake" Shiv Sena headed by Uddhav Thackeray will merge with the Congress after the Lok Sabha polls, Modi said: "When the Uddhav Sena merges with the Congress, I will remembers the words of Shiv Sena founder late Balasaheb Thackeray who used to say that the day the Shiv Sena becomes the Congress, he will wind up the Shiv Sena".

Alluding to a recent statement by Sharad Pawar that some of the regional parties might merge with the Congress after the Lok Sabha polls, Modi said: "INDIA alliance knows that its 'primary' party (Congress) will be defeated in such a way that becoming even the Opposition will be a big feat for them. The leaders of the alliance are suggesting that after elections, the small parties should merge with Congress so that they can at least stand as the Opposition party….the fake-Shiv Sena and fake-NCP will definitely be subsumed by Congress"

Singling out Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray for vicious criticism, Modi said: " The nakli (fake) Shiv Sena has shattered every dream of Balasaheb Thackeray. His vision included building a grand Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and abolishing Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir. While these dreams have been fulfilled, the fake Shiv Sena is showing the most disgust. Just like Congress, the fake Sena rejected the invitation for the temple's consecration"

"While the Congress members are puking hate about the Mandir, the fake Shiv Sena remains silent. Their sinful partnership has been exposed to the entire state of Maharashtra," Modi said.

Hitting out at the Congress for its "pro-Pakistan" approach, Modi said: "The Congress asks us to respect Pakistan because it's a nuclear state… When Congress rules, Pakistan threatens us. And, when Congress doesn't rule, then Congress threatens us that Pakistan will threaten us. Why is Congress being a proxy for Pakistan?".

"The Congress used to beg Pakistan to spare India from terrorist attacks. Since you gave me a chance, India started to retaliate by conducting surgical strikes and airstrikes. Now, Pakistan does not threaten us with nuclear attacks anymore.," he said. Amid shouts of a small section of the audience to speak on the issue of onion, Modi said at his election rally at Dindori: "Modi always prioritizes the interests of farmers. Nashik and its surrounding region are renowned for onion and grape cultivation. "It was our government that initiated the onion buffer system for the first time, a system absent in previous administrations

"Our government is also providing subsidies for onion transport through Operation Green, a mission being reinstated now. Similarly, the cluster development plan for grape cultivation will greatly benefit our grape farmers," Modi said.

Stage set for photo finish at Baramulla LS seat on May 20

MOHIT KANDHARI ■
JAMMU

After the Srinagar Parliamentary seat witnessed a close contest recording the second highest voter turnout of 38 per cent since 1996 in the fourth phase of polling the stage is now set for North Kashmir's Baramulla Lok Sabha seat from where four prominent candidates are gearing up for a photo finish during the fifth phase on May 20.

An estimated 17.30 lakh voters are expected to exercise their right to franchise to decide the fate of 23 candidates in the fray.

The Baramulla Lok Sabha seat spread over four districts of Baramulla, Kupwara, Bandipora, and Budgam, is already witnessing the high-octane poll campaign.

Peoples' Conference Chairman Sajad Lone is taking on the former Chief Minister and National Conference Vice President Omar Abdullah in a direct fight.

Peoples' Conference candidate finished runners-up in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls but this time Lone himself is eyeing a maiden entry into the Parliament.

Omar is also testing the political waters from the North Kashmir seat for the first time in his over two decade-long political career.

Two other candidates namely former Rajya Sabha member Fayaz Ahmad Mir of the Peoples Democratic Party and an Independent candidate Abdul Rashid Shiekh, currently lodged in the Tihar jail, are both determined to give Lone and Omar a run for their money in the poll arena.

In the 2019 polls, Rashid had emerged as a strong candidate in the Baramulla seat. He came third by securing over a lakh votes, finishing ahead of the PDP and the Congress's candidates. In his absence, both his sons are canvassing in his favor and attracting large crowds.

Launching his campaign after filing his nomination papers Lone told reporters, "The people of Kashmir deserve to be represented by a new voice, a different voice. Even the people of India deserve to know what exactly is happening here."

Lone, who previously contested the seat in 2009, is also receiving tactical support from the APNI Party led by Altaf Bukhari and several former legislators. In his campaign meetings, Lone is attacking Omar Abdullah as a 'tourist'. In

return, the National Conference labels him as BJP's proxy in the poll arena in the absence of their candidate in the fray.

Jammu and Kashmir National Conference has won the Lok Sabha seat nine times.

In the last leg of the poll campaign, Peoples Conference is mobilizing its cadre to put up a massive show of strength on Thursday at the Degree College in Baramulla. Party spokesperson Adnan Ashraf said, "It will be the biggest mainstream political rally in Jammu and Kashmir not just after 2019, but in the last two or three decades. We are expecting a mammoth crowd. Our party is receiving tremendous response in all assembly segments of Baramulla.

Political pundits say Rashid may get "sympathy votes" as he will be contesting the election from the Tihar prison, where he has been lodged since 2019 following his arrest by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in an alleged money laundering case related to terror funding in the Valley. Sajad Lone's strong bastion is restricted to the Kupwara district only but ever since he launched his campaign he has been trying to expose the double-speak of the National Conference leadership.

Omar enjoys the support base of the party cadre across all four districts. Dr Farooq Abdullah is also working hard to ensure the victory of Omar. Dr Abdullah toured several areas to address impressive poll meetings.

In 2019 Lok Sabha elections, National Conference's Mohammad Akbar Lone, who received 133,426 votes -- 29.29 per cent defeated JKPC's Raja Aijaz Ali who grabbed 1,03,193 — 22.65 per cent — by a margin of 30,233 votes.

In 2014, JKPDP's Muzaffar Hussain Baig defeated JKNC's Sharifuddin Shariq by a margin of 29,219 votes. Baig received a total of 175,277 — 37.61 per cent — votes while Shariq got 1,46,058 — 31.34 per cent votes.

14 non Muslim migrants get citizenship under CAA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The first set of citizenship certificates under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act(CAA)was issued Wednesday here to 14 people by Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla, nearly two months after rules were notified to grant Indian nationality to persecuted non-Muslim migrants from three neighbouring countries.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah termed it a "historic day", saying the decades-long wait of those who faced religious persecution in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan is over. Bhalla handed over the certificates to the 14 people after their applications were processed online through a designated portal, an official spokesperson said.

The CAA was enacted in December 2019 for granting Indian nationality to persecuted Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi and Christian migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who came to India on or before December 31, 2014. After the enactment, the CAA got the president's assent but the rules under which the Indian citizenship was granted were issued on March 11 this year.

While granting the citizenship certificates, the home secretary congratulated the 14 applicants and highlighted the salient features of the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024.

Secretary Posts, Director of the Intelligence Bureau, Registrar General of India and senior officers were also present during the interactive session when the certificates were issued. Home Minister Shah said the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian brothers and sisters who fled religious persecution in the three countries have started getting Indian citizenship and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has fulfilled the promise made at the time of the country's independence.

"I express my gratitude to Modiji for giving justice and rights to these people who suffered for decades. I also assure all my refugee brothers and sisters that the Modi government will give citizenship to all of them through the CAA," he said on X in Hindi. "Modi's guarantee...The guarantee of fulfilling promises."

The CAA rules envisage the manner of application form, procedure for processing applications by the District Level Committee (DLC), scrutiny and grant of citizenship by State Level Empowered Committee (SLEC). "In pursuance of these rules, applications have been received from persons belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi and Christian communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who have entered into India up to December 31, 2014 on account of persecution on grounds of religion or fear of such persecution," the spokesperson said.

The DLCs chaired by Senior Superintendents of Post or Superintendents of Post as designated officers, on successful verification of documents, have administered the oath of allegiance to the applicants. After processing as per rules, the DLCs have forwarded the applications to SLEC headed by Director (Census Operation). Processing of application is completely done online.

The empowered committee, Delhi, headed by Director (Census Operation), Delhi, after due scrutiny, has decided to grant citizenship to 14 applicants. Accordingly, Director (Census operation) granted certificates to these applicants, the spokesperson said.

Security review meet held in J&K

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
JAMMU

With foreign terrorists responsible for targeting security forces convoys remaining at large in the frontier districts of Rajouri and Poonch, senior army and police officials Wednesday convened a high-level security review meeting with a focus on counter-terrorism operations in the Jammu region.

General Officer Commanding (GOC) of Jammu-based 16 Corps Lt Gen Navin Sachdeva chaired the meeting which was also attended by the Additional Director General of Police, Jammu zone, Anand Jain, and representatives of intelligence agencies. "…the discussions concluded with a reinforced commitment to ensuring the safety and stability of the region and coordinating the ongoing anti-terror operations," the White Knight Corps wrote on X after the meeting.

The security review meeting took place ahead of the sixth round of polling in the region on May 25 for the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat.

Mayor who brought joy to Kerala turns out to be embarrassment

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

When she was elected as Mayor of Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation, Arya Rajendran made to the headlines of the national media. At the age of 21, she was touted as the youngest Mayor of the country. Three years later , this young lady has become a major embarrassment to the CPI(M) as well as the people of the capital city. RS Sasikumar, chairman, Save University Campaign, a leading whistleblower against the highhandedness of the ruling CPI(M) has disclosed that Mayor Arya Rajendran scored zero marks for Mathematics and just seven marks for her Malayalam paper in the semester examination. The Worshipful Mayor is a B Sc student in the city's All Saints College.

"She had said in an interview that she wants to crack the civil service examination and prefers to be an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer. If this is the quality of her studies, this young lady would not be able to get the job of even a last grade employee in the government service without the help of her party," said Sasikumar while revealing the marks scored by the Worshipful Mayor.

Sasikumar also said that Arya Rajendran was an embodiment of arrogance and petty mindedness. She posted her picture breastfeeding her newborn and got it published in all newspapers with the caption "Mayor Breastfeeding her child while on office duty," a la Jacinda Ardern (former Prime Minister of New Zealand).

Arya Rajendran was the principal character in a series of controversies that shook the State. The letter written by her to the district secretary of the CPI(M) asking him to nominate the candidates he prefers to be appointed as regular staff in the Corporation office, her official car violating all security protocols and gatecrashing into the motorcade of the then President Ram Natha Kovind too hogged the limelight.

As on date, a controversial stand off between the Mayor supported by her husband who is also a CPI(M) MLA and Yedu Krishnan, driver of a State Road Transport Corporation bus is the major topic of discussion in Kerala. Arya Rajendran alleges that Yedu refused to give space to her personal car in a thoroughfare in the capital city. This led the Mayor to overtake the KSRTC bus and park the car in front of the bus blocking its way. Her response was that the driver showed an obscene sign to her when she sounded the horn, an allegation that he denied vehemently. The city police gave preference to whatever was told by the Mayor and slapped charges on Yedu under harassment of women.

According to Sasikumar, the move by CPI(M) to appoint immature persons to important posts like ministers and heads of corporations have led the State to anarchy. "This has affected the education sector in Kerala as most of these recruits are from SFI, the student wing of the CI(M).

USCIS plans extra...

From Page 1

If a non-immigrant takes any of these actions during the 60-day grace period, they can stay in the United States for more than 60 days, even if they lose their previous non-immigrant status.

But if they do not take any action during this time, they and their dependents might have to leave the US within 60 days, or when their authorised period ends, whichever comes sooner. Additionally, H-1B non-immigrants may begin working for a new employer as soon as the employer properly files a new H-1B petition (Form I-129) requesting to amend or extend H-1B status with the USCIS, without waiting for the petition to be approved.

The timely filing of a non-frivolous application to change status will "toll," or stop, the accrual of unlawful presence until the application is adjudicated, if the applicant did not work without authorisation, either before the application was filed or while it was pending, and the applicant maintained their status prior to the filing of the request for change of status.

During the 60-day grace period, workers can apply to change their non-immigrant status. Options may include:

a) Becoming a dependent of a spouse (e.g., H-4, L-2).

b) Some dependents may be eligible for work authorisation.

c) Changing to student (F-1) or visitor (B-1/B-2) status.

Note that B-1/B-2 visitors cannot work in the US."

Timely filing of a petition by a prospective employer can pause unlawful presence accrual, but it does not grant work authorisation until approved. Premium processing may be available for some petitions.

Nomadic...

From Page 1

Despite the proclamation of a bird sanctuary, numerous birds have been designated as fragile or endangered negatively impact species, according to a study 'Kabartal (Kanwar) Lake: First Ramsar Wetland Site of Bihar' published in ResearchGate. It was presented at the 9th International Multidisciplinary Conference on Current Research Trends-2023, last year.

The authors of the article are Bijay Kumar Das, Associate Professor, Department of Architecture and Planning, NIT Patna, Khushbu Kumari, Independent researcher from Patna, Avi Kush, a Civil Engineering student from SMVDU, Katra, Jammu and Kashmir, Arpita Srivastav from Department of Architecture and Planning, NIT Patna, and Sumit Kumar, a wildlife photographer.

Uttarakhand...

From Page 1

"We fail to understand as to how the State could have grievance with regard to the disbursal of state disaster management funds in as much as it is within the domain of the state to disburse the said funds," it said.

"It is further pertinent to note that at one hand, the state contends that the resources, that is, manpower and vehicles are not available, and on the other hand, keeps a large number of vacancies...," the bench observed.

It said taking into consideration the importance of controlling forest fires in Uttarakhand, the apex court had requested Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Aishwarya Bhati to take instructions with regard to disbursement of funds for financial year 2023-2024.

The bench said in so far as CAMPA funds are concerned, it has been submitted that these funds are lying with the state and it was for the state to release them for works undertaken by the forest department.

It noted that as far as exemption of field officials of the forest department from election duty, Char Dham yatra and other related activities was concerned, the Election Commission by various orders has already exempted its staff and vehicles from elections and allied purposes.

"Be that as it may, we direct that in all the states, the forest staff as well as the forest vehicles shall not be requisitioned for election purposes or any other purposes like 'Char Dham Yatra'," the bench said.

Rajmata Scindia passes...

From Page 1

Rajmata, who hailed from Nepal's Royal family, got married to former Union Minister Madhavrao Scindia in 1966. She is survived by her son Jyotiraditya Scindia and daughter Chitrangada Raje Singh.

Her mortal remains will be brought to Gwalior on Thursday morning and will be kept at the Rani Mahal in the Jai Vilas Palace for people to pay their respects. Her last rites will be performed at Amma Maharaj ki Chhatri in Gwalior on Thursday, sources said. The last rites of late Rajmata Vijaya Raje Scindia and her son Madhav Rao Scindia had also been held at the same place.

Ram temple, Modi aura will see me through: Bidhuri

From Page 1

"He works hard and is down to earth and I even once told him directly that he is not an ordinary man. He is an 'ansh' of the Supreme," he said, adding that the country has made historic progress during the 10 year tenure of BJP and Modi.

"Today, the borders of the country are safe. The country is completely safe in his hands. He is the most popular leader in the world. So people of India feel proud. People in India and abroad come and tell us how they have been treated since he became the PM. Now, the way Europeans are treated abroad, the same way Indians get respect," said Bidhuri, who has experience in several political parties, including Congress, AAP, and BSP.

Attacking Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP, Bidhuri said Delhiites are tired of seeing AAP leaders crying foul for everything they can't do and asked why no one in the previous Governments had any problem even when the ruling party in Delhi wasn't the same as the Central Government.

Responding to a question that the AAP Government accused the Centre and Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena of not letting them work, the leader said, "There was no tussle when Chief Minister Madan Lal Khurana-led the BJP Government was here and there was Congress Government in the Centre. We have seen Sheila Dikshit's Government being run in Delhi without any problem with the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led BJP Government in the Centre. They never had a confrontation with LG. These people deliberately create drama when they can't get any work done."

He said there are transferable subjects that come under the elected Government of Delhi and hence crying foul all the time about it makes the people think of voting for BJP. "AAP makes a lot of commitments which are not possible for them to fulfill. And when these commitments are not fulfilled, AAP leaders say the BJP Government is not allowing us to work. The LG is not allowing us to work. I am an MLA from Badarpur. If I say I am not able to work, that Kejriwal is not allowing me to work, then people will regret electing me. People understand this and if this is the case with AAP, why will people not elect BJP to bring a double engine Government in Delhi?" he said.

Talking about the development projects, he highlighted the biggest eco-park in the world being built on 885 acres in his constituency, which had NTPC's ashes there. He said it will have a jogging track, a cycle track, a yoga center, a safari, a zoo and a boating lake.

He talked about expanding the metro network and working on developing a master plan to solve the issue of traffic, which is a pertinent issue in the area.

"I will expand the Metro network, develop master-plan roads and regularise 69 unauthorised colonies. Traffic is a big problem in our region and we will develop a peripheral road connecting Sangam Vihar to Deoli.

The Mehrauli-Badarpur road needs to be turned into an elevated road, up to the Gurugram border. Mandi Road will be widened to 100 feet from 25 feet to provide another passageway connecting Haryana," he stated.

He said, "We are constructing a six-lane road to decongest traffic on Mathura Road. So, in the next six months, 70 to 80 per cent of that work will be completed. From DND Kalindi it will connect the Baroda-Mumbai highway. This will solve the issue of traffic allotment."

BJP demands probe into Maliwal assault incident

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP is facing attack from all fronts over party leader and Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal's alleged 'assault' accusation by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's PA Bibhav Kumar as her former husband Navin Jaihind attacked senior AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, claiming that her life is in danger, while the BJP staged a protest near Kejirwal's residence, demanding a probe in the matter.

In a video message posted on X (formerly Twitter) by Maliwal's former husband, he attacked Singh and asked him to stop his acting.

Reacting to the press conference held by Singh confirming the assault allegation by former Chairperson of Delhi Women Commision (DCW), he siad, "I got to know that Sanjay Singh visited Maliwal's house. Let me tell you (Sanjay Singh) this, if you really consider Swati as your sister then don't go to his house and indirectly threaten her and pressurise her. Take her with you to the police station and file an FIR against the perpetrators. Don't act, instead take actions against the criminals."

BJP women workers protest against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in New Delhi on Wednesday Ranjan Dimri

Meanwhile, BJP leaders and workers, including activists of BJP Mahila Morcha, staged a protest on Wednesday near Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence, demanding a probe into the incident involving MP Swati Maliwal.

President of Delhi BJP Virendra Sachdeva questioned the silence of Kejriwal over the alleged incident and demanded action against those guilty. "It's a matter of respect and honour of a woman who has been chief of the Delhi Commission for Women. We are here to support her. AAP leader Sanjay Singh has admitted the incident. Why is not Kejriwal lodging a police complaint against the person who is involved in it," Sachdeva asked Maliwal had alleged earlier that the Delhi chief minister's assistant Bibhav Kumar "misbehaved" with her at his residence which was confirmed by party leader Sanjay Singh a day after.

Addressing a press conference a day after Maliwal's allegations, Singh said AAP supremo Kejriwal will take strict action in the matter. Sachdeva said the police could launch a probe after confirmation of the incident by Singh. He also urged Maliwal, who has maintained complete silence over the incident so far, to come forward to give her statement to the police.

BJP national spokesperson Shazia Ilmi, who was formerly with the AAP, also expressed concern over Maliwal's safety and questioned Kejriwal if she was being intimidated and pressured into reaching "some kind of a compromise".

She also targeted the opposition INDIA bloc, questioning the alleged silence of Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and party president Mallikarjun Karage as well as TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee on the issue.

Ilmi said, "It is obvious that she had been beaten up at the residence of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. I know all the characters (in AAP) very well. It is impossible that Kejriwal's right hand (Bibhav Kumar) would do so without being ordered to do so by Kejriwal.

It is indeed very serious. Arvind Kejriwal should come clean on this, offer his resignation if he cannot ask Bibhav to resign."

Kejriwal holds roadshows for INDIA Bloc candidates in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Coining the slogan "Jo kare Kejriwal ko pyaar woh kare Modi ko inkaar (those who love Kejriwal reject Modi)", Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal held roadshows in Chandni Chowk and North West Delhi in support of Congress and joint INDIA alliance candidates in the national capital on Wednesday.

During the roadshow, Kejriwal claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is "not coming back to power" on June 4. "I have made enquiries across the country.

Their (BJP's) seats are reducing everywhere, be it Haryana or Uttar Pradesh. If the INDIA bloc comes to power, we will work for the progress of the country and end dictatorship. It does not matter whether I go to jail, what matters is that the Constitution should be saved and it's your responsibility," the AAP Chief said while addressing a gathering at Jahangirpuri.

Scores of party workers and supporters of both Congress and AAP came to witness the roadshow of Kejriwal in support of JP Agarwal and Udit Raj. While he didn't do a roadshow in North east Delhi,

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's roadshow to support joint INDIA and Congress candidate JP Agarwal in Chandni Chowk Ranjan Dimri

Congress candidate Kanhaiya Kumar accompanied Udit Raj while campaigning.

While appealing to people to vote for candidates of the alliance to end "dictatorship" and "save" the Constitution, Kejriwal said that the INDIA bloc will work for the country's progress if it forms government at the Centre.

The AAP and the Congress, both members of the bloc, are contesting the Lok Sabha elections in Delhi under a seat-sharing arrangement. The Kejriwal-led party is contesting four of the seven parliamentary seats in the national capital, while its alliance partner has fielded candidates from three.

Kejriwal, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in the Delhi liquor policy case, was released from Tihar Jail on interim bail granted by the Supreme Court.

"I have come straight from jail to be amongst you. These people (BJP) put me behind bars and I missed you a lot. I love you a lot. I know that even you love me a lot. I am a small person.

Ours is a small party with governments in Delhi and Punjab," Kejriwal said. "I was wondering why I was put in jail. What is my fault? These people are quite powerful," he said, adding that his "fault" was providing good education to children, building good schools for them, opening Mohalla Clinics and arranging for free medicines for people.

"Now, they are saying I will have to go to jail again. It is in your hands whether I go to jail. If you choose lotus (the BJP's symbol), I will have to return to jail. If you choose INDIA bloc candidate, I won't have to go to jail," the AAP national convener said, adding that when people go to vote, they should think whether Kejriwal should go to jail.

Congress and joint INDIA candidate JP Agarwal for Chandni Chowk said, "The atmosphere here is very good; the people want a change this time. The current government didn't work for the people; the people want democracy in the country and not fascism."

Further, Kejriwal alleged that efforts were made to break him while he was in jail "but because of the blessings of Lord Hanuman, I stayed strong".

He said, "They are saying that they want 400 seats since they want to accomplish big things. What are those big things? It was found that they want to end reservation. Baba Saheb Ambedkar has written an excellent Constitution. Do not think about the heat on May 25 and step out to vote."

Modi, Rahul to hold roadshows, raise poll heat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The heat of the election battle for securing the seven Lok Sabha seats in the National Capital is likely to turn up as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress leader and Wayanad MP are likely to hold a roadshow and address the public on May 18.

According to BJP sources, PM Modi, who filed his nomination papers from Varanasi on Tuesday, will hold a roadshow in support of two time MP and BJP candidate for North east Delhi on May 18 along with a public address in Ramleela Maidan in the national capital.

With his campaigning in Delhi, the election fervour in Delhi will be turned up even further and the saffron party would be vying to secure all the seats in

the city, maintaining its track record of sweeping all seats for a consecutive third term .

Further, the Delhi Congress earlier shared that Rahul Gandhi will be participating in a town hall address with the public dwelling on the issues they face.

Delhi Congress President Devender Yadav on Monday said, "Delhi Congress will organise "Town Hall" in the coming days to discuss the issues facing the people like price rise, unemployment, GST, rehri-patri vendors, pollution, women's safety and security, law and order, JJ clusters, resettlement and unauthorised colonies, ownership rights to the poor in every Lok Sabha constituency and to find solutions. Rahul Gandhi has agreed to address one of the Town Hall meetings."

According to party sources, it is likely that Gandhi, who had earlier asked PM Modi to do a debate with him in a US Presidential election style, will hold such a town hall address on Monday in support of the Congress and joint INDIA alliance candidates in Delhi.

Following Modi's election campaigning, one can also expect to see Home Minister Amit Shah up next in Delhi campaigning for BJP candidates.

Polling in Delhi is slated to be held on May 25 and the election results will be announced on June 4.

State election body asks Delhi Police to curb illegal activities

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Chief Electoral office has written a letter to the Delhi Police and urged them to act strictly against political parties and their workers indulging in registration of voters for post-election beneficiary-oriented schemes.

The poll body asked him to sensitise the field functionaries and district police to be proactive and more vigilant to curb such unlawful activities in its letter to Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora on May 11.

The letter said the Delhi election office has received complaints about "some" political parties "registering voters" for post-election beneficiary-oriented schemes in the garb of conducting surveys. It stated that such parties are asking voters to fill up the forms manu-

ally or digitally to get benefits of their prospective schemes.

The national capital has seven Lok Sabha seats and will go to polls on May 25 in the sixth phase.

"Complaints are being received against some political parties and their workers for registering the individuals for beneficiary-oriented schemes and distributing guarantee cards in the form of pamphlets giving details of prospective individual benefits along with an attached form asking for details of voters such as name, age, address, mobile number, booth number, constituency name and number etc," the letter issued by the Delhi chief electoral officer's office to the CP read.

It said "while action is being taken by the returning officers (RO) against such violations, you (CP) are also requested to direct, sensitise the field functionaries, district police to be proactive and more vigilant to curb such unlawful activities, if any, in the area of their respective jurisdiction."

The poll body urged the CP to ensure that strict and swift action is taken against people found indulging in such acts.

The election body also suggested that the police could take the action under Section 127A and 123(1) of the Representation of People Act, 1951 and Section 171 (B) of Indian Penal Code.

Traffic advisory issued for DTU area due to polls training

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police on Wednesday said there will be some traffic restrictions for two days on Thursday and Friday near the Delhi Technological University (DTU) as a training programme will be held in connection with the Lok Sabha elections.

It is advised by the traffic police to the commuters to plan their journey in advance in order to ensure smooth traffic management in the area and for an uninterrupted journey.

"On 16.05.2024 & 17.05.2024, a training programme in connection with the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections 2024 has been scheduled in the Delhi Technological University, Shahbad Daulatpur, Delhi," the advisory said by the traffic police. Informing that the restrictions will be placed between 7 am in the morning to 7 pm in the evening, the senior traffic officials said, "In view of the same, there will be some traffic restrictions in the said area on Thursday and Friday from 7 am to 7 pm."

The commuters coming from the Shahbad Dairy side towards the DTU/Samaypur Badli Metro Station will reach their destination via St Xavier's red light and KN Katju Marg, police said.

The commuters coming from the Samaypur Badli Metro/Rohini Sector-18 and 19, towards the Shahbad Dairy will go via Rohini Sector-16 to reach the KN Katju Marg.

Shah rally in Gurugram cancelled

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Home Minister Amit Shah's rally, which was scheduled on Thursday in Haryana's Gurugram, has been cancelled due to some unknown reason. He was going to address a public meeting in support of party candidate and incumbent MP Rao Inderjit Singh.

According to party leaders, senior leaders of the BJP, including Shah, were scheduled to address a public meeting in Gurgaon on Thursday evening which has now been cancelled.

Senior party functionaries on Wednesday said all three rallies scheduled in Haryana's three constituencies on Thursday in Gurgaon and on Friday in Rohtak and Karnal have been cancelled.

However, the party functionaries did not disclose the reasons behind the cancellation. Haryana will go to polls on May 25 and incumbent MP Rao Inderjit Singh is eyeing a third win from the

Gurgaon seat, after having won from there in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Meanwhile, the BJP candidate Rao Inderjit Singh is busy in his stormy elections campaign in his constituency. On Wednesday Rao addressed public meetings in village Garhi Harsur, Sadharana, Chandu-Buhra, Makdola, Kaliyawas, Iqbalpur, Sultanpur, Jhanjharela Kheda, Mubarikpur, Farrukhnagar, Khentawas, Saidpur, Mohammadpur, Dhanawas, Patli, Hajipur, Judaula in the Gurgaon constituency.

While addressing people, he said that huge development was conducted in the entire area during his tenure. "Work has been done to connect Farrukhnagar and Manesar areas by rail. In the coming days, people of Manesar to Pataudi area will also get the benefits of Orbital Rail Corridor and Rapid Rail Transit System (RRTS). This entire area is going to be connected to passenger train service in the coming days," Rao said.

Attacking Congress, Rao said "Congress is trying to mislead the people by abolishing the Constitution and ending reservation. BJP has no such intention. In the last 10 years, there has been rapid development in the country under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi."

Further, he urged the voters to cast their vote for BJP to continue this pace of development. He said, "It is important that we once again cooperate in forming the Modi government at the Centre. Prime Minister Modi's goal is to include the country among the first three world economic powers by 2047, after the completion of 100 years of the country's independence."

Scores of AAP workers sign Kejriwal support campaign

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Scores of AAP supporters signed on the 'I Support Kejriwal' board in support of the Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal West Delhi's Tilak Nagar under the 'Jail ka Jawab Vote se' campaign on Wednesday. AAP and Joint INDIA Alliance candidate from West Delhi Lok Sabha constituency Mahabal Mishra and MLA Jarnail Singh were also present at the event.

Addressing the crowd, Mahabal Mishra highlighted BJP's 'Jumlas' (hollow promises) contrasted with Arvind Kejriwal's achievements and asked the public to oust the dictatorial BJP government. AAP Delhi Vice President and MLA Jarnail Singh lauded CM Arvind Kejriwal's track record, noting his surpassing of electoral pledges with exemplary gover-

nance. Mishra said, "Every voter is considering themselves as Arvind Kejriwal and people are very enthusiastic about removing the dictator government.

While on one hand BJP's guarantee becomes 'jumlas', Kejriwal's guarantee is visible in every house.

The public knows that we are their companions in happiness and sorrow, we have always worked by staying among them," adding that their slogan is, we have worked, we will work and will respect the people, and whether it is an AAP MLA or MP, everyone is a common person.

While signing the board with 'I Support Kejriwal' written on it, they also wrote short messages to AAP chief like 'This time victory is sure', 'I love you Kejriwal', 'My vote for Kejriwal', 'people of Tilak Nagar will answer jail with Votes', '25 May BJP gayi' and 'We love Kejriwal' among others. MLA Jarnail Singh said that this is the love of the common people for Arvind Kejriwal. "25 May is the voting day here. Only 10 days are left for the election. You have a chance to answer this dictatorship.

The BJP had promised to give two crore jobs to the youth every year, but no one got a government job. They had promised to reduce the price of petrol and inflation, but did not do it. Today people are asking questions to BJP but they have no answer.

Those who were their MPs for the last 10 years were never seen. BJP was forced to change them," he said. Further, the AAP Delhi Vice President said that BJP had promised to double the income of farmers, but more than 700 farmers had sacrificed their life due to Modi ji's three black laws (farmer's law), for which they have no answer.

Voters face lack of basic facilities at North West Delhi seat

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Voters in the reserved constituency of North West Delhi constituency, which came into existence in 2008 following delimitation, face problems in basic facilities like water, electricity and sanitation, proper roads and connectivity. The constituency is being contested by BJP candidate Yogendra Chandolia and Congress and INDIA alliance joint candidate Udit Raj.

This constituency has the second largest number of voters at 25,67,423 and comprises Narela, Badli, Rithala, Bawana, Mundka, Kirari, Sultanpur Majra, Nangloi, Mangol Puri and Rohini assembly segments. It has large rural belts

where locals rely on dairy as well as traditional farming while the migrant population comprises mostly rickshaw pullers and industrial workers. There are also some housing societies that have sprung up in the last few years in Rohini.

Migrant labourers rue the lack of employment opportunities and basic facilities like water and electricity while those residing in housing societies complain about incidents of street crimes. "After the 2019 elections, our MP Hans Raj Hans was hardly seen here. Though his attendance in Parliament was decent, I have no idea why he did not pay any visit, when needed, to listen to our problems," alleges Rithala resident Manohar Singh.

A resident of Rohini Pradeep Bhatnagar said, "Roads are not wide and during peak hours, traffic is a major issue. Due to non- functioning of street lights, snatching of mobile phones and jewellery in the area is a major concern."

People also say lack of sanitation facilities pose a threat to women when they step out of their homes early morning or after evening. Kishor Nath, a resident of Badli village, says, "There are very few public toilets and most of them are in horrible conditions. There are several open fields here and many people defecate in the open. Leaders must think about resolving such issues for the common people."

Northwest Delhi is one of the most crime-prone areas in the capital. "We keep strict vigil round the clock on bootlegging and drug peddling. We have directed senior police officers to keep an eye on suspicious activities. No one is allowed to breach law and order situations at all," said a senior police officer. Factory worker Mukund claims many criminals are active in the area and they snatch mobile phones and money, adding they use weapons like knives or country-made guns whenever someone tries to resist them. "Several cases take place everyday. Most of the people do not report these matter to police out of fear," says Khurshid, a migrant labourer from Uttar Pradesh.

According to Nupur Jain, a resident of Rohini, "Roads are not in good shape while snatching of mobile phones and chains is common. Supply of clean water is a major issue here. Many times, the water supplied is not fit for cooking. Without having an RO unit at home, one cannot use this water." Northwest Delhi is also home to a large number of migrant labourers from Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Bihar as there are two industrial areas -- Narela and Bawana -- which have hundreds of factories.

Jag Jeevan, an industrialist, says Bawana and Narela have more than 16,000 small and big industries but there is no proper connectivity with the highway and trucks have to pass through small lanes of the villages. "There is not even a dispensary where we can take a factory worker in case of any emergency.

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Deeply saddened: Centre condoles Indian UN worker's death in Gaza

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

India on Wednesday condoled the death of an Indian who was working with the United Nations (UN) in war-torn Gaza. Colonel Waibhav Anil Kale (retd), a 46-year-old former Indian Army officer, was killed on Monday when the vehicle he was travelling in came under attack in Gaza's Rafah region. The United Nations condoled and expressed apologies to India over the killing.

The killing marks the UN's first international casualty since the Israel-Hamas war began last year. The UN has called for a full investigation into his death while Israel has ordered a separate probe into the attack. In its first official reaction, Ministry of External Affairs(MEA) said it is deeply saddened by Colonel Kale (retd)'s death.

"We are deeply saddened by the death of Colonel Waibhav Anil Kale (Retd.), Security Coordination Officer in the UN Department of Safety and Security (DSS) in Gaza on 13 May 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and dear ones," said a statement.

The Indian permanent mission to the UN in New York and its missions in Tel Aviv and Ramallah are helping in bringing back the retired soldier's body, the ministry said. "Our Permanent Mission to the UN in New York and our Missions in Tel Aviv and Ramallah are extending all assistance in the repatriation of mortal remains to India and continue to be in touch with relevant authorities regarding the investigation into the incident," it added.

Colonel Kale (retd) had taken premature retirement from the Indian Army in 2022 and joined as a Security Coordination Officer in the UN Department of Safety and Security (DSS) two months ago, officials said yesterday. He is survived by his wife Amruta and two teenage children, son Vedant and daughter Radhika. The United Nations

GAZA WAR

condoled and expressed apologies to India over the killing of the former Indian Army officer."We also express our apologies and our condolences to the Government and people of India," Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said at the daily press briefing on Tuesday, reports PTI from United Nations. "We appreciate the contribution that India has made," he said.

Haq said the UN has established a fact-finding panel to look into the deadly attack. "It's very early in the investigation, and details of the incident are still being verified with the Israeli Defence Force (IDF)," Haq said. The fact-finding mission is being set up by the Department of Safety and Security. Haq said a weapon appears to have impacted the back of the white UN vehicle that was carrying the two UN staff members, killing Kale and injuring the other DSS female staff member who is receiving medical attention and "we believe that she will make it through."

"The deceased staff member has been identified. He is Waibhav Anil Kale of India, and we send our condolences to his family," he said. Haq confirmed that this was the "first international casualty" for the UN in Gaza and added that currently, the world body has 71 international staff in Gaza.

When asked if the UN is in contact with Israeli officials regarding the attack, Haq replied in the affirmative and said, "I think the point is we are in discussion with Israel to determine exactly how this incident happened and the nature of what happened."

"I don't think at this stage we are in doubt about where the shots came from as much as what the circumstances were," he added.

Haq said the UN believes the shots came from a tank in the area. When asked that only the IDF have tanks in the region, Haq said, "I think that's a safe assumption to make, yes."

He said the convoy was going to the European hospital as "there's regular work that's going on in terms of bringing people to different sites and this was part of that." When asked if Israel apologised to the UN and if the world body sees this as a deliberate attack, Haq said the case is "still under review". "We'll see what the review results in," he said, adding that "as the review proceeds, we'll need to see what the precise nature of the circumstances were."

The Permanent Mission of India to the UN had said in a post on X that it is "deeply saddened" by the loss of Col Waibhav Kale.

"Our deepest condolences are with the family during this difficult time," it said. UN chief Guterres expressed sadness to learn of Kale's death and injury to the other DSS staffer and condemned all attacks on UN personnel, calling for a full investigation.

Guterres sent his condolences to the family of the fallen staff member. "With the conflict in Gaza continuing to take a heavy toll — not only on civilians but also on humanitarian workers — the Secretary-General reiterates his urgent appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the release of all hostages," Guterres said. He said that more than 190 UN staff have been killed in Gaza. "Humanitarian workers must be protected. I condemn all attacks on UN personnel and reiterate my urgent appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire & the release of all hostages," he said.

Trinamool Congress MP Saket Gokhale on Wednesday wrote to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, urging that the government strongly condemn the killing of a former Indian Army officer in Gaza.

Gokhale said the former Army officer was travelling in a clearly-marked UN vehicle when he was killed. "It is clear from reports that Col.

Kale was killed when his convoy was attacked in a strike by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). There is well-established international law which prohibits military strikes on UN personnel in a conflict zone," he said in his letter to the minister.

BJP, Congress spar over Modi's remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

The BJP and Congress on Wednesday sparred following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's that he will never do Hindu-Muslim politics to assert that he has worked for development of all sections of society with any discrimination.

While BJP leaders cited the Prime Minister's remarks and said he ended communal appeasement with his inclusive governance, Congress, however, claimed that the "outgoing PM" has had no agenda barring Hindu-Muslim politics as 'Modi ki Guarantee' has "fallen flat" and '400 paar' given a "silent burial."

With the Congress and its allies accusing Modi of communal politics in his campaign, the prime minister had told a private television channel on Tuesday that he will not be fit for public life if he starts doing Hindu-Muslim. Former

Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said Modi ended communal appeasement with his inclusive governance, asserting that his numerous welfare schemes have benefitted the poorest people without any caste, religious or regional biases. Even Modi's critics cannot deny that his schemes have benefitted everyone, the BJP leader said.

BJP spokesperson R P Singh claimed it was leaders of the Congress and its allies which have spoken in favour of reservation for Muslims and strengthening personal laws, inviting a rejoinder from the prime minister. The Congress manifesto, he said, promises strengthening personal laws, alleging that it implies implementation of parts of sharia. RJD president Lalu Prasad Yadav has favoured reservation for Muslims, he added.

"The BJP's agenda is for the country's advancement," Singh said, noting that the his party's manifesto for expanding health insurance, housing, water and electricity facilities and boosting infrastructure is meant for all sections of society.

Slamming the prime minister, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the nation knows very well that "the outgoing PM is a pathological liar". "But even by his own pathetic standards, Mr. Modi's latest claim that he does not do Hindu-Muslim politics shows the new depths he reaches daily in lying.

Since April 19th 2024, it is a matter of public record that cannot be erased from our collective memory - even if Mr. Modi erases it from his own - that the outgoing PM has blatantly and brazenly used communal language, symbols, and allusions," Ramesh charged on X.

Another BJP spokesperson Shahnawaz Hussain said Modi has always considered over 140 crore population of the country as one, and it is the opposition which has tried to stick "Hindu-Muslim" charge on to him. "Modi has never done politics in the name of Hindu-Muslim," he said. The issue had taken the centre stage following his speech in Rajasthan last month, in which he had attacked the Congress over its alleged agenda for redistribution of wealth and Muslim reservation.

Modi said he was shocked at such an allegation and had cited his government numerous welfare measures aimed at saturation in their reach to make his point. Ramesh, however, alleged that throughout this campaign, "the outgoing PM" has had no agenda barring Hindu-Muslim politics. His party's manifesto, an incoherent jumble of words amidst an array of his own photos, has found zero traction, the Congress leader claimed.

"Modi ki Guarantee, promoted at tremendous cost to the public exchequer for the last few months, has fallen flat. 400 Paar has been given a silent burial," Ramesh said.

"His last, desperate attempt at having a campaign has been to lie and spread untruths about the Congress Party's and the INDIA janbandhan's agenda for equitable growth for each and every Indian citizen," he said. "The certainty of his exit has now forced him to feign memory loss," Ramesh added.

EC summons Andhra chief secretary, DGP over post poll violence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

Taking cognisance of post-poll violence in Andhra Pradesh, the Election Commission (EC) of India has summoned the State's chief secretary and the DGP on Thursday to "personally explain" the administration's failure to contain the incidents, sources said.

Reminding the state government that the Model Code of Conduct is still in force, the EC also asked the chief secretary and the police chief to ensure such incidents are not repeated. The Commission has repeatedly emphasised that there is no place for violence in a democracy and since the announcement of Lok Sabha elections, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar has been personally monitoring the election space to ensure peaceful and violence-free conduct of polls, officials pointed out.

When they appear at the EC headquarters here on Thursday, the top Andhra Pradesh officials will be asked to "personally explain" the reasons for the administration's failure to contain the post-poll violence, the sources said.

They will also be asked about preemptive steps being taken to avoid any such incidents in the future, the sources said.

Post-poll violence was reported in parts of Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday where Lok Sabha and assembly polls were held together on Monday. The leaders of ruling YSRCP and opposition TDP have levelled allegations against each other for the incidents.

India urges Iran to release 40 Indian seafarers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

India has asked Iran to release nearly 40 Indian seafarers who were detained from four different merchant ships seized by the Persian Gulf country over the past eight months on different charges, sources said on Wednesday.

Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Sarbananda Sonowal made the request during a meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in Tehran on Monday.

Sonowal was in Tehran where India signed a 10-year contract to operate the strategic Iranian port of Chabahar that will help expand the trade with Central Asia.

Following a request of Iranian side, a meeting was held between Sonowal and Abdollahian where bilateral issues were discussed, sources privy to the development said. During the meeting, Sonowal requested Abdollahian to

release all Indian seafarers who are in Iranian custody. Abdollahian said Tehran is positive on the release of the Indian seafarers but it is getting delayed as legal procedures have to be followed, the sources said.

The sources said the Indian seafarers were working in four ships -- Steven, Global Cherylyn, Margol and MSC Aries -- which were seized by Iran over the past eight months on different charges. According to the sources, Steven was seized by the lranian Coast Guard on September 12, 2023, for "smuggling" and the crew were also detained.

There were nine Indian crew members on board and it has come down to six now after three of them, along side two other nationals, were taken away by Iranian authorities on April 24 and their whereabouts are still unknown.

Iran is yet to give consular access to the Indian seafarers of the ship and the Indian Embassy in Tehran is in regular touch with Iranian authorities, the sources said. Another ship, Global Cherylyn, was seized on December 11, 2023 at Bandar Abbas with 20 Indian crew members and one Bangladeshi.

Consular access to the crew was given on March 12, 2024. The vessel was seized on charges of "fuel smuggling". The issue was raised with the Iranian Embassy and authorities in Tehran.

According to the latest update, the release orders of the seafarers have been signed by a local court but final release depends on the approval of a court in Tehran.

Another vessel, Margol, was seized on January 22, 2024. It has currently one Indian, the vessel's captain Sujeet Singh. So far, consular access has not been given. The vessel was seized on charges of "fuel smuggling". The ship's 12 Indian crew were already released and they reached Delhi on February 14. A penalty of Rs 20 crore was imposed on the captain by the Iranian authorities.

Shipping company RPSL is in touch with the Iranian authorities and they have assured the release of the captain by this month. Merchant ship MSC Aries was seized on April 13, 2024 by Iran for its alleged links with Israel.

There were 17 Indian crew. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke to his Iranian counterpart on April 14 for the release of Indian crew members. Following the conversation, Indian female deck cadet Ann Tessa Joseph was released and she landed in Kochi on April 18, 2024. On May 9, five more Indian sailors of MSC Aries were released by Iran.

India has requested the Iranian side for the early release of the remaining Indian crew members of the ship. The Indian embassy is in touch with Iranian authorities and has requested for second consular access, the sources said.

India sees highest heatwave deaths globally from 1990 to 2019: Study

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

India shouldered the highest burden of heatwave-related excess deaths globally accounting for more than 20 per cent of the total 1.53 lakh such mortalities surpassing both China and Russia in this aspect in the last three decades from 1990 to 2019.

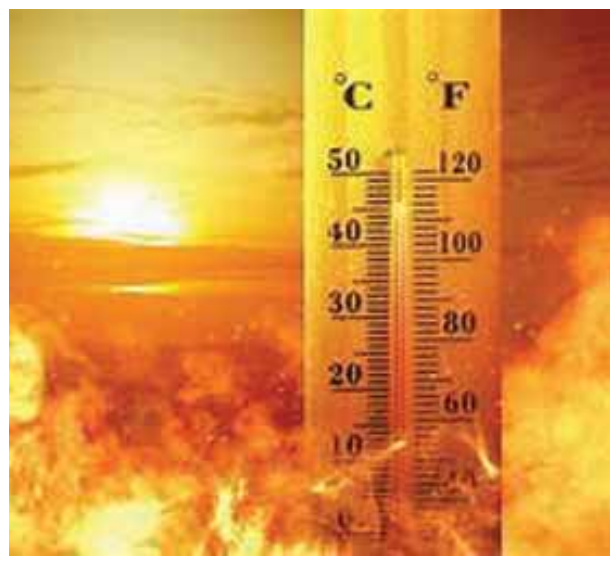
A research conducted by Australia-based Monash University said that the impact of heat waves on India is particularly severe due to a combination of geographical, climatic, and socioeconomic factors. In contrast, China and Russia,each experienced roughly 14 per cent and 8 per cent of these heat wave-linked excess deaths, respectively.

Overall, more than 1.53 lakh deaths a year were associated with heat waves around the world. The study found that heatwave-linked excess deaths accounted for about a third of all heat-related deaths and 1 per cent of total deaths globally.

Needless to say, overall 1.53 lakh excess deaths occurred every summer, close to half came from Asia and more than 30 per cent from Europe. Further, the largest estimated death rates (deaths per population) were seen in regions with dry climates and lower-middle incomes. The findings are published in PLoS Medicine.

The high incidence of heatwave-related mortality in India is reflective of several factors, including the country's large population, its geographical location, and the prevalence of extreme temperatures, particularly during the summer months.

Additionally, socioeconomic factors such as poverty, inadequate access to healthcare, and limited infrastructure exacerbate the vulnerability of certain segments of the population, particularly those living in urban slums or rural areas with limited resources. The authors explained that "During the warm seasons from 1990 to



2019, heatwave-related excess deaths accounted for 153,078 deaths per year, a total of 236 deaths per ten million residents or 1 per cent of global deaths."

For the study, the researchers used data from the UK-based Multi-Country Multi-City (MCC) Collaborative Research Network that included daily deaths and temperatures from 750 locations across 43 countries including India.

Comparing the decade up to 2019 with that up to 1999, the duration of heat waves each year was found to have extended from 13.4 to 13.7 days on average around the world, with average ambient temperature warming by 0.35 degrees Celsius every decade.

The researchers said that while previous studies have quantified excess deaths due to heat waves locally, they have not compared these estimates across the globe over a prolonged duration.

The authors have called for a "comprehensive approach" tackling not only immediate health risks during heat waves but also implementing long-term strategies to minimise vulnerability and inequalities across communities.

"The strategies include climate change mitigation policy, heat action plans (e.G., heat early warning system), urban planning and green structure, social support program, healthcare and public health services, education awareness, and community engagement and participation," they said.

The study echoes findings of a recent report by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) which said in India alone, severe heat waves in April and June resulted in about 110 reported fatalities due to heatstroke in 2023.

Yet another analysis by an international team of leading climate scientists from the World Weather Attribution group has called for urgent measures to mitigate the impact of heat waves which are likely to intensify in coming years.

"Some countries, such as India, have comprehensive heat action plans in place. Yet, to protect some of the most vulnerable people, these must be expanded with mandatory regulations.

Workplace interventions for all workers to address heat stress, such as scheduled rest breaks, fixed work hours, and rest-shade-rehydrate programs (RSH), are necessary but have yet to become part of worker protection guidelines in the affected regions," it said.

SAARC Secretary General holds talks to boost regional cooperation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

Secretary General of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Md Golam Sarwar paid an official visit to India from May 11-15 and interacted with the authorities of the government on issues of cooperation in SAARC. It was Secretary General's first official visit to any of the Member States of SAARC.

Giving details here, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said during the visit, the Secretary General was hosted for a working lunch by Jaideep Majumdar, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs. The two sides had detailed discussions on vari-

ous issues of regional cooperation within SAARC. Following this, the Secretary General also called on the Foreign Secretary and Minister of State for External Affairs Rajkumar Ranjan Singh.

During the discussions, India reiterated its commitment towards regional cooperation for growth and prosperity of the people of South Asia through SAARC. It was also underlined that India considers SAARC as an important regional association for cooperation in South Asia and has been taking several efforts and initiatives to bring the peoples of South Asia closer to each other.

The Secretary General also visited the South Asian University (SAU) which is a specialised body of SAARC hosted by India in New Delhi and discussed with its authorities issues concerning the University.

Not necessary to make arrest in all GST cases: SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday told the Centre that there is no need for making arrests in all Goods and Services Tax (GST) cases and that it can be done only if there is credible evidence and tangible material to prove culpability.

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna, MM Sundresh and Bela M Trivedi, which reserved its verdict on a batch of pleas challenging the constitutional validity and interpretation of provisions relating to the Customs Act and Goods and Services Tax Act, said the power of arrest is different from necessity of arrest. "The legislation does not say that for completion of investigation you need to be arrested. It is not the object of the legislation. It is not necessary for you to arrest in each and every case of GST.

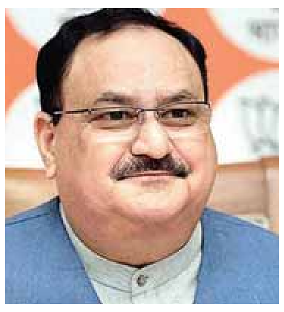
It has to be based on some credible evidence and tangible material," the bench told Additional Solicitor General SV Raju.

The bench, which posed several questions to Raju on provisions of arrest under the GST law, said the legislation has itself kept liberty on a high pedestal and it should not be diluted.

Raju said arrests are mostly made during the investigation as there can be no arrest after the probe in a case has been completed.

This election is to punish those who are anti-Ram: BJP chief Nadda

PTI ■ MOTIHARI (BIHAR)



Launching a scathing attack on opposition INDIA bloc, BJP national president JP Nadda on Wednesday said this election is about holding those accountable who oppose the core values of 'Ram', nationalism, reservation, Sanatan Dharma and the Constitution and hinder the Centre's mission to make India 'Viksit Bharat'.

He accused the opposition leaders, including RJD, of misleading the electorate in the name of providing employment to youths.

"They will first take the land of the poor before giving them jobs. If anyone can do good for the poor, then it's only the NDA government at the Centre led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi," said Nadda while addressing an election rally here in support of Lovely Anand, the NDA nominee from Sheohar Lok Sabha constituency.

The allusion was apparently to the land-for-jobs scam during RJD supremo's tenure as the railway minister in the Manmohan Singh government. The scam is currently being probed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

"When Sonia Gandhi was the chairperson of UPA, she had raised questions of the existence of Lord Ram and the then government gave an affidavit in the court terming him as fiction (imaginary). This election is to punish those who are anti-Ram, anti-national, anti-reservation, anti-Sanatan Dharma and against the Constitution. This election is also to punish those who are opposing the Centre's initiatives to make India a 'Viksit Bharat'", Nadda said.

"Tamil Nadu minister Udhayanidhi Stalin had denigrated Sanatan Dharma as dengue, malaria etc. No Congress leader condemned his statement. They are anti-Sanatan Dharma", said Nadda.

Nadda said the party led by Lalu Prasad stands for 'Rishwatkhor Jungleraj Dal'. He accused the opposition coalition of "protecting" corrupt people, whereas Modi was "striving hard" to end corruption in the country. "A majority of the leaders of the INDIA bloc, including those of the Congress and RJD, are either in jail or out on bail," he added.

"We have a PM who is working for the country and on the other hand, you have the INDIA bloc, a 'parivar bachao, dynasty bachao' alliance," he said and alleged that Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Lalu Prasad and Tejashwi Yadav are all out on bail.

Reiterating that the BJP-led NDA will win 400-plus Lok Sabha seats, including all 40 in Bihar, Nadda asserted that the eastern state has developed only under NDA rule. "Bihar is also likely to get Rs 3 lakh-crore aid from the Centre for its overall development", he said.

"Modi's only aim is welfare of every person. But INDIA bloc leaders want to give reservation on religious lines. The Congress is giving tickets to those belonging to 'tukde-tukde' gang," Nadda added.

Grand temples will also be built in Mathura and Kashi if BJP wins 400 seats: Assam CM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said here that grand temples will also be built in Mathura and Kashi if the BJP wins 400 seats.

"The BJP government had promised the Ram temple (in Ayodhya) and the government kept the promise. The BJP government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has fulfilled all the promises," Sarma further said addressing a public meeting in support of BJP candidate Harsh Malhotra in Laxmi Nagar.

Sarma also that the vice president should take suo motu cognisance of the incident with AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's official residence.

"There was an earlier allegation that a Delhi chief secretary was beaten by Kejriwal. Yesterday, he also thrashed a Rajya Sabha MP. I think the vice president, who is also the chairman of the Rajya Sabha, should take suo motu cognisance of how a chief minister can beat a Rajya Sabha MP," Sarma told reporters.

Maliwal on Monday went to the Civil Lines Police Station and alleged that a member of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's personal staff "assaulted' her at the chief minister's official residence, police officials said.

Attacking the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Sarma said, "The Lal Qila (Red Fort) and the Qutub Minar are the main attractions of the capital, but the CM of Delhi invites people to show Mohalla Clinics, which are in bad conditions."

He further said that medical colleges are being built in every district of Assam, and if the BJP is voted to power again, the government will build super-specialty hospitals and medical colleges in the national capital.

Local MLA Abhay Verma, deputy president of Delhi BJP Lata Gupta and many other BJP leaders and workers were present during the meeting.

NORTHERN RAILWAY

OPEN E-TENDER NOTICE

Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav

No. 128-W/280/e Tender Notice/NIT-23-2024-25/W-2 **Dated :- 14.05.2024**

The Sr. Divisional Engineer-II. Northern Railway, Delhi Division invites E-Tender for the following work.

1	Name of work	Annual P.way zone for maintenance of track in the section of SSE/P.Way/GZB-I under ADEN/GZB jurisdiction of Sr. DEN-II for the year 2024-25 P.E. 30.06.2025.
2	Approx cost of work	As per NIT on IREPS
3	Earnest Money to be Deposited	As per NIT on IREPS
4	Cost of tender document	Rs. 0.00/-
5	Date & Time of submission of tender bid and opening of tender	07.06.2024 at 15:00 Hrs.
6	Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in

• The tenderer/s must be registered on the Indian Railway E-Procurement system (IREPS) site i.e. **www.ireps.gov.in** for participating in the e-tender system. • For all terms and conditions please refer tender document. • No manual offers are acceptable. • Cost of tender document and Earnest money will be acceptable through net banking or payment gateway only. **1457/24**

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

ICICI Bank | **Branch Office:** ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

Whereas

The undersigned being the Authorized Officer of ICICI Bank Limited under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) rules 2002, issued demand notices upon the borrowers mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

As the borrower failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/ her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned dates. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of ICICI Bank Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Vinay Kumar Agarwal/ Sunita Gupta/ LBMRT00001627795	Property At Khasra No. 77, Mohalla- Krishna Kunj Colony, Gali No. 2, Tibra Road, Modi Nagar, Gram Aurangabad, Pargana Jalalabad, Modinagar, Uttar Pradesh- 201204/ May 13, 2024	October 30, 2023 Rs. 1,85,093/-	Modi-nagar up

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date: May 16, 2024 **Authorized Officer**
Place: Modinagar **ICICI Bank Limited**

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

ICICI Bank | **Branch Office:** ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005

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Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Jitendra Kumar Pathak Alias Jeetendra Pathak/ Seema Pathak/ LBDEL00001968676/ LBDEL00002385456/ LBGHZ00001960713	Flat No- B401 Ground Floor, Block-B, Township, Spring View Floors, Residential Township Crescent Par C, Situated At Village Shahpur, Bamheta, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh/ May 9, 2024	December 27, 2023 Rs. 18,69,885/-	Delhi/ NCR

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date: May 16, 2024 **Authorized Officer**
Place: Delhi/ NCR **ICICI Bank Limited**

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

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Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Kushlesh Dutt Gaur/ Lovesh Dutt Gaur/ Manju Dutt Gaur/ LBMRT00005837826/ LBMRT00005837830	Plot No. 2, Khasra No. 338M/5 Minjumla, Village Dantal, Mohalla Hari Nagar Kanker Khera, Pargana Tehsil and District, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh- 250001/ May 13, 2024	January 08,2024 Rs. 34,30,475/-	Meerut/ Delhi/ NCR/ Shamli

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/ guarantors(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date: May 16, 2024 **Authorized Officer**
Place: Delhi/ NCR **ICICI Bank Limited**

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Riya Atreya D/o Kamal Kumar Atreya R/o Z-228 B, Sector-12, Noida, Distt-Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P.-201301, have changed my name from Riya Atrey to Riya Atreya in future for all purposes.

PD(449)C

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is to inform to the public at large that **Mr. Vishal Maggon who is purchasing the GROUND FLOOR WITHOUT ROOF AND TERRACE RIGHTS OF PLOT NO. 33, BLOCK-Q, LAND AREA MEASURING 200 SQ. YDS., COLONY KNOWS AS RAJOURI GARDEN SITUATED AT VILLAGE, BASAI DARAPUR ON DELHI, NAJAGGARH ROAD, IN THE STATE OF DELHI. from Mrs. Santosh Kumari Vide Relinquishment deed dated 24.02.2022 and** That the 1. Original **Sale Deed** dt. 08.12.1995 Executed by D.L.F housing & Construction Ltd., in favour of Mr. SomNath Sharma S/o Mr. Bishan Das Sharma, Vide doc No. 3764, book no.1 , vol no. 6, pages 85-88, dated 08.12.1955, SR-Delhi. 2. Original **Sale Deed** dt.06.07.1956 Executed by Mr. SomNath Sharma S/o Mr. Bishan Das Sharma in favour of Mr. Ved Parkash Kumar S/o Mr. Sain Ditta Mal vide doc No. 2782 book no. 1, volno. 197-200, dated 06.07.1956 SR-I, Delhi. are misplaced/lost and FIR has lodged on dated 16.11.2022 with L.A.R No. 985683/2022 for loss of document. **same to be financed & mortgaged by Aditya Birla Housing Finance Ltd.** If any Person having any type of claim/right/title/interest over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within **7 days** from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc.

LUCEM LEGAL LLP
Office No. B-93B,Second Floor,Opposite SBI Bank Sector-2,Noida,UP-201301,Contact# 0120-4269379

UTTAR PRADESH STATE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

UPSIDC Complex: A-1/4, Lakhanpur, Kanpur-208024

Notice for Public Objections/Suggestion on layout Plan of I.A. Sikandrabad (Gopalpur) Bulandshahr by which industrial Plot No. V-3 & V-4 has been Amalgamated and created a new plot V-3/4 (Area 2400.00 Sq.mtr)

The amended part layout plan of I.A. Sikandrabad (Gopalpur) Bulandshahr of the UPSIDA situated in Distt. Bulandshahr has been prepared. A copy their of will available of inspection at the REGONAL MANAGER, UPSIDA, Administrative Building, EPIP Industrial Area Surajpur-5, Kasna Greater Noida (Gautambudh Nagar) between 10.00 AM to 5.00 PM on all workings days till the date mentioned in para 3 here after as well as website www. onlineupsida.com. Objections/Suggestions are here by invited with respect to the draft amended layout plan. Objection and Suggestion are shall be sent in writing to office of "REGIONAL MANAGER ,UPSIDA , Administrative Building , EPIP Industrial Area Surajpur- 5, Kasna Greater Noida (Gautambudh Nagar) , within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice mentioning subject as **"Regarding public Objections / Suggestions on Draft partial Amendment in layout plan for I.A Sikandrabad (Gopalpur) Bulandshahr"** Any person making the suggestions or Objections should also give his/her full name & address, Email id and contact number

-Regional Manager - U.P. State Industrial Development Authority
Email – rmsurajpur@upsida.co.in

Public Notice

This is to inform the general public that **Smt. Praveen** is the sole owner of Land area measuring 50 sq. yds. out of Khasra No. 1899 situated near Jama Masjid Mustafabad village Loni Chakbandi Pargana & Tehsil Loni Distt. Ghaziabad U.P. This ownership was legally acquired through a Gift Deed dated 27.02.2024 as doc. no. 3839 executed by Mohd. Jahid in favour of Smt. Praveen in respect of property. **Mrs. Praveen** is in the process of mortgaging the said **SMFG India Home Finance Co. Ltd. *(Formerly Fullerton India Home Finance Co. Ltd.)*** Any objections or concerns regarding this transaction should be raised within a period of 07 days from the date of this public notice. Any objections submitted after the completion of this 07-days period will not be considered binding with respect to the said property or the interests of our client.

If anyone wishes to raise an objection, please do so within the stipulated 07-day period by contacting **Law Veritas: North (Advocates & Legal Consultants) at Office No. 11, 1st Floor, Building No. A-44/A, Sector-16, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301; Landline(s): +910120-3101683; e-mail: accounts@lvnorth.in**

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice is hereby given to the General Public that Mrs. Sheela Sharma is the owners PROPERTY A BUILT UP HOUSE (TWO SIDE OPEN), BUILT ON PLOT NO. A-22, PART OF KHASRA NO.1024 MIN, SITUATED AT JANAKPURI, SHAHIBAD, VILLAGE: PASONDA, PARGANA LONI, TEHSIL AND DISTRICT GHAZIABAD, UTTAR PRADESH, vide Reg. GPA dated 07.06.2018 executed by Mr. Sudhir Kumar & Mr. Sunil Kumar S/o Mr. Virender Singh and Mrs. Nirmala Devi W/o Mr. Virender Singh, and same to be sold to Intending Borrower i.e MR. GURUTAV and MRS. ANJALI SHARMA and same mortgaging the said property with SMFG India Home Finance Co. Ltd, if anybody has any charge/interest/title in the said property or any kind of dispute kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present.

Mrs. Prasoon Lata, Advocate
SG Associates (Law Firm)
FF 18, Lotus Pond Plaza,Vaibhav Khand,Indirapuram,Ghaziabad UP. E-mail: sgassociatespl@gmail.com. Ph: 7011172764, 8130200837

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is to inform to the public at large that **Mr. Manoj Kumar who is purchasing the Residential Flat No. U.G.-4, (Upper Ground Floor) without roof rights, Area 34 sq. mtrs., Built on Plot No. 42, Situated at Residential Colony Durga Enterprises, Pargana Loni, Tehsil & Distt. Ghaziabad, U.P.; from Smt. Neeru Aggarwal W/o Sh. Naveen Aggarwal, Vide Sale deed dated 25.09.2023 duly regd. as Doc. No. 9783, Vol. No. 20315, on page 25 to 48, on dt. 25.09.2023, in S.R.– I, Ghaziabad, U.P. and** That the Original **Sale Deed Dated 25.06.1956 and** Original **Sale Deed Dated 09.07.1956 executed by M/s Delhi Glass Works Ltd. in favour of M/s Bhagwati Glass Works Pvt. Ltd.,** are misplaced/lost for loss of document. **same to be financed & mortgaged by Satin Housing Finance Limited.** If any Person having any type of claim/right/title/interest over the said property, may inform in writing, at the address mentioned below, about his objections, within **7 days** from today, failing which it shall be presumed that the said property is free from all type of Encumbrances, lien etc.

LUCEM LEGAL LLP
Office No. B-93B,Second Floor,Opposite SBI Bank Sector-2,Noida,UP-201301,Contact# 0120-4269379

PUBLIC NOTICE

"It is to inform to the public at large that Mr. Khalid has acquired Residential House area measuring 50 sq. yrds., situated at Kaila Bhatta, Hadbast Village Kaila, Pargana Loni, Tehsil & Distt. Ghaziabad, U.P vide Sale Deed daied 26.03.2024 executed by Mrs. Shazia Khanam, Now Mr. Khalid is the undisputed owner of above said property.

OR

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

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

Union Bank of India

(Stressed Asset Management Branch, New Delhi) Unit No.603 B, Konnectus Tower, Bhav Bhuti Marg, Opp. New Delhi Railway Station, Ajmeri Gate Side, New Delhi-110001 | Email: ubin0906069@unionbankofindia.bank

DEMAND NOTICE UNDER SEC. 13 (2)

Ref: SAM: DEL: OR: 160 : 2024-25

To

1. Borrower : M/s SMW Metals Private Limited

Address : No 3/8, SAB House, 2nd Floor Asaf Ali Road, New Delhi-110002

2. Guarantors :

a) Mr. Mohinder Jain (Director)
E-4/21D, Model Town-II, Delhi - 110009

b) Mr. Adiish Jain (Director)
E-4/21D, Model Town-II, Delhi - 110009

c) Mrs. Anita Jain (Guarantor)
E-4/21D, Model Town-II, Delhi - 110009

d) M/s Siddhartha Holdings (Guarantor)
No 3/8, SAB House, 2nd Floor Asaf Ali Road, New Delhi-110002

e) M/s Simla Holdings (Guarantor)
SH-1, Plot No.-7, Vardhman Grand Plaza, Sector -3, Dist. Centre Mangalam Place Outer Ring Road Rohini- New Delhi -110085.

f) M/s Tantra Solutions (Guarantor)
SH-1, Plot No.-7, Vardhman Grand Plaza, Sector -3, Dist. Centre Mangalam Place Outer Ring Road Rohini- New Delhi-110085

g) M/s J P Engineers Private Limited (Guarantor)
No 3/8, SAB House, 2nd Floor Asaf Ali Road, New Delhi-110002

Dear Sir(s) / Madam(s),

Notice Under Sec.13(2) read with Sec. 13 (3) of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

You the addressee No.1 herein availed the following credit facilities from our Green Park Branch (e-Andhra Bank), A-13, Aurobindo Marg, Green Park, New Delhi - 110016 and failed to pay the dues/installment/interest/operate the account/s satisfactory and hence, in terms of the RBI guidelines as to the Income Recognition and Prudential Accounting Norms, your account/s have been classified as Non-Performing Asset as on 01.09.2020. As on 03.05.2024 a sum of Rs. 21,07,02,534.84 (Rupees Twenty-One Crores Seven Lakhs Two Thousand Five Hundred Thirty-Four and Eighty-Four Paise Only) is outstanding in your accounts.

The particulars of amount due to the Bank from Addressee No.1 in respect of the aforesaid account/s are as under:

S No.	Type of the Facility	Outstanding amount as on date of NPA i.e. 01.09.2020	Un applied interest w.e.f. 01.09.2020 to 03.05.2024	Penal Interest simple	Cost/ charges incurred by bank	Total dues
	SOD (w/w devolve ILC)	22,95,17,591.84	10,32,98,499.00	**	**	33,28,16,090.84
	TOTAL					33,28,16,090.84

** (Amount of Rs 12,21,13,556.00 has been recovered in the account after NPA date 01.09.2020. Hence calculation Rs 21,07,02,534.84 + Rs 12,21,13,556.00 = Rs 33,28,16,090.84)

To secure the repayment of the monies due or the monies that may become due to the Bank, Borrower had executed documents on 26.02.2019 and created security interest by the way of :

Mortgage of immovable properties described herein below:

S. No.	Name of the Owner	Description of property
1	Mrs Anita Jain	Property at E4/21 D, Block-4, Model Town-II, New Delhi 110009, admeasuring an area of 472 Sq yards Boundaries: North: Plot No E-4/21B South: Plot No E-4/21 East: Plot No E-4/22 A & 23C West: Road
2	Mr Mohinder Jain	Commercial space at P-3-254, 1st floor, Pool Bangash, New Rohtak road, Central Plaza, Delhi admeasuring 85.24 sq.mts/906.02 SFT
3	M/s Siddhartha Holdings	5th floor, Vikas Surya Shopping Mall, Plot No.18, District Centre, Mangalam Place, Sector 3, Rohini, Delhi-110085 Extent: 4217.75 SFT
4	M/s Tantra Solutions	Commercial Space No SH-1, Second Floor, Vardhaman Grand Plaza, Plot-07, Sector-3, Distt. Centre, Mangalam Place, Outer Ring road, Rohini, Delhi-110085 Super area: 2961 SFT Covered area: 1762 SFT
5	M/s Simla Holdings	Property bearing No. 2517/X, Second Floor, Plot No.8, Block No.3, Khasra No 856/195-196, Asaf Ali Road, New Delhi Extent: 2070 SFT

Therefore, you are hereby called upon in terms of Section 13(2) of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, to pay a sum of Rs. 21,07,02,534.84 (Rupees Twenty-One Crores Seven Lakhs Two Thousand Five Hundred Thirty-Four and Eighty-Four Paise Only) together with further interest and charges at the contractual rate as per the terms and conditions of loan documents executed by you and discharge your liabilities in full within 60 days from the date of receipt of this notice, failing which, we shall be constrained to enforce the aforesaid securities by exercising any or all the rights given under the said Act.

As per Section 13(13) of the Act, on receipt of this notice you are restrained/prevented from disposing of or dealing with the above securities without the consent of the Bank.

Your attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the SARFAESI in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Note: Earlier demand notice u/s 13(2) of SARFAESIA, 2002 dated 24.06.2020 issued in the subject account hereby stands withdrawn with immediate effect.

Place : Delhi Authorised Officer
Date : 04.05.2024 For Union Bank of India

PUBLIC NOTICE
NATIONAL CONSUMER DISPUTES REDRESSAL COMMISSION

(Constituted under Consumer Protection Act, 2019)

Upbhokta Nyay Bhawan, 'F' - Block, GPO Complex, INA, New Delhi - 110 023, Telephone No.011-24608715 , 24608741, Websiie: http://ncdrc.nic.in

Execution Application No. 961 of 2023 in Consumer Complaint No. 97 of 2017

Subhash Sharma .....Complainant

-Versus-

Aarcity Builders Pvt. Ltd. ...Opposite Party

To

Aarcity Builders Pvt. Ltd.,

Having its Office at 301, Krishna Apra. Business Square. Netaji Subhash Place. Pitampura. New Delhi-110034

NOTICE

(Service By way of Publication of Notice)

Whereas, a Execution Application No. 961 of 2023 in Consumer Complaint 97 of 2017 has been filed by the Complainant namely Sh. Subhash Sharma Sto Sh. Laxmi Narayan Sharma And Sh. Nikhil Kaushik S/o Sh. Subhash Sharma, Residing at H No. 4698. Sector-23-A, Near Manipal Hospital, Gurugram, Haryana. Through his counsel Mr. Vikas Bhardwaj, Advocate, Office at: 141-B, District Courts, Gurugram, Haryana. Mob. 9213257251, before the Hon'ble National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, New Delhi.

2. The Opposite Party has not complied with the final Order dated 08.06.2023 of the Hon'ble National Commission leading to the filing of the Execution Application by the Decree Holder

3. The above mentioned Opposite Party/Judgment Debtor has been arraigned as Judgment Debtor in the Execution Application in Consumer Complaint, and, it has been brought to the notice of the Hon'ble National Commission by the Complainant/Decree Holder that the above mentioned Opposite Party/Judgment Debtor has remained "unserved" of the Execution Application.

4. And whereas, the Hon'ble National Commission vide its order dated 30.04.2024 has, inter alia, posted the case for further hearing on 12.06.2024 and has directed for substituted service of the hearing notice on the said Opposite Party/Judgment Debtor by way of publication be carried out in two newspaper one in English and other in vernacular language, having circulation in the locality of the Opposite Party/Judgment Debtor.

5. Accordingly, take Notice that the above captioned Opposite Party/Judgment Debtor is hereby directed to attend the hearing in the above Execution Application in Consumer Complaint listed on 12.06.2024 at 10:30 AM, either in-person or through an authorized representative / counsel, failing which, the case will be heard and determined ex-parte by the Hon'ble National Commission.

Dated New Delhi, on this 14th May, 2024

Sd/-

Assistant Registrar

पंजाब नैशनल बैंक punjab national bank

...भरोसे का प्रतीक ! ...the name you can BANK upon !

SASTRA DIVISION, 3rd Floor, East Wing,
Plot No. 4, Sec. 10, Dwarka, New Delhi - 110075
E-mail: horecovery@pnb.co.in/ hosastrawilful@pnb.co.in

SHOW CAUSE NOTICE

To Date: 22.04.2024

M/s Purulia Metal Casting Pvt. Ltd. (Borrower), Bongabari, P.O. V. Nagar, Dist. Purulia Barakar Road, Purulia, West Bengal - 723147 also at 31, Ganesh Chandra Avenue, 4D/1, 4th Floor, Kolkata - 700 013

Bhabani Prasad Mukherjee (Managing Director/ Guarantor), S/o Ajit Kumar Mukherjee, Huchuk Para, Krishna Kutir, Purulia, West Bengal - 723101

Subodh Kumar Singh (Director), 31, Ganesh Chandra Avenue, 4D/1, 4th Floor, Kolkata - 700 013

Sh. Sushil Choudhary (Director), C/o Chander Narayan Singh, X022, DLF Capital Green, Near Shivaji Marg, New Moti Nagar, Zakhira, West Delhi - 110 015

Anirban Mukherjee (Guarantor), S/o Shri Bhabani Prasad Mukherjee, Huchuk Para, Krishna Kutir, Purulia, West Bengal - 723101

Anindita Mukherjee (Guarantor), W/o Shri Bhabani Prasad Mukherjee, Huchuk Para, Krishna Kutir, Purulia, West Bengal - 723101

Dear Sir(s)/ Madam(s),

Reg.: Show Cause for Identification of default in the Loan Account of M/s Purulia Metal Casting Pvt. Ltd. with the Bank, as "Wilful"

Please refer to notice dated 22.05.2023 and 01.09.2023 issued by the bank vide which the event(s) of wilful default perceived in the captioned loan account has been pointed out and you thereby called upon to rectify the default/s within 10 days of receipt of the said notice. But, you failed/ neglected to take any action thereto for removing the default. However, bank has already sent reply vide letter dated 16.09.2023 to your representation dated 09.09.2023 against Notice dated 22.05.2023/ 01.09.2023.

The facts of the matter were placed before the Committee for Identification of wilful Defaulters ('Identification Committee') constituted in consonance with the RBI guidelines. The Committee, in its meeting held on 21.03.2024, after going through facts of the matter & evidence on record, has concluded that events of default/s has occurred in the account which are wilful and substantial to classify you as 'Wilful Defaulter', inter alia for the following reasons:

Capacity to Pay

The company has the capacity to honour the said obligation as PMC has entered into a conversion agreement with a 3rd party M/s Anantech Ventures Pvt. Ltd. on 18.02.2023 and addendum on 15.05.2023 under which the 3rd party shall produce goods and pay monthly amount of Rs. 0.35 crore plus taxes to PMC. However, PMC is not paying any amount to the bank.

Further, following are the particulars of the company/ directors:

(in Crore)

Sl. No.	Name	Net Worth	Net Worth Report/ Certificate dated
1.	Shri Bhabani Prasad Mukherjee	2.84	02.06.2022
2.	Shri Rabin Das	0.10	02.06.2022
3.	Shri Goutam Kumar Sen	9.02	09.06.2021
4.	Smt. Anindita Mukherjee	0.73	02.06.2021
5.	Shri Anirban Mukherjee	0.69	02.06.2021

Diversion of Funds

PMC is not routing transactions from Cash Credit/ Loan accounts of our bank and thereby indulging in Diversion of Funds.

Siphoning of Funds

No current assets of the company were found, inspite of the unit being in running condition.

As per post sanction inspection report dated 27.07.2023, the stock of raw material like iron pallets were seen as well as work in progress like hot billets and the finished goods like TMT rods were also found to be in abundance. However, when documents were asked to be produced, the manager present informed them that the unit is running under Conversion Agreement. As such there is no stock of raw materials or finished goods stand under the ownership of the company, Purulia Metal Casting Pvt. Ltd.

Unauthorised Disposal/ Removal of Charged Assets

PMC has entered into a conversion agreement with a 3rd party M/s Anantech Ventures Pvt. Ltd. on 18.02.2023 under which the 3rd party shall produce goods by using land, building, plant and machinery of the company. The company did not take approval from bank for letting out the assets to 3rd party which were mortgaged to bank.

In case you feel aggrieved by the aforesaid conclusion of the Identification Committee, you may make a submission/ representation, if you so desire, to the Identification Committee for consideration and show cause as to why you should not be classified as "Wilful Defaulter". Your submission/ representation must reach us within 15 days of the receipt hereof and be sent either to Dy. General Manager, SASTRA Division, 3rd Floor, East Wing, Punjab National Bank, Head Office, Sector 10, Dwarka, New Delhi - 110075 or through the Zonal SASTRA Durgapur.

If we do not receive any submission/ representation of yours, it would be deemed that you have nothing to say in your defence against the conclusion of the Identification Committee. Please take note that pursuant to submission/ non submission of your show cause, the Identification Committee shall proceed to pass an order with regard to declaration of the Wilful Defaulter as per the RBI guidelines.

The undersigned is the member of the Identification Committee constituted in consonance with the RBI directives and the Identification Committee has authorised the undersigned to send this show cause notice under his signature.

Note: SHOW CAUSE NOTICES sent to abovementioned addressee by post dated 30.04.2024 were unattended /returned .

sd/-

(E. J. Jerome John)
Member of the Identification Committee

ICICI Bank

Branch Office: ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh. Delhi-110005

PUBLIC NOTICE - TENDER CUM E-AUCTION FOR SALE OF SECURED ASSET

[See proviso to rule 8(6)]
Notice for sale of immovable assets

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

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Guarantor(s) that the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the **physical possession** of which has been taken by the Authorised Officer of ICICI Bank Limited will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is" basis as per the brief particulars given hereunder;

Sr. No.	Name of Borrower(s)/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors/ Loan Account No.	Details of the Secured asset(s) with known encumbrances, if any	Amount Outstanding	Reserve Price / Earnest Money Deposit	Date and Time of Property Inspection	Date & Time of E-Auction
(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)
1.	Technocrats Tooling Private Limited (Borrower), Umesh Kumar Singh (Co-Borrower/Guarantor), Praveen Rao (Co-Borrower) Sps Technology/ Reena Singh/ Vinod Kumar Dahiya/ Vijay Sharma (Guarantor), Reena Singh (Mortgagor) Lan No. 002105023126, 002155000039 and 002155000045	Flat No. NGH-051 Along With Parking Space No. POH-025, 5th Floor, Block-H, New Town Heights, Sector-90 At Revenue Estate Of Village Hayatpur, Tehsil And Distt-Gurgaon Area- 1936 Sq Ft	Rs. 77,38,289/- as on May 02, 2024	Rs. 1,29,64, 000/- / Rs. 12,96, 400/-	June 01, 2024 From 12:00 Noon 02:00 PM	June 27, 2024 From 11:00 AM 12:00 Noon

The online auction will take place on the website of e-auction agency **C1 india pvt ltd (URL Link- https:/www.bankeauctions.com)** The Mortgagors/ noticee are given a last chance to pay the total dues with further interest till **June 26, 2024** before **05:00 P.M** failing which, this/these secured asset/s will be sold as per schedule.

The Prospective Bidder(s) must submit the Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) Demand Draft (DD) (Refer Column E) at **ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh. Delhi- 110005** on or before **June 26, 2024** before **05:00 P.M** and thereafter they need to submit their offer through the above mentioned website only on or before **June 26, 2024** before **05:00 P.M** along with scan image of Bank acknowledged DD towards proof of payment of EMD. Kindly note, in case prospective bidder(s) are unable to submit their offer through the website then signed copy of tender documents may be submitted at **ICICI Bank Limited, 3rd Floor Shal Tower, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh. Delhi-110005** on or before **June 26, 2024** before **05:00 P.M.** Earnest Money Deposit DD/PO should be from a Nationalised/Scheduled Bank in favour of **"ICICI Bank Limited"** payable at **Delhi.**

For any further clarifications with regards to inspection, terms and conditions of the e-auction or submission of tenders, kindly contact **ICICI Bank Limited** On **8928935040/ 8584874809.**

Please note that Marketing agencies **1. M/s NexXen Solutions Private Limited 2. Augeo Asset Management Pvt Ltd 3. Hecta Proptech Pvt. Ltd.** have also been engaged for facilitating the sale of this property.

The Authorised Officer reserves the right to reject any or all the bids without furnishing any further reasons.

For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please visit **www.icicibank.com/n4p4s**

Date: May 16, 2024 **Authorised Officer**
Place: Delhi/ NCR **ICICI Bank Limited**

NEW DELHI | THURSDAY | MAY 16, 2024

the pioneer

pinion 06

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Eating gold

Already costly, food items to be dearer on the back of heatwave, poll expenditures

With wholesale inflation hitting a 13-month high of 1.26 per cent in April and the mercury poised to peak in the next two months, stubbornly rising food prices are worrying many a family across the nation. This rise was driven as both food and fuel became dearer. Interestingly, India's retail inflation, measured by the consumer price index (CPI), fell to an 11-month low of 4.83 per cent year-on-year in April 2024, compared to 4.85 the previous month. The Reserve Bank of India primarily considers retail inflation when formulating monetary policy. However, for the average person, the rise in WPI is concerning as it is primarily influenced by food items, both processed and unprocessed, as well as manufactured goods. India is experiencing an ongoing heatwave, which is expected to affect vegetable prices. WPI inflation is forecast to increase to 2-3 per cent in May 2024; it is expected to spiral up and reach its peak in June 2024. WPI food inflation, which includes primary food articles and manufactured food items, increased for the third consecutive month to an eight-month high of 5.5 per cent in April (compared to 0.4 per cent in April 2023), driven by both manufactured food products (reaching a 15-month high of 1.2 per cent) and primary food articles (reaching a four-month high of 7.7 per cent).

The increase in WPI inflation in April was attributed mainly to fuel and food items. However, there is a silver lining as the outlook for food inflation has improved due to expectations of a normal monsoon, which is anticipated to boost agricultural production. Additionally, commodity prices have rebounded on hopes of increased demand from China. Since it is an election year, there is an automatic push to prices based on market speculation and uncertainty over continuation of governance policies, not to mention that the cost of election is recovered from the common man via higher prices. The funding of political parties by corporates and traders often reflects in the spiralling prices, pre- and post-elections. Logistic bottlenecks, labour shortages and increased transportation costs, thanks to oil prices, all contribute to the overall inflationary pressures, amplifying the challenges faced by food producers and consumers alike. Amid the backdrop of escalating food prices, election discussions revolve around economic policies and their impact. High prices and employment concerns loom large as hot topics, reflecting the broader sentiment of economic anxiety among voters. Generally, the ruling party bears the brunt of inflation as people hold it responsible for not keeping the prices in check. Effectively managing inflation entails employing a comprehensive strategy that harmonises short-term interventions with enduring structural changes. Swift actions, like directed subsidies and mechanisms for stabilising prices, can provide temporary respite to consumers contending with rising food expenses. Until that happens, we can happily fulfil our tax obligations by paying through our nose. Indeed, inflation is taxation without legislation!

PICTALK

BSF personnel with a youth cycle rally to raise awareness for water, education and clean environment, in Dinajpur PTI

BJP retains control, INDIA gains ground

SIDHARTH **MISHRA**

The Opposition's revival from near-disarray presents a formidable challenge but may fall short of the impact needed to dislodge the BJP-led NDA

ANI

With phase four of the polling over, we are more than halfway through the ongoing Lok Sabha polls. There is no denying that the opposition INDIA bloc, led by the Congress, has been able to create a perspective that it isn't a one-sided battle and the fight was on all the seats.

The usual gimmicks of stock market predictions and illegal 'satta' gambling forecasts have started to emerge on social media and private WhatsApp groups. However the underlying message is that come what may, the BJP shall be able to form the Government. This probably emerges from the faith the BJP supporters have in the abilities of Prime Minister Narendra Modi being a leader with gargantuan mass appeal.

However, there is also no denying the fact that the opposition was in tatters when the poll campaign started but by the passing of time have been able to create an image of a close fight, which in the end could prove to be just a mirage. Nevertheless, the Congress campaign in the 2024 polls, whatever the results, would remain an area of discussion among the political scientists in the times to come.

Congress's poll preparation could be said to have begun from the conclave it had at Udaipur in 2022. The declarations at the 'Udaipur Shivir' talked talked of building a vibrant organisation. This came in the backdrop of desertions plaguing the party especially from their most prominent leader Rahul Gandhi's coterie. In 2022, when the Congress met in Rajasthan, one right decision it took was to hold the polls for the post of the president of the All India Congress Committee. It did activate the party and in Mallik arjun Kharge, the party has found a good campaigner, who not only campaigns hard but makes a lot of sense with what he says.

Strategically, unlike the Vidhan Sabha polls held some months back in the four States, the leadership has consolidated on the alliance despite the initial hiccup caused by its very convener, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar walking out of the formation. Though some point out that Kharge and not Nitish was foisted as the chair of the alliance, as given his track record, Nitish's opposition to the BJP was always suspect.

The second move by Congress has been to channel the strength of the alliance partners to keep itself afloat. To this end, the Congress is contesting just 328 seats this time, much lower than what it had contested in the 2019 polls. Last time it had contested 421 seats. The party would have contested 330 seats this time but for the rejection of the papers of its candidate in Surat and its candidate withdrawing in Indore.

This means that the Congress in INDIA has created an alliance base that is much wider than that of the United Peoples Alliance (UPA). This also means that the party has shrunk from the position of a dominant partner to a senior partner with some other members of the bloc like the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab not even entertaining an alliance.

> THE CONGRESS CAMPAIGN IN THE 2024 POLLS, WHATEVER THE RESULTS, WOULD REMAIN AN AREA OF DISCUSSION AMONG POLITICAL SCIENTISTS IN THE TIMES TO COME

Those in charge of the alliance forging for the party claim that the grouping this time is much more pragmatic than in 2019. The case in point is Uttar Pradesh. The party went into the 2019 polls all by itself. With no major allies and up against the BJP and the SP-BSP alliance, Congress contested 67 of the State's 80 seats. It could win only one: Sonia Gandhi in Rae Bareli.

This time in alliance with the Samajwadi Party it's contesting just 17 seats, down by 50 seats. People close to poll planning, point out that it has been done to conserve the party resources for more realistic contests. Similarly West Bengal, after contesting 40 seats in 2019 is contesting just 14 seats this time giving the remaining seats to the alliance partner - the Left parties. Similar arrangements have been made in other States. Now how would that affect the final results?

The BJP in 2024 wants to equal the performance of the Congress in 1984 when it got more than 400 seats. What's not to be forgotten is that those 400 seats came as a harvest of the sympathy wave in the favour of the party following the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

What makes BJP in 2024 different from Congress in 1984 is that it has delivered on its ideological agenda thus the cadre commitment would be there. Based on that the saffron party has expanded its poll machinery. This could work both ways, if there is an undercurrent, it would bring bonus points and if there is voter indifference, the performance should not fall below, as they say in commerce, the reserve price.

(The writer is the author and president, the Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice; views expressed are personal)

Embracing the joys and wisdom of age

SANJAY **CHANDRA**

Amidst serene nature, I pondered time's fleeting nature and shifting age perspectives, inspired by three chance encounters

I spent a memorable week in the mountains last year. Crisp and importantly clean mountain air, long walks along jungle trails, beautiful sunrises and sunsets and views of snow-capped peaks in the distance, were only a few of the bonuses that the place offered.

It was during this trip that three different people, in their way, tried to put us at ease, by referring to the facilities that they offered for the comfort of senior citizens. I would have bristled indignantly at a reference to my advancing age until only a couple of years back. Now I was not offended.

I remember an incident about 25 years back. One evening, a younger engineer, recruited through campus placement and working with me, remarked, "Sir, I am amazed by your energy. You work so hard and such long hours even at this age."

At 40, I could not take the Statement as a compliment that he had intended it to be and quipped rather caustically, "What do you mean by this age? I am still young." I would love to see his face today if someone were to remark to him about his age.

I completed 60 five years back. That was the time I realised the benefits that I was entitled to as I booked my air or train ticket at a discount. I could conveniently travel in the metro trains sitting comfortably on the seats meant for seniors, till someone older than me, or at least someone who looked older than me, came and stood near me. Old habits die hard. I would offer my seat to the more needy or gallantly offer the seat to a much younger woman since that is what I was taught.

But chivalry still had limits. I was not prepared to be called an old man or even an uncle by the younger people. Till we faced the onslaught of something terrible four years back - covid. It invaded our lives like nothing we had witnessed in our lifetime.

I too had my share of the dread that many might have undergone during their last living moments. We understood the fragility of life. Many, much younger, did not make it through the nights. I did and realised the privilege of being called old. Many will never get the opportunity.

I live and it accords me the benefit of rambling like an old fool to wide-eyed younger people who in some distant future would be fortunate enough to recount their pearls of wisdom. I hope that some of these gems may have been dispensed by me. I am proud of being called old as I remember the words of Frank Lloyd Wright, "The longer I live, the more beautiful life becomes."

But let us not forget that getting old also comes with a lot of responsibility towards others. I hope that I can say with hands on my heart when I meet the supreme being, "I lived a life that made a difference to the people around me!"

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE ESSENCE OF RAM RAJYA

Madam — Apropos the news article "Ram Rajya will begin in the country now, doesn't mean theocratic State: Rajnath Singh," published on 14 May, this is my response. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's remarks on the inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and the concept of Ram Rajya reflect a perspective blending faith with civic duty. Singh emphasises that Ram Rajya isn't about establishing a theocratic State but fostering a sense of responsibility among citizens. His call for a return to the essence of politics, where words align with actions, resonates with the public disillusionment with political rhetoric.

Singh's stance on the triple talaq issue underscores a commitment to gender equality transcending religious boundaries. His assertion reflects a broader narrative of social justice and protection of vulnerable individuals, regardless of religious affiliation. As he seeks reelection, Singh's emphasis on fulfilling electoral promises underscores accountability in governance. His track record in Lucknow adds weight to his assertion, aligning action with words. Overall, Singh's discourse encapsulates a nuanced understanding of governance, intertwining religious symbolism with practical governance and societal welfare.

Vihaan Sharma | *Kolkata*

KEJRIWAL'S GUARANTEE

Madam — It refers to the article "Kejriwal's bail: Unveiling political prophasis post-release," published on 13 May. Most of the AAP's guarantees require more funds since most are a burden to the State exchequer. Free electricity, the MSP guarantee, the scrapping of the magnifier and the creation of two crore jobs need heavy payout from the State exchequer. Finding funds without taxing the people is not possible in today's situation. The six guarantees of the Congress remain to be implemented in Karnataka and Telangana. Guarantees have become political stunts during elections.

Furthermore, during the last 2019 general election, Kejriwal said that that would be the last election if Modi is returned to power. It was Indira Gandhi who included the words socialism and secularism in the preamble of the Constitution. So the charge Modi will not hold elections or tamper with the constitution is without substance and a repeat of what was said in 2019. Furthermore, many politicians, actors and so-called social workers said in 2014 and 2019 that if Modi wins the elections they will move out of the country. Still, they are all here enjoying the fruits of freedom. On corruption, first, let Kejariwal come clean on the Delhi liquor gate scam.

N R Ramachandran | *Chennai*

PARAG'S INSPIRING JOURNEY

Madam — Apropos the news article "Home Turf: Rajasthan Aim to clinch a playoff berth in Parag's 'Royal' Homecoming," published on 14 May, this is my response. Riyan Parag's journey from the northeastern corner of India to becoming a cricketing sensation embodies hope and perseverance. His anticipated return to Guwahati, backed by a robust performance, not only fuels the Rajasthan Royals' playoff dreams but also marks a milestone for cricket in the region. Parag's stellar season, coupled with the strategic investment made by the Royals, highlights the potential lying dormant in lesser-explored cricketing territories.

The upcoming matches against Punjab Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders hold more than just playoff implications; they symbolise the rise of a new cricketing stronghold. While Parag's emergence steals the spotlight, it's crucial to acknowledge the collective effort of the team. Sanju Samson's leadership and consistent batting form, alongside the solid bowling unit, underscore the Royals' strength as a cohesive unit. As cricket enthusiasts, witnessing Parag's ascent not only inspires but also reshapes the narrative of cricketing talent in India, extending its reach beyond conventional boundaries.

Ishita Kapoor | *Ahmedabad*

Triangular contest in Ladakh

Apropos the news article "Ladakh stands alone in Lok Sabha roll call," published on 13 May, this is my response. The political landscape in Ladakh has dramatically shifted, morphing a once two-way battle between the BJP and Congress into a three-way challenge. The emergence of local alliances and the entry of an Independent candidate complicates the electoral dynamics, adding layers to an already complex scenario. The contest reflects the region's aspirations and frustrations, particularly regarding Statehood and constitutional status. The BJP's incumbency faces scrutiny, with discontent palpable over unmet demands. Meanwhile, Congress positions itself as a champion of local interests, leveraging historic ties and promising to address grievances.

The involvement of grassroots movements and renowned figures underscores the grassroots activism shaping Ladakh's political narrative. The electorate's choice will influence not just parliamentary representation but also the trajectory of regional autonomy and development. As the campaigns intensify, candidates grapple with reconciling national agendas with local exigencies, emphasising dialogue and resolution of longstanding issues. Ultimately, Ladakh stands at a crossroads, poised to redefine its political identity through this pivotal electoral battle.

Dhruv Malhotra | *Mumbai*

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FIRST COLUMN

HARNESSING THE POWER OF RESOLUTION

Achievers propel success with determination and humility

RAVI **VALLURI**

Successful completion of a task releases endorphins in the body which act as a tonic and an analgesic. "Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other," said Abraham Lincoln. Resolution is the positive intent, resolve or aspiration to give a hundred per cent to achieve the targeted goal. Before treading the path, one should remain grateful and blessed for the abundance provided by nature. Half the job gets done by feeling the blessings.

Effort, skill and courage are prerequisites for brewing this heady cocktail. Achievers tap the potential from the depths of their minds and hearts and conquer the fear of failure in the process.

The mind is that element of a person that enables him to be aware of the world and its myriad experiences to think positively and to feel the faculty of consciousness simultaneously purging negative thoughts in the bargain. One must dream big, even if ideas may appear outlandish to become high-end achievers and ensure to never kill an idea, however witless it may appear on the surface. That is the Audacity of Hope. Be it a Mandela, a Modi, or an Obama.

"The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires," writes William Arthur Ward. Successful individuals foster friendships and build trust. There is no deficit in trust. They respect colleagues and only symphony is orchestrated in the environment. There is no room for any cacophony.

Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar always differentiates between mere hearing and the art of listening. Listening is a trait of a humble person; while hearing is the character of a brusque and an inaccessible person. An achiever is available to all his followers 24*7, 365 days a year. Achievers are adaptable to new ideas, thought processes, abstractions and intentions. Their minds are not closeted by achievements or failures of the past and continuously live in the present moment. This is the trademark of their personality.

Those who are high achievers are not driven by amassing wealth. Such trailblasers and trendsetters are continuous learners. Leadership implies 3Ls for them. These are learned, learn some more and learn even more. Top-grade sportsmen, artists and scientists are compulsive learners and are humble about their achievements. There is only one path from the top and that is downhill. High-end achievers never believe that they have reached the summit or the pinnacle or that they are too powerful.

Such a conjecture smacks of capriciousness and arrogance and that would be their nemesis. Every successful career is a lesson in humility. Rewards and recognition are meant to act as motivators, not create a glass ceiling of conceit.

Achievers are surrounded by positive-oriented people and positive thoughts, as negative emotions are a big drain on resources. It is important to ascertain positive feedback and build on the synergy of the group. Understanding group dynamics is an important physical and psychological tool. They glean synergies of any joint venture. Achievers always work with teams and individuals who share their values, they possess long-term vision inherently and believe in themselves and the set goals. They direct the wind and the sails. Such people need to build on their strengths and those of the organisation. It is essential and paramount to prioritise targets, the mission and vision Statements, identify a self-do list and focus on projects that can be delegated.

"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way," says John C Maxwell.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Electric tractors for electrifying agriculture

AS **MITTAL**

These technological marvels promise not only to rejig farming practices but also to mitigate the industry's environmental footprint

Climate change is an issue of utmost importance that the world is currently facing and it is a challenge that is complex and multifaceted. Particularly the agriculture sector is vulnerable, as greenhouse gas emissions are being released into the atmosphere, causing extreme weather conditions such as heat waves and floods. This is directly impacting crop productivity and farmers' livelihoods, which is a significant threat to global food security.

To counter this challenge, we must adopt environmentally friendly cultivation and processing methods. Electric tractors are one of the globally emerging excellent alternatives for future farming. It can reduce farming costs and zero emissions effectively addressing the issue of a sustainable environment and reducing our dependence on imports of crude oil.

As the world's largest tractor manufacturer, India sells over 1 million tractors annually. However, the adoption of electric tractors has been slower than other electric vehicles (EVs) like two-wheelers, three-wheelers, passenger cars and electric buses. It's time to take action and promote electric tractors. This will foster an environment for mass adoption and position India as a global exporter of electric tractors. To achieve this, we must integrate electric tractors into incentivised EV policies. It's unacceptable that no incentives are being offered for electrifying tractors.

Electric Tractors Could be Fetched in FAME-3 Scheme: The FAME-2 scheme (April 2019-March 2024) was a central Government subsidy that aims to promote the Fast Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles (FAME). The scheme ended on 31st March, with a total outlay of Rs 10,000 crore to support the production of 7,000 electric buses, half a million electric three-wheelers, 55,000 electric passenger cars and one million electric two-wheelers. However, the scheme excludes electric tractors, which means that manufacturers cannot significantly reduce the cost of producing electric tractors.

The Ministry of Heavy Industries has recently proposed the FAME-3 scheme, which has an outlay of Rs 12,600. The scheme is expected to be implemented after the Lok Sabha elections. Farmers are hoping that the scheme will include electric tractors, which will reduce their costs significantly. With a subsidy of up to Rs 2.4 lakh (capped at 40 per cent of the tractor's base price), the burden of high purchasing costs on farmers will be greatly reduced.

To promote the use of electric vehicles, several States such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh offer concessions or a waiver on the road tax between 50 per cent and 100 per cent. Other States, including Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, offer direct cash incentives on top of the road tax waiver through a similar approach to the central FAME scheme. The incentives range from Rs 2,500 to Rs 10,000 and the subsidy cap ranges from Rs 60,000 to Rs 2.5 lakh, depending on the battery capacity. Punjab and Haryana offer incentives (up to 40 per cent of the ex-showroom price) for e-tractors in their EV policies. Other key agricultural States should consider following this approach to promote sustainable agricultural practices.

Rationalisation of Taxes: Tax rationalisation has proven to be an effective way of promoting electric vehicles through discounted taxes and insurance fees. The existing fiscal incentives provided for zero-emission motor vehicles should be extended to zero-emission tractors as well. While electric vehicles are charged a reduced GST of 5 per cent, e-tractors are still taxed at the same rate as diesel tractors, which is 12 per cent. Additionally, electric vehicles receive a 15 per cent discount on third-party insurance premiums, whereas this provision is not available for e-tractors. The International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) has analysed that reducing the GST to 5 per cent or even nil and providing discounted insurance would reduce the cost gap between electric and diesel tractors by almost 40 per cent.

> THE ADOPTION OF ELECTRIC TRACTORS PRESENTS A STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIA TO ENHANCE ITS ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY, PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN ACHIEVING NET-ZERO EMISSIONS, STRENGTHEN THE RURAL ECONOMY AND SHAPE A SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT FARM FUTURE

Infrastructure Development: Investing in charging infrastructure for electric tractors, especially in rural areas, is crucial for the rural economy to meet India's development goals by 2047. Using corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds for this purpose and establishing a charging station network with incentives will ensure widespread accessibility and convenience for farmers.

To increase demand for electric tractors, it's important to introduce them into custom hiring centres for agricultural machinery. This will help farmers experience the benefits of electric tractors and mitigate challenges related to charging and maintenance.

R&D Investments &Training: Allocating funds for research and development in electric tractor technology can lead to innovation, efficiency improvement and cost reduction. Encouraging collaboration between Government agencies, agricultural research institutions such as the Indian Council for Agricultural Research and the manufacturers would speed up technological advancements in the sector. Developing and certifying testing and quality assurance standards for electric tractors can attract manufacturers to this sector, addressing supply-side constraints. Institutes like the Central Farm Machinery Training & Testing Institute can set manufacturing, operational and performance standards for various electric tractors based on power output, design and usage purposes. Training and skill development initiatives for farmers, technicians and service providers on electric tractor operation, maintenance and repair are crucial. Empowering stakeholders with the necessary knowledge and skills will facilitate the transition to electric tractors and ensure their effective use in agricultural operations.

Zero Emissions in Electric Tractor: A study by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, reveals that the agriculture sector in India is responsible for almost 14 per cent of the country's greenhouse gas emissions, with diesel-powered machinery playing a major role. However, electric tractors could be a solution to these challenges.

Currently, most tractors used in India are powered by diesel, which accounts for approximately 7.4 per cent of the country's annual diesel consumption, equivalent to the amount consumed by buses. While incentives have been introduced to encourage the electrification of buses, no such incentives have been introduced for tractors.

The adoption of electric tractors presents some challenges, such as the initial cost, infrastructure development and promoting their use among farmers. Diesel-powered machinery, notably tractors, accounts for approximately 12-15 per cent of the total cost of agricultural production, which varies by crop type and geographical region. However, electric tractors have many advantages, including zero-emission and a reduction in fuel and maintenance costs due to having fewer moving parts.

According to a study by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), electric tractors could reduce maintenance costs by up to 40 per cent over their lifetime, providing a more reliable, environment friendly and cost-effective option for farmers. The Way Forward: India's tractor manufacturers have developed advanced technology and moved beyond incentives to introduce electric tractors. However, the primary challenge at present is the cost. On-road zero-emission electric tractors cost 40 to 50 per cent more than diesel tractors. This high cost could deter farmers, even though electric tractors are more cost-effective when used in the field. Urgent support from the Government is needed in the early stages of the market to bridge the cost gap between e-tractors and diesel-driven tractors.

Central and State-level incentives would send a positive signal to the industry to invest more in zero-emission tractors. Additionally, this aligns with India's goal of improving air quality and energy security and has the potential to boost India's tractor exports. Countries such as the US, Europe, Japan and Canada have implemented strict regulations for tractor emissions and have expressed interest in decarbonising farm machinery.

The global electric tractor market is projected to grow from USD 0.7 billion in 2024 to USD 3.4 billion by 2030, presenting a strategic opportunity for India to leverage its manufacturing capabilities. It can enhance its economic competitiveness, play a pivotal role in achieving net-zero emissions, strengthen the rural economy and shape a sustainable and resilient farm future.

The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika ITL Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council and President of Tractor and Mechanisation Association(TMA). Views expressed are personal.

AI is revolutionising sustainable, tech-driven farming

By harnessing data-driven insights, AI empowers farmers to optimise resource allocation, mitigate environmental degradation and enhance crop yields

PRERNA **NEGI**

Artificial intelligence (AI) in agriculture is expected to increase dramatically food waste, climate change and other issues lead approximately one billion people to remain hungry and malnourished even though the globe produces enough food to feed everyone. With 9.7 billion people expected to inhabit the planet by 2050, the agriculture sector is under increasing pressure to provide food with less resource use and less environmental effect. Thankfully, the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in agriculture has promise for revolutionising food systems and mitigating the world food issue. AI can assist farmers in making data-driven choices, optimising resource consumption and minimising environmental effects by analysing data from several sources. According to a World Economic Forum analysis, integrating AI into agriculture might result in a 60 per cent reduction in the use of pesticides and a 50 per cent reduction in water usage.

Market demand analysis is an essential component of contemporary agriculture. In addition to analysing meteorological data and satellite photos, AI can assist farmers in choosing the best crop to produce or sell and offer insightful advice on when to plant and what kind of crop to grow. It is possible to forecast market demand for certain crops while optimising profitability by examining data patterns. Farmers may reduce the likelihood of crop failures by using forecasting and predictive analytics. This will create software applications that analyse fruits and vegetables and offer information on their quality, freshness and size using artificial intelligence (AI) and computer vision methods. In addition to identifying flaws and illnesses in crops, these AI technologies allow farmers to take preventative action before the crops are impacted. Artificial Intelligence (AI) can assist in the production of crops that are more weather and disease-adapted by gathering data on plant growth. Scientists can use AI to find the best-performing plant kinds and cross-breed them to make even more superior hybrids. AI systems are capable of reliably estimating missing nutrients and performing chemical soil analysis.

One of their products, Nutrient Scanner, gathers information from soil samples and gives farmers precise estimations of the nutrients that are lacking and the general condition of the soil. This enables farmers to optimise crop growth and minimise environmental impact by modifying irrigation schedules and fertiliser applications. AI can monitor the State of plants to spot and predict diseases, identify and remove weeds and recommend effective treatment of pests.

It can also suggest the most effective treatment for pests, reducing the need for broad-spectrum insecticides that can harm beneficial insects and lead to pesticide resistance. Farmers find it difficult and time-consuming to estimate crop growth and maturity, but AI can complete the work accurately and swiftly. Farmers can accurately forecast when crops will achieve ideal maturity by monitoring and tracking crop changes with the use of AI-powered gear, such as sensors and image recognition tools. According to studies, the accuracy rate attained by employing AI to forecast crop maturity was greater than that of human observers. Farmers may benefit from large cost savings and better revenues as a result of this improved precision. Farmers can precisely track the amount of water and nutrients in the soil by integrating sensors and AI systems.

Deploying devices that detect several factors such as temperature, pH levels, nutrient content and soil moisture might be part of the sensor-based soil monitoring process. These sensors relay data back to AI systems, which process it, evaluate it and advise farmers on the best ways to handle their crops in light of the soil conditions they have discovered. AI-powered technologies can help farmers identify plant illnesses and insects faster than people can. For instance, an AI-powered system might identify an aphid infestation on a strawberry field, transmit the information back to the farmer's Smartphone and then recommend the best course of action.

Through a linked sprayer, the device could even automate the spraying of pesticides if necessary. AI technology can be used to automate insect or weed control. Robotic weeding is supposed to be extraordinarily accurate with the use of computer vision, saving 90 per cent of pesticide use. These solutions use data analytics to determine how much pesticide is required for each field based on information about crop type, soil condition and field history. In the upcoming years, artificial intelligence (AI) in agriculture is expected to increase dramatically since it can completely transform the industry by boosting efficiency, decreasing waste and raising crop yields. The market for AI in agriculture is likely to develop rapidly, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 35.6 per cent expected to see the market size rise from $2.35 billion in 2020 to $10.83 billion by 2025, according to research by Markets and Markets. This will lead to more informed decision-making and improved crop yields, essential for addressing the global food security challenge.

(The writer is research Scholar, Department of Agronomy, SGRR University, Dehradun; views are personal)

Biden admin sending $1 bn more in weapons, ammo to Israel

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration has told key lawmakers it would send more than USD 1 billion in additional arms and ammunition to Israel, three congressional aides have said. But it was not immediately known how soon the weapons would be delivered.

It's the first arms shipment to Israel to be revealed since the administration put another arms transfer, consisting of 3,500 bombs of up to 2,000 pounds each, on hold this month.

The Biden administration, citing concern for civilian casualties in Gaza, has said it paused that bomb transfer to keep Israel from using those particular munitions in its offensive in the crowded southern Gaza city of Rafah.

The package disclosed Tuesday includes about USD 700 million for tank ammunition, USD 500 million in tactical vehicles, and USD 60 million in mortar rounds, the congressional aides said. They spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an arms transfer that has not yet been made public. There was no immediate indication of when the arms would be sent.

Two congressional aides said the shipment is not part of the long-delayed foreign aid package that Congress passed and Biden signed last month. It wasn't known if the shipment was the latest tranche from an existing arms sale or something new.

The Biden administration has come under criticism from both sides of the political spectrum over its military support for Israel's now seven-month-old war against Hamas in Gaza — at a time when Biden is battling for reelection against former President Donald Trump.

Some of Biden's fellow Democrats have pushed him to limit transfers of offensive weapons to Israel to pressure the US ally to do more to protect Palestinian civilians. Protests on college campuses around the US have driven home the message this spring.

Republican lawmakers have seized on the administration's pause on the bomb transfers, saying any lessening of US support for Israel — its closest ally in the Middle East — weakens that country as it fights Hamas and other Iran-backed groups. In the House, they are planning to advance a bill this week to mandate the delivery of offensive weaponry for Israel.

Despite the one-time suspension of a bomb shipment, Biden and administration officials have made clear they will continue other weapons deliveries and overall military support to Israel, which is the largest recipient of US military aid. Biden will see to it that "Israel has all of the military means it needs to defend itself against all of its enemies, including Hamas," national security spokesman John Kirby told reporters Monday.

"For him, this is very straightforward: He's going to continue to provide Israel with all of the capabilities it needs, but he does not want certain categories of American weapons used in a particular type of operation in a particular place.

Slovakia's prime minister wounded in shooting

AP ■ BRATISLAVA

Slovakia's populist Prime Minister Robert Fico was wounded in a shooting Wednesday afternoon and taken to hospital.

Reports on TA3, a Slovakian TV station, said that Fico, 59, was hit in the stomach after four shots were fired outside the House of Culture in the town of Handlova, some 150 kilometers northeast of the capital, where the leader was meeting with supporters. A suspect has been detained, it said.

Police sealed off the scene, and Fico was taken to a hospital in Banska Bystrica.

The shooting in Slovakia comes three weeks ahead of crucial European Parliament elections, in which populist and hard-right parties in the 27-nation bloc appear poised to make gains. Deputy speaker of parliament Lubos Blaha confirmed the incident during a session of Slovakia's Parliament and adjourned it until further notice, the Slovak TASR news agency said.

Slovakia's major opposition parties, Progressive Slovakia and Freedom and Solidarity, canceled a planned protest against a controversial government plan to overhaul public broadcasting that they say would give the government full control of public radio and television.

"We absolutely and strongly condemn violence and today's shooting of Premier Robert Fico" said Progressive Slovakia leader Michal Simecka. "At the same time we call on all politicians to refrain from any expressions and steps which could contribute to further increasing the tension."

President Zuzana Caputova condemned "a brutal and ruthless" attack on the premier.

"I'm shocked," Caputova said. "I wish Robert Fico a lot of strength in this critical moment and a quick recovery from this attack."

Fico, a third-time premier, and his leftist Smer, or Direction, party, won Slovakia's Sept. 30 parliamentary elections, staging a political comeback after campaigning on a pro-Russian and anti-American message.

Critics worried Slovakia under Fico would abandon the country's pro-Western course and follow the direction of Hungary under populist Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Thousands have repeatedly rallied in the capital and across Slovakia to protest Fico's policies.

German court convicts Palestinian of train murder

Berlin (AP): A court in Germany convicted a man of murder and sentenced him to life in prison Wednesday for carrying out a fatal stabbing on a train last year.

The state court in Itzehoe convicted the 34-year-old Palestinian, who has been identified only as Ibrahim A. in line with German privacy rules, of murder and attempted murder, German news agency dpa reported. It found that he fatally stabbed two teenagers and wounded another four passengers seriously in the January 25, 2023 incident in the northern town of Brokstedt, before being overpowered by others on board the regional train travelling from Kiel to Hamburg.

The defendant grew up in the Gaza Strip and came to Germany in 2014.

Dutch anti-Islam party nears government formation

Brussels (AP): Anti-Islam firebrand Geert Wilders is on the verge of brokering a four-party coalition in the Netherlands six months after coming in first in national elections, opening the prospect that yet another European Union nation will veer toward the hard right weeks ahead of EU-wide elections.

Wilders has said he does not expect to become prime minister himself, because he remains too extreme for his coalition partners, but his Party for Freedom would be the driving force in the coalition.

With hard right and populist parties now part of or leading a half dozen governments in the 27-nation bloc, they appear positioned to make gains in the June 6-9 EU polls.

"I hope we will get there. I think we will get there. I cannot see it going wrong," Wilders told the broadcaster NOS early Wednesday after the four parties reached a deal on government financing, the last major stumbling bloc in the talks. It remains unclear who will become prime minister.

"That is still crucial. If you want a government to succeed, you need a prime minister that unites," said Pieter Omtzigt, leader of the centrist New Social Contract party. Outgoing prime minister Mark Rutte's center-right People's Party for Freedom and Democracy and the populist Farmer Citizen Movement are also in the coalition talks.

Wilders said Wednesday could become "a historic day" if his party is finally let into a government. It once supported a minority government a decade ago, but was not part of it. Wilders' Party for Freedom won 37 seats in the 150-seat lower house of the Dutch parliament, and the four parties combined hold a comfortable majority of 88 seats.

After two decades in the opposition, Wilders seemed to have a shot at leading a nation that long prided itself on its tolerant society, but he has stepped aside in the interests of pushing through most of his agenda.

From Finland to Croatia, hard-line right parties are part of European governing coalitions, and hard right or populist prime ministers are leading Hungary, Slovakia and Italy.

Palestinians across Middle East mark 'catastrophe' with eyes on Gaza war

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Palestinians across the Middle East on Wednesday are marking the anniversary of their mass expulsion from what is now Israel with protests and other events across the region at a time of mounting concern over the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza.

The Nakba, Arabic for "catastrophe," refers to the 700,000 Palestinians who fled or were driven out of what today is Israel before and during the war surrounding its creation in 1948. More than twice that number have been displaced within Gaza since the start of the latest war, which was triggered by Hamas' October 7 attack into Israel.

UN agencies say 550,000 people, nearly a quarter of Gaza's 2.3 million people, have been newly displaced in just the last week, as Israeli forces have pushed into the southern city of Rafah, along the border with Egypt, and reinvaded parts of northern Gaza. "We lived through the Nakba not just once, but several times," said Umm Shadi Sheikh Khalil, who was displaced from Gaza City and now lives in a tent in the central Gaza town of Deir al-Balah.

The refugees and their descendants number some 6 million and live in built-up refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the Israeli-occupied West Bank. In Gaza, they are the majority of the population, with most families having relocated from what is now central and southern Israel.

Israel rejects what the Palestinians say is their right of return, because if it was fully implemented, it would likely result in a Palestinian majority within Israel's borders.

The refugee camps in Gaza have seen some of the heaviest fighting of the war. In other camps across the region, the fighting has revived painful memories from earlier rounds of violence in a decades-old conflict with no end in sight.

At a centre for elderly residents of the Shatila refugee camp in Beirut, Amina Taher recalled the day her family's house in the village of Deir al-Qassi, in today's northern Israel, collapsed over their heads after being shelled by Israeli forces in 1948.

The house was next to a school that was being used as a base by Palestinian fighters, she said. Taher, then 3 years old, was pulled from the rubble unharmed, but her 1-year-old sister was killed. Now she has seen the same scenes play out in news coverage of Gaza. "When I would watch the news, I had a mental breakdown because then I remembered when the house fell on me," she said.

"What harm did these children do to get killed like this?" Daoud Nasser, also now living in Shatila, was 6 years old when his family fled from the village of Balad al-Sheikh, near Haifa. His father tried to return to their village in the early years after 1948, when the border was relatively porous, but found a Jewish family living in their house, he said. Nasser said he would attempt the same journey if the border were not so heavily guarded. "I would run. I'm ready to walk from here to there and sleep under the olive trees on my own land," he said.

The latest war began with Hamas' rampage across southern Israel, through some of the same areas where Palestinians fled from their villages 75 years earlier. Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people that day, mostly civilians, and took another 250 hostage.

Israel responded with one of the heaviest military onslaughts in recent history, obliterating entire neighbourhoods in Gaza and forcing some 80 per cent of the population to flee their homes. Gaza's Health Ministry says over 35,000 Palestinians have been killed, without distinguishing between civilians and combatants in its count. The UN says there is widespread hunger and that northern Gaza is in a "full-blown famine."

Israel says its goal is to dismantle Hamas and return the estimated 100 hostages, and the remains of more than 30 others, still held by the group after it released most of the rest during a cease-fire last year.

Houthi Rebels admit attacking US destroyer in Red sea

AP ■ DUBAI

Yemen's Houthi rebels on Wednesday claimed targeting a U.S. Navy destroyer and a commercial ship in the Red Sea. However, the attack on the warship apparently happened nearly two days earlier and saw the vessel intercept the missile targeting it.

The latest statement from the Houthis comes as their attacks on shipping, which have disrupted trade through a vital corridor leading onto the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Sea, have slowed in recent weeks. Though the rebels have not acknowledged the slowdown, the U.S. military has suggested its airstrikes and interceptions of Houthi fire have disrupted their assaults and chewed into their weapon stockpiles.

Recently, the Houthis have been claiming days-old attacks. Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree said the rebels targeted the USS Mason with missiles and launched an attack on a ship he identified as the Destiny. Multiple vessels have that name in shipping registries.

The Mason, an Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer, has been in the Red Sea and the wider region as part of a U.S.-led coalition trying to prevent Houthi attacks on shipping. On Monday night, the Mason "successfully engaged and destroyed one inbound anti-ship ballistic missile launched by (the) Iranian-backed Houthis from Yemen over the Red Sea," the U.S. military's Central Command said.

The US Navy's Mideast-based 5th Fleet did not immediately respond to a request for comment regarding the claimed attack on the Destiny.

The Houthis say their attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden are aimed at pressuring Israel to end its war against Hamas in Gaza, which has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians there, according to local health officials. The war began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 others hostage.

The Houthis have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, seized one vessel and sunk another since November, according to the U.S. Maritime Administration. Shipping through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden has declined because of the threat.

Protesters throng streets of Georgia's capital

AP ■ TBILISI

Huge throngs of protesters blocked streets in the capital of Georgia and milled angrily outside the parliament building after lawmakers on Tuesday approved a "foreign influence" bill that critics call a Russian-style threat to free speech and the country's aspirations to join the European Union.

Soon after the 84-30 vote, a crowd of protesters in front of parliament tried to break metal barriers near the building. At least 13 people were arrested and Georgian news reports showed one with severe cuts and bruises on his head.

The protests expanded after nightfall, with thousands of demonstrators marching to Heroes Square about two kilometers from the parliament and blocking off the streets that converge on the square.

The bill requires media and nongovernmental organisations and other nonprofit groups to register as "pursuing the interests of a foreign power" if they receive more than 20 per cent of their funding from abroad. The government says the bill is needed to stem what it deems as harmful foreign actors trying to destabilize politics in the South Caucasus nation of 3.7 million people.

The opposition has denounced the bill as "the Russian law" because Moscow uses similar legislation to crack down on independent news media, nonprofits and activists critical of the Kremlin.

European Council President Charles Michel said Tuesday that if Georgians "want to join the EU, they have to respect the fundamental principles of the rule of law and the democratic principles."

French President mulls state of emergency in New Caledonia

AP ■ PARIS

French President Emmanuel Macron is considering imposing state of emergency in the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia to curb spiraling violence, the presidency said Wednesday. At least three people were killed and four others, including a gendarme, were seriously injured, according to officials in the territory and French media reports on Wednesday.

More than 130 people have been arrested and more than 300 have been injured since Monday, when protests over a constitutional voting reform pushed by Paris turned violent in the archipelago, which has long sought independence.

Speaking at parliament, Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, who attended a two-hour meeting with top ministers at the Elysee, said the aim of the state of emergency would be "to restore order in the shortest time possible."

A decree on the methods to impose the state of emergency is to be presented to the French Cabinet on Wednesday afternoon.

In a statement, Macron emphasized the need for a resumption of political dialogue and asked the prime minister and the minister of the interior and overseas territories to invite New Caledonian delegations to Paris.

"All violence is intolerable and will be the subject of a relentless response to ensure the return of order," the statement said.

There have been decades of tensions on the archipelago between Indigenous Kanaks seeking independence and descendants of colonizers who want to remain part of France.

French Minister of Interior and Overseas Territories Gérald Darmanin said that 100 gendarmes were evacuated during violence overnight following "an attack on their station with an ax and live ammunition."

"Calm must absolutely be restored," Darmanin said in an interview with French broadcaster RTL.

On Tuesday, the French Interior Ministry sent police reinforcements to New Caledonia, which long served as a prison colony and now hosts a French military base.

About 1,000 gendarmes and 700 police officers have been deployed and a dozen professionals from a specialized police intervention and riot control unit have also been mobilized, the territory's top French official, High Commissioner Louis Le Franc, said at a news conference in New Caledonia.

The territory's political parties appealed for "calm and reason" with people who support independence and those who want the island to remain part of France."We have to continue to live together," the rival parties said in a joint statement on Wednesday. "Only with dialogue and resilience (we will) get through this situation."

Three people were killed and four were seriously injured in the unrest overnight and on Wednesday, French officials said. A fourth person, a member of the gendarmes, was also seriously injured near the southern town of Plum, according to France Info. He was evacuated in critical condition to the medical unit of the Pacific Marine Infantry Regiment, French broadcaster BFM reported.

Le Franc warned that if calm isn't restored, there will be "many deaths" in the area of the capital, Noumea, where protests over the voting rights turned violent on Tuesday.

Local authorities extended a curfew until Thursday morning.

Jurors in Trump's hush money trial are getting front row seat to history

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A gag order. The House Speaker turning up outside court. Angry denouncements of the judge overseeing the case. Some of the most explosive moments in Donald Trump's hush money trial have played out for most of the world to see — except for the people who are actually deciding his fate: the jury.

The 12-person panel is shown evidence and witness testimony so they can decide whether the former president is guilty of a scheme to buy up and bury seamy stories in an effort to illegally influence the 2016 presidential election. But it's a highly curated experience; jurors are not getting the full picture seen by those who follow along each day.

They don't even witness Trump enter or exit the courtroom. He's already there by the time they are brought into the room, and he stays until they are dismissed.

This is by design. Laws carefully govern how a criminal case is tried to ensure that a jury's decision on guilt or innocence isn't affected by fights over evidence or other legal sparring. It's routine to hold back a jury while trial lawyers argue with the judge about what can and can't be included for jurors to see during the trial. And attorneys often gather quietly at the judge's bench to talk about sensitive topics, out of their earshot.

Jurors, too, agree to a set of rules when they're chosen for a trial. They can't research the case. They must avoid all news about it. They also agree not to discuss the case outside of court and not talk about it among themselves until deliberations, when all the evidence has been presented and they're deciding whether the defendant should be convicted. If they break any of these rules, they could be kicked off the panel and replaced with an alternate juror, or a mistrial could be declared.

So if they're taking their civic duty seriously, the Trump jury has never heard the Republican presidential candidate criticize Judge Juan M. Merchan as "totally conflicted." They don't know that Trump has been threatened with jail time and and fined USD 10,000 for violating a gag order that bars him from talking about witnesses in the case, including the prosecution's star witness, Michael Cohen. They haven't watched Cohen's TikTok livestreams. They didn't see House Speaker Mike Johnson hold a press conference outside the courthouse this week, using his powerful position to show his party turning against the judicial system by declaring the Manhattan criminal trial illegitimate.

And they're unaware of the hours of legal wrangling over what witnesses can be called to testify, and what they can say when they're called.

Trump has pleaded not guilty to 34 counts of falsifying business records and denies any of the sexual encounters happened. Trump's attorneys, for example, last week asked the judge to declare a mistrial over testimony from a crucial witness, Stormy Daniels, who spoke in discomfiting detail for jurors over the alleged sexual encounter with Trump that prompted the hush money payment just weeks before the presidential election in 2016. Jurors saw Daniels on the witness stand for 7.5 hours over two days.

The panel got sent home early the day Daniels finished testifying. And then Trump's attorneys argued with the judge the case should be thrown out over her testimony. They took issue with Daniels' testimony describing a power dynamic between her and Trump, and the visceral reaction she had when she says she saw Trump sitting on the bed of his hotel suite stripped down to his boxers and T-shirt.

"That is so prejudicial and so incredible for a jury to hear," Trump's attorney Todd Blanche argued. He blamed prosecutors for asking questions that elicited intimate details of the alleged encounter.

Judge Merchan refused to throw out the case.

Trump's attorneys also wanted to modify a gag order that bars him from talking about witnesses in the case. "He needs an opportunity to respond to the American people," Blanche argued.

Judge Merchan denied that request too. And an appeals court on Tuesday upheld the gag order; finding that Trump wasn't claiming the restrictions infringed on his right to a fair trial. He was arguing that being prohibited from talking about the case could adversely impact his 2024 presidential campaign.

But Trump's lawyers have won some, too. Merchan said no to prosecutors' request to play jurors a 1999 CNN interview in which Trump discussed his familiarity with campaign finance laws. And just before court let out lastn Friday, Merchan told prosecutors they should inform Cohen "that the judge is asking him to refrain from making any more statements" outside court about the case or about Trump.

More routine actions are also decided outside of the watchful eyes of the jury. The judge and attorneys talk about scheduling and days off - including this Friday, when the Republican presidential nominee will be attending his son Barron's high school graduation. And they've talked about potential upcoming witnesses.

Wong sworn in as Singapore's new Prime Minister

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Economist Lawrence Wong was on Wednesday sworn in as Singapore's fourth prime minister in a planned political transition for the island state. Wong, 51, succeeded Lee Hsien Loong, 72, who relinquished his position after two decades; both belong to the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) that has been driving Singapore's economic progress for more than five decades.

Wong, who was the deputy prime minister, will be leading the fourth generation PAP politicians' government as the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister.

President Tharman Shanmugaratnam, 67, administered the oath to Wong, described by the local media as a low-key leadership transition.

Wong cited continuity, stability and the need to avoid disruptions as reasons for not making major changes at the minister (cabinet) level.

"With all other ministers holding on to their portfolios across the leadership transition from Lee Hsien Loong's government to Wong's, it also testifies to the consistency in Wong's decision-making," a Channel News Asia report said.

In April 2022, Wong was named as the leader of the PAP's fourth-generation, or 4G, team, and in June of that year promoted as the Deputy Prime Minister. Wong is married to Loo Tze Lui. Prior to entering politics, Wong was a civil servant for 14 years before joining the Ministry of Trade and Industry in 1997.

The Wong-led government is expected to continue pro-business policies, given Singapore's status as an Asian financial hub generating investments for Asia, including India, and a trading centre with a global network.

Lee will stay on in the Cabinet as senior minister as has been the case with the first two Prime Ministers of the city state – Lee Kuan Yew and Goh Chok Tong.

Wong is retaining Heng Swee Keat, 63, and promoting Minister for Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong, 65, as his two Deputy Prime Ministers.

Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Lawrence Wong is sworn in as Singapore's fourth Prime Minister next to Singapore's President Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon at the Istana, in Singapore.

President Tharman said he has full confidence in Wong's ability to lead as Singapore ventures into uncharted waters internationally, noting Wong's key role in shaping the country's economic and social policies, Channel News Asia said.

"He will be his own person, with his own approach to building consensus and finding the best way forward for the country. And he will no doubt do so to his own rhythm and beat," Tharman said at the ceremony.

All eyes are now set on the next General Election, which must be held by November 2025, only after which significant changes to the Cabinet are expected. At a press conference earlier this week, Wong said: "Continuity and stability are key considerations (for the cabinet), especially as we are approaching the end of this term of government."

"There is no higher priority for me and that is to form the best possible team to serve Singapore and Singaporeans," he added.

Among Indian PAP parliamentarians, Murali Pillai, 56, has been promoted as minister of state in the Ministry of Law and the Ministry of Transport. Pillai, a lawyer, will be sworn in on July 1, 2024. The other Indian origin ministers in the cabinet – Dr Vivian Balakrishnan, 63, remains the Foreign Minister; K Shanmugam, 65, as Minister of Law and Home Affairs, and Indranee Rajah, 61, as Minister in the Prime Minister's Office.

Welcoming Wong as the new Prime Minister, the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI) said it is confident that Singapore-India ties will continue to flourish.

"This is all the more so since Wong co-chaired the India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable, which has set the stage and the tone for long-term ties between our two countries," SICCI chairman Neil Parekh said.

Pak conducts successful training launch of 'Fatah-II rocket system

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan on Wednesday conducted a successful training launch of guided multi-launch rocket system 'Fatah-II', which is capable of engaging targets with high precision up to a range of 400 kilometres, the army said.The launch of Fatah-II Guided Rocket System was aimed at perfecting the launch drills and procedures, the army said in a statement.

"Equipped with state-of-the-art navigation system, unique trajectory and manoeuvrable features, Fatah-II is capable of engaging targets with high precision and defeating any missile defence system," it said. Moreover, the army also announced that "Fatah -II is being inducted in Pakistan's Artillery Divisions for stand-off, precision engagement of deep targets,".

Zelenskyy postpones foreign visits as Ukraine faces new Russian offensive

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy postponed all his upcoming foreign trips as Ukraine's army battled to contain a front-line push by the Kremlin's forces, as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday visited a drone manufacturing facility in Kyiv on the second day of a visit meant to reassure Ukrainians of continuing American support.

Zelenskyy cancelled all foreign visits "that were planned for the coming days," his office said Wednesday on Telegram. The head of state instructed his team to reschedule the visits.

"We are grateful to our partners for understanding," the announcement said.

Zelenskyy had been expected to visit Spain, and perhaps Portugal, later this week. No reason was given for his decision, but Ukraine is having a hard time fending off the latest Russian assault.

Blinken also toured a grain transshipment facility and a bionics factory, praising Ukrainian innovation and ingenuity in the face of wartime difficulties.

"Ukraine has had to adapt and adjust to this and it's done so remarkably," Blinken said of grain exports now being taken by rail after traditional shipping routes were interrupted by Russia's full-scale invasion, which began on February 24, 2022.

Russian troops are pressing a fresh offensive in northeast Ukraine's Kharkiv region. It began last week, marking the most significant border incursion since the full-scale invasion began and forcing almost 8,000 local people to flee their homes.

Together with Moscow's week-slong effort to build on its recent gains in the eastern Donetsk region, the more than two-year war has entered a critical stage for Ukraine's depleted army.

Against that grim backdrop, with thousands of Ukrainian troops locked in fierce battles in towns and villages, Blinken on Tuesday pledged unceasing US support for the country, during and beyond the war. He also tried to lift spirits in Kyiv, performing on guitar with a band at a city bar and eating pizza at a veteran-run restaurant.

Russia is opening new fronts in order to stretch Ukraine's army, which is short of ammunition and manpower, along the about 1,000-kilometre front line, hoping defences will crumble. Russian artillery and sabotage raids have also been menacing Ukraine's northern Chernihiv and Sumy regions,

Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address Tuesday that the army has sent reinforcements to the Kharkiv and Donetsk regions.

"It is too early to draw conclusions, but the situation is under control," he said.

The pace of Russia's advance in the Kharkiv border region, where it launched an offensive late last week and has made significant progress, has slowed, the Institute for the Study of War said late Tuesday. The Washington-based think tank said Moscow's main aim there is to create a "buffer zone" that will prevent Ukrainian cross-border strikes on Russia's Belgorod region.

Blinken on Wednesday visited a drone manufacturer on the outskirts of Kyiv and toured a grain transshipment facility where Ukrainian grain is loaded into containers for export by rail.

Blinken praised the ingenuity of the process, which local companies adopted after traditional shipping routes were interrupted by Russia's full-scale invasion, which began on February 24, 2022. "Ukraine has had to adapt and adjust to this and it's done so remarkably," Blinken said.

Blinken announces USD 2 bn arms deal for Ukraine

Kyiv(AP): US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has announced a USD 2 billion arms package arms deal for Ukraine — most of the money coming from a package approved last month. The announcement came Wednesday as Blinken was in Kyiv to reassure Ukraine of the US support as it attempts to fight off a new Russian offensive.

At his final event Wednesday of a two-day visit to Kyiv, Blinken said the Biden administration had approved a USD 2 billion, medium- and long-term foreign military financing package for Ukraine.

The packages generally send US taxpayer money to American defense firms to manufacture and ship weaponry and other military supplies to the recipient country.

Pak HC grants bail to Imran in corruption case

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A High Court in Pakistan on Wednesday granted bail to Imran Khan in the 190 million pounds corruption case, in which the jailed former prime minister and his wife are accused of receiving land worth billions of rupees as a bribe from a real estate tycoon.

A two-member bench of the Islamabad High Court comprising Chief Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, had reserved the verdict on Tuesday after the completion of arguments.

On Wednesday, the court asked Khan to submit a surety bond of Rs 1 million in order to secure bail. However, the order will not result in the ex-premier's release from Adiala jail since his sentences in the Iddat and cypher cases are yet to be suspended.

Khan, who was arrested weeks ago in the case, had challenged his detention in the Islamabad High Court.

"Despite of being granted bail in the Al-Qadir case, Imran Khan will continue to remain imprisoned given that his bail or suspension of sentence in the Cipher and iddat cases are yet to happen," his party said in a statement.

His party added that it was safe to say by "looking at the bogus prosecution and tactics to procrastinate the bail petitions in other cases" that "courts are likely to bail Mr. Khan out soon".

Khan and his wife were indicted in the case by an accountability court in February.In December last year, the National Accountability Bureau initiated an investigation against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Khan, his wife Bushra Bibi, and others in a case of alleged acquisition of hundreds of canals of land under the name of Al Qadir University Trust, resulting in a reported loss of 190 million pounds to the exchequer.

In his bail application in November last year, Khan alleged that the NAB, while acting as a tool of the previous Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government, used the case to harass him on political grounds.

The Al-Qadir Trust case is about the settlement of 190 million pounds, about Rs 50 billion, which the UK's National Crime Agency sent to Pakistan after recovering the amount from a Pakistani property tycoon.

Being the prime minister then, Khan, instead of depositing in the national treasury, allowed the businessman to use the amount to partly settle a fine of about Rs 450 billion imposed by the Supreme Court some years ago.

Reportedly, the tycoon, in return, gifted about 57 acres of land to a trust set up by Khan and Bushra Bibi to establish the Al-Qadir University in the Sohawa area of the Jhelum district of Punjab.

Khan has been lodged at the high-security Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi since August last year.

Since his removal from power in a no-confidence motion in April 2022, Khan has been convicted in at least four cases, including the cipher (secret diplomatic communication) case.

Russia prepared to negotiate over Ukraine

AP ■ BEIJING

Russian President Vladimir Putin says his regime is prepared to negotiate over the conflict in Ukraine in an interview with Chinese media on the eve of visit to partner Beijing that has backed Moscow in its full-scale invasion of its neighbour.

"We are open to a dialogue on Ukraine, but such negotiations must take into account the interests of all countries involved in the conflict, including ours," Putin was quoted as saying by the official Xinhua News Agency on Wednesday.

The Russian leader's two-day trip starting Thursday comes as his country's forces have pressed an offensive in northeastern Ukraine's Kharkiv region that began last week in the most significant border incursion since the full-scale invasion began, forcing almost 8,000 people to flee their homes.

Along with Moscow's efforts to build on its gains in the nearby Donetsk region, the 2-year-old war has entered a critical stage for Ukraine's depleted military that is awaiting new supplies of anti-aircraft missiles and artillery shells from the United States.

"We have never refused to negotiate," Putin was quoted as saying by Xinhua. "We are seeking a comprehensive, sustainable and just settlement of this conflict through peaceful means. We are open to a dialogue on Ukraine, but such negotiations must take into account the interests of all countries involved in the conflict, including ours."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said any negotiations must include a restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity, the withdrawal of Russian troops, the release of all prisoners, a tribunal for those responsible for the aggression, and security guarantees for Ukraine.

China claims to take a neutral position in the conflict, but has backed Moscow's contentions that Russia was provoked into attacking Ukraine by the West, despite Putin's public avowals of his desire to restore Russia's century-old borders as the reason for his assault.

The Kremlin said in a statement that during their talks, Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping will "have a detailed discussion on the entire range of issues related to the comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation and determine the new directions for further development of cooperation between Russia and China and also have a detailed exchange of opinions on the most acute international and regional issues."

The visit furthers the effort by China and Russia to topple the US-led Western democratic order in favour of a more authoritarian model that crushes political opposition, human rights and freedom of speech.

'Radical Saudi Arabia scholar held for years should be tried or released'

Dubai (AP): A radical Sunni scholar whose criticisms of Saudi Arabia's government and the West drew praise from the late al-Qaida founder Osama bin Laden should be immediately tried or released from a yearslong arbitrary detention by the kingdom, independent experts working with the United Nations said Wednesday.

Safar bin Abdulrahman al-Hawali had been one of the prominent voices behind the Sahwa, or "Awakening" movement, in the kingdom, which called for strictly observing hard-line Wahhabi beliefs and criticized its royal Saud family. Al-Hawali has been held without trial since 2018 as part of a wider crackdown on all dissent under King Salman and his assertive son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Al-Hawali, now in his mid-70s, was cited specifically by bin Laden in his 1996 declaration of war on the United States as one of the clerics detained by the kingdom purportedly on the order of the Americans.

The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities called for al-Hawali's release, saying ailments from strokes he suffered in 2005 and 2006 have made it difficult for him to speak or care for himself.

Lanka's minority Tamil-dominated regions on alert

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lanka's security forces were placed on alert in the northern and eastern regions to counter attempts to commemorate LTTE members killed in the group's bitterly-fought conflict for a separate homeland for the minority Tamils, ahead of the anniversary of the long-drawn battle's end. Security forces received information about events being organised throughout the island nation's Tamil-dominated North and East to commemorate the outlawed Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to mark the 15th anniversary of its final battle.

The three-decade-long armed, which started in 1983, was ended by the island nation's military by killing the leaders of the LTTE in 2009.Although the military decided against deploying troops, a special task force of the military and the police would keep a close eye on the possible LTTE commemorations from Wednesday to May 20. Security forces said that the distribution of pro-LTTE literature was seen at several commemorative events. At some events, calls were also made for the revival of the LTTE, which is under proscription internationally, including in India. Police have said that any group trying to commemorate the LTTE would be arrested.

However, Tamil political and rights groups say the events planned are to commemorate their kith and kin, who died in the long-drawn-out conflict since the mid-1970s.

In Mullaitivu — the scene of the final battle — the main commemorative event is to take place at the beachfront in Vellamullivaikkal. In Tamil-dominated Jaffna, university and civil groups began the 'Mullivaikkal week' on May 11. Blood donation campaigns are being held in the memory of the fallen.

Porridge was distributed to mark the once-a-day serving civilians received when they were trapped in Mullaitivu when the final battles raged between the LTTE and the government troops. Police arrested four people, including three women, in the eastern town of Sampur for violating a court order banning the LTTE commemorations, it said on Tuesday. The LTTE ran a parallel administration in parts of the northern and eastern regions until May 2009.

The armed conflict officially came to an end on May 19, 2003, when LTTE supremo Velupillai Prabakaran's body was found in the lagoon of the northeastern region of Mullaivaikkal.

FGN13

US to send an unofficial delegation as Taiwan's president is sworn in

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The White House will send an unofficial delegation to Taiwan this weekend for the inauguration of the island's democratically elected president, the Biden administration announced Wednesday, in a move that is certain to upset China but unlikely to draw excessive responses from Beijing as the two countries try to stabilise relations.

A senior White House official said the move is in line with longstanding US practice to send the delegation — which includes two former senior officials and a scholar — to the inauguration ceremony Monday. Lai Ching-te of the Democratic Progressive Party will take office, succeeding Tsai Ing-wen of the same party.Beijing, which sees Taiwan as part of Chinese territory and vows to seize the island by force if necessary to achieve unification, sees Lai as a supporter of Taiwan's independence and has long opposed any official contact between Washington and Taipei."In what ways the US deals with the new Taiwan authorities on May 20 and afterwards will affect (the) cross-Strait situation and also the China-US relations in the future," Liu Pengyu, spokesman for the Chinese Embassy in Washington, said Tuesday before the announcement, referring to the Taiwan Strait.

"So we urge the US side to act on President Biden's commitment of not supporting Taiwan independence," he said.

The US delegation will be in Taipei "to represent the American people," the White House official told reporters on condition of anonymity to discuss details of the trip before it was announced. The official called Taiwan "a model for democracy not only in the region but also globally."

Despite an absence of formal relations with Taiwan, the US is the island's strongest ally and is obligated under a 1979 law to help Taiwan protect itself from invasion.

It's unclear how Beijing would respond to an unofficial US delegation at the Taiwanese inauguration, but "Beijing will be the provocateur should it choose to respond with additional military pressure or coercion," the US official said, adding that the administration is not predicting how China would respond. Beijing has repeatedly warned Washington not to meddle with Taiwan's affairs, which it says are a core interest for China because it is a matter of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Beijing sees Washington's support for Taiwan as provocative.

The US insists any differences be resolved peacefully and opposes any unilateral changes by either side to the status quo. "We do not support Taiwan independence," the administration official said. "We support cross-Strait dialogue."

Taiwan has topped the agenda in US-China relations, which have soured over issues ranging from trade, cybersecurity and human rights to spying. The Biden administration, in its competition with China, has engaged in "intense diplomacy" aimed at preventing tensions from spiraling out of control.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Secretary of State Antony Blinken have recently visited China in the administration's latest effort to keep communications open and minimize misunderstanding.

Shortly after Lai was elected in January, President Joe Biden sent an unofficial delegation to Taipei to meet Lai, drawing protests from Beijing. Members of Congress also have travelled to Taiwan to meet the president-elect. Plans are underway for a congressional delegation to visit Taiwan shortly after the inauguration. Beijing reiterated its claim over Taiwan immediately after Lai was elected and said "the basic fact that Taiwan is part of China will not change."

Days later, Nauru, a tiny Pacific nation, severed its diplomatic ties with Taiwan, which now is recognized by 12 governments, including the Vatican.

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Phone : +91-120-6102000/6102009 CIN: U40101UP2007PLC032835
NOTICE INVITING EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
Prayagraj Power Generation Company Limited invites expression of interest (EOI) from eligible vendors for **PROCUREMENT OF FERRIC CHLORIDE (ANHYDROUS TECHNICAL GRADE - 98% - Pack Size 25 Kg in Waterproof Bag)** of 3x660 MW Thermal Power Plant at Prayagraj Power Generation Company Limited, Bara, Dist. Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India.
Details of pre-qualification requirements, bid security, purchasing of tender document etc. may be downloaded using the **URL- https://www.ppgcl.co.in/tenders.php** Eligible vendors willing to participate may submit their expression of interest along with the tender fee for issue of bid document latest by **23th May 2024.**

Gen Zs, millennials globally optimistic about economy, social situation: Survey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

More than half of Gen Zs and two-thirds of millennials globally are optimistic about the economic and social situation of the country and expect it to improve further, a Deloitte survey said on Wednesday.

Both generations are optimistic about GenAI and its potential benefits in improving the way they work with 4 in 10 undergoing training, the Deloitte's 2024 Gen Z and millennial survey said.

The survey also found that nine in 10 Gen Zs and millennials say the purpose is important for job satisfaction and are likely to reject work or employers that do not align with their ethics and beliefs.

The survey gathers insights from more than 22,800 Gen Z and millennial respondents across 44 countries and explores how Gen Zs and millennials perceive the transformations occurring in the world around them.

Fieldwork for the survey was completed between November 24, 2023 and February 13, 2024. Gen Z respondents were born between January 1995 and December 2005 and the millennial respondents between January 1983 and December 1994.

According to the survey, millennials are feeling more optimistic about the overall economic, financial, and social outlook compared with their global counterparts and this sentiment is boosted by India's sustained economic growth amid a global slowdown.

Two-thirds of millennials (65 per cent) and more than half of the Gen Zs (58 per cent) expect the country's economic outlook to improve in the next one year. It is a significantly better situation compared with the previous year, as more Gen Zs (62 per cent) and millennials (64 per cent) are now confident of their financial situation.

As per the survey, both the generations believe GenAI will have a positive impact on their work-life balance and how they work. More than half of the Gen Zs (51 per cent) and millennials (54 per cent) frequently use GenAI at work and strongly feel that it will free up their time for creative and strategic work.

However, they are equally convinced that they will need to reskill and GenAI will influence their career decisions and cause some job loss. The survey also highlights how women are more upbeat about GenAI and slightly more comfortable working with it than men.

"Millennials and Gen Zs are the agents of change and contribute significantly to shaping the future of work. More than half of the respondents are excited about GenAI and believe that this new technology will positively impact their work-life balance, allowing more time for creative and strategic work", Deloitte India Chief People and Experience Officer said.

Exports up one per cent in April; trade deficit widens to four months high

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's merchandise exports rose by 1 per cent to USD 34.99 billion in April even as the trade deficit widened to a four-month high of USD 19.1 billion during the month, according to government data.

Healthy growth in sectors such as electronics, chemicals, petroleum products and pharmaceuticals has helped in registering positive growth in exports despite global economic uncertainties.

Imports also increased by 10.25 per cent to USD 54.09 billion in the month under review from USD 49.06 billion in April 2023 due to a significant jump in gold imports.

The imports of precious metals more than doubled to USD 3.11 billion in April this year. Crude oil imports rose by 20.22 per cent to USD 16.5 billion.

Trade deficit, or the gap between imports and exports, in April 2023 stood at USD 14.44 billion. The previous high in the deficit was recorded in December 2023 at USD 19.8 billion. In March 2024, the outbound shipments dipped to USD 41.68 billion from USD 41.96 billion a year ago.

Briefing media on the data, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said the figures show that the new fiscal year started on a good note and hoped that it would continue.

He informed that the data for the country's total exports in goods and services for 2023-24 has been revised to USD 778.21 billion, which is the "highest" so far. Merchandise exports in the last fiscal was aggregated at USD 437.1 billion, while services exports stood at USD 341.1 billion. In merchandise exports, 13 of the 30 key sectors exhibited positive growth in April as compared to same period last year. These include coffee, tobacco, spices, plastic and handicrafts. According to the commerce ministry data, released on Wednesday, the estimated value of services exports for April is USD 29.57 billion compared to USD 25.78 billion in April 2023.

Imports of services are estimated to be increased to USD 16.97 billion during the month as compared to USD 13.96 billion in April 2023.

Markets snap three days winning run; Sensex slips over 100 points

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Wednesday after three days of rally, dragged down by selling pressure in HDFC Bank and unabated foreign fund outflows. Halting its three-day rally, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 117.58 points or 0.16 per cent to settle at 72,987.03. During the day, it lost 281.95 points or 0.38 per cent to 72,822.66.

The NSE Nifty dipped 17.30 points or 0.08 per cent to 22,200.55.

From the Sensex pack, Tata Motors, Asian Paints, HDFC Bank, JSW Steel, Hindustan Unilever, Nestle and Titan were the major laggards.

In contrast, Bharti Airtel, Power Grid, NTPC, Mahindra & Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro and HCL Technologies were among the major gainers.

In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower. Markets in South Korea and Hong Kong were closed for a holiday.

European markets were trading mostly higher. Wall Street ended with gains on Tuesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.21 per cent to USD 82.55 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,065.52 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark climbed 328.48 points or 0.45 per cent to settle at 73,104.61 on Tuesday.

MakeMyTrip posts Q4 profit of USD 171.9 million

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Nasdaq-listed MakeMyTrip Ltd on Wednesday reported a multi-fold jump in profit at USD 171.9 million in the March 2024 quarter, aided by gains on tax credit and convertible notes value.

The company had posted a profit of USD 5.4 million in the same quarter previous fiscal, MakeMyTrip said in a statement.

Coal's share in India power generation capacity drops below 50 per cent for first time since 1960s

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The share of coal in India's total power generation capacity dipped below 50 percent in the first quarter of 2024, the first time since the 1960s.

The latest POWERup quarterly report from the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) showed that renewable energy accounted for 71.5 percent of the record 13,669 megawatts (MW) power generation capacity added by India in the first quarter (January-March) of this year.

Coal's share, including lignite, in India's total power generation capacity dropped below 50 percent for the first time since the 1960s.

The report noted that the renewable energy trend is well ahead of India's target of achieving 50 percent cumulative power generation capacity from non-fossil fuel-based sources by 2030.

The decline in coal's share of power generation capacity mirrors a global trend, with demand for coal in G7 countries hitting record lows in 2023, levels not seen since 1900.

To accelerate the transition, G7 countries pledged last month to phase out all unabated coal power generation by 2035, building on their commitment to halt all construction of new coal-fired power plants.

The term "unabated" generally refers to the continued use of coal, oil, and gas without efforts to curtail emissions.

At the United Nations' COP28 climate change conference in December last year, world leaders reached a historic agreement to transition away from planet-warming fossil fuels and triple the global renewable energy capacity by 2030.

According to the report, a record 69 gigawatts (GW) of renewable energy tenders were issued in India in the fiscal year (FY) 2023-24, surpassing the central government's target of 50 GW per year.

"After a downturn from 2019 to 2022 due to supply-chain issues and global price spikes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the market has rebounded and gone from strength to strength," Vibhuti Garg, Director – South Asia, IEEFA, said.

India has risen to third place in the world's solar power generation rankings, trailing only China and the US, according to Ember's fifth annual Global Electricity Review of 80 countries.

Ranked ninth in 2015, India has now overtaken Japan, which, along with fellow G7 member Germany, has a persistently high demand for coal.

Solar power generated a record 5.5 percent of global electricity in 2023, with India generating 5.8 percent of its electricity from solar last year.

Solar remained the world's fastest-growing electricity source for the 19th consecutive year in 2023, adding more than twice as much new electricity worldwide as coal.

India witnessed the world's fourth-largest increase in solar generation in 2023 (+18 terawatt hour or TWh), behind China (+156 TWh), the United States (+33 TWh), and Brazil (+22 TWh). Together, the top four solar growth countries accounted for 75 percent of growth in 2023.

Solar's contribution to electricity generation in India surged from 0.5 percent in 2015 to 5.8 percent in 2023.

Sebi eases KYC compliance guidelines

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has decided to simplify the risk management framework for validating Know Your Customer (KYC) records through KYC Registration Agencies (KRAs), a move that will ensure ease of transacting for investors, experts said on Wednesday.

Under the new framework, KRAs can now verify PAN, name, address, email, and mobile number from official databases. If these details are found to be in order, they will be considered validated records, Ankit Ratan, Co-founder & CEO, Signzy said.

"The new framework is expected to address challenges faced by many investors while also ensuring the verification of investors' digital identities. With a growing number of investors embracing digital platforms for investment, verifying digital identities has become increasingly important," he added.

The exchanges, depositories, and relevant intermediaries are tasked with implementing necessary technical changes in their systems by May-end.

Mutual fund houses, broking firms, and portfolio management service providers will need to implement robust compliance tools and risk management frameworks to safeguard investor data privacy and security. This will help ensure that all investors are onboarded after identity verification.

KRA involves entities such as CAMS KRA, BSE KRA, NSE KRA, among others. These agencies are responsible for maintaining the KYC details of individuals, typically gathering information from brokers, exchanges, and intermediaries.

On Tuesday, Sebi simplified the risk management framework for ease of transacting by clients based on the feedback received from the stakeholders in the securities market. Simplifying the guideline, the regulator has modified the circular issued in October 2023.

In October last year, the verification process underwent an update, invalidating proofs of address such as ration cards, electric bills, or scanned Aadhar cards. Presently, the mandate requires KRAs to verify certain attributes of client records within two days of receiving the KYC record, including Permanent Account Number (PAN), name, and address.

"Going forward, the client's records verified by KRAs with official databases (Income Tax Department database on PAN, Aadhaar XML, Digilocker or M-Aadhaar) will be considered 'validated records'. Individuals with invalid documentation will not be permitted to trade in the securities market," Feroze Azeez, Deputy CEO of Anand Rathi Wealth, said.

This initiative by Sebi serves to safeguard investor interests in securities and foster the development and regulation of securities markets, representing a significant step forward in consumer protection, he added.

Signzy Ratan said that Sebi's move will ensure the protection of investor interests in the capital market and promote the development of security markets. It represents a significant step towards enhancing digital trust and creating a secure digital environment for investors.

Government aims to boost use of artificial intelligence in food processing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India plans to accelerate the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the food processing sector to improve efficiency, enhance farmers' incomes and reduce the environmental impact, officials said on Wednesday.

At a conference organised by NIFTEM (National Institute of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management) on using frontier technologies in the sector, senior bureaucrats and government advisors stressed the need for a roadmap to deploy AI tools, which are still at a nascent stage in the country's massive food processing industry.

"As an industry, we need to create a roadmap. The MEITY secretary has come on board. I am sure he is going to be a big support in this endeavour," Food Processing Secretary Anita Praveen said, referring to the secretary of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY).

MEITY Secretary S Krishnan pitched for wider adoption of AI, saying some work was already happening in agriculture but the food processing sector was still in the early stages of using such technologies.

NITI Aayog member Ramesh Chand said efficient food processing was "climate smart", helping enhance farmer incomes, satisfy consumers and reduce environmental impact amid increasing climate change challenges.

He suggested using AI to develop simple portable devices for quality assaying of agricultural produce, which could be a "great service to the nation". "Can we think of low-scale devices to check the quality of the produce? In the absence of assaying devices, we are still focusing on quantity rather than quality," Chand said.

The officials said AI tools could help improve overall sector efficiency as India aims to reach net zero emissions by 2070.

IIFCL profit rises 44 per cent in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd (IIFCL) on Wednesday reported a 44 per cent jump in standalone net profit to Rs 1,552 crore for the fiscal ended March 2024 aided by an increase in lending and moderation in bad loans.

The state-owned infrastructure finance company had earned a net profit of Rs 1,076 crore in the previous fiscal.

The company recorded the highest-ever profit, recovery, sanction and disbursement furthering turnaround performance that began three years ago, IIFCL managing director PR Jaishankar said while announcing annual financial numbers.

He said, for the first time, the profit before tax has crossed Rs 2,000 crore. During the year, profit before tax has increased to Rs 2,029 crore as against Rs 1,076 crore in the previous year.

The company continued to add value as its net worth increased 11 per cent to Rs 14,266 crore in 2023-24 from Rs 12,878 crore in the preceding fiscal.

LG looks to enhance leadership in TV segment with products tailored for India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Korean consumer electronics major LG will continue to introduce products in the home entertainment segment tailored for India to maintain its leadership position, according to senior company officials.

LG Electronics India, which on Wednesday launched 55 AI-enabled television models, expects to grow 25-30 per cent this year in its home entertainment (HE) vertical.

India is the most important market globally, a company official said.

"There is a growing demand for large screen TVs in India and we are constantly enhancing our portfolio with products like the World's largest 97-inch TV with vibrant picture quality, advanced AI-powered processing technologies...With this new lineup, we aim to further enhance our market leadership in flat panel TV in India," LG Electronics India Managing Director Hong Ju Jeon said.

The company plans to enhance its India-specific product lineups.

"LG Electronics thinking about the Indian market is not one of the important markets, but it is the most important market," LG Electronics India Director HE, Brian Jung told PTI.

Compared with the European and American TV market where most of the products have moved up to OLED technology, the Indian market is a bit different with LED technology still dominant, he added.

"So, we are trying to deliver our product to the Indian consumer which is a 'picked' product," Jung said.

He however said the Indian market has witnessed a rapid evolution in terms of screen size and also on technology.

"The Indian market is growing very rapidly and by quantity and by quality," he added.

LG has market leadership in India in the television segment with 27.1 per cent, he said, adding that the brand is loved by consumers in the country "especially in the home entertainment category and we will keep to uphold it."

The Indian television market is estimated to be around Rs 28,000 crore annually.

When asked about the growth outlook, LG Electronics India Business Head, Home Entertainment Abhiral Bhansali said, "Last year was also good for us. This year we are targeting roughly about 25 to 30 per cent growth versus last year."

In the HE segment, the company clocked revenue of Rs 8,000 crore last year.

The company has a TV production capacity of 30 lakh units annually at its Pune plant.

Aadhar Housing Finance shares make flat market debut

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd, which is backed by private equity major Blackstone, made a flat market debut on Wednesday against the issue price of Rs 315. The stock listed at par with the issue price at Rs 315 on the NSE. It later hit a high of Rs 329.90 and a low of Rs 292. On the BSE, the stock made its debut at Rs 314.30, a dip of 0.22 per cent from the issue price.

The company's market valuation stood at Rs 13,480.12 crore. The initial public offer of Aadhar Housing Finance received 25.49 times subscription on the closing day of the share-sale on Friday. The Rs 3,000-crore initial share-sale was a combination of fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 1,000 crore and an OFS (Offer-for-Sale) of Rs 2,000 crore by promoter BCP Topco VII Pte Ltd, an affiliate of Blackstone Group Inc. The three-day IPO had a price range of Rs 300-315 a share.

The company plans to utilise Rs 750 crore of the fresh issue proceeds to meet future capital requirements towards onward lending, while a portion will be used for general corporate purposes.

Aadhar Housing Finance offers a range of mortgage-related loan products, including loans for residential property purchase and construction; home improvement and extension loans; and loans for commercial property construction and acquisition.

The housing finance company is focused on the low-income housing segment, serving economically weaker and low-to-middle-income customers, who require small-ticket mortgage loans.

BUSINESS BRIEF

BAWEJA IS NEW DIRECTOR (FINANCE), REC LIMITED

Gurugram: Harsh Baweja has taken charge as Director (Finance) at REC Limited after the approval from the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) on May 10. Baweja's appointment follows the recommendation by PESB, which identified him as the ideal candidate for the role after a rigorous selection process involving 11 candidates. Baweja, a seasoned Chartered Accountant, brings with him an extensive experience of over 33 years in managing financial & business operations across multiple institutions. With over three decades of expertise in finance and a background as a Chartered Accountant, Baweja's appointment underscores his proven track record in navigating complex financial landscapes.

EPSI ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Chennai: Educational institutions for engineering have a greater role to play in the process of nation building, said Prof T G Sitharam, Chairman of AICTE. He was speaking at the inauguration of a round table discussion on 'Higher Education in India: Opportunities and Challenges in the context of NEP Implementation' at SRM Institute of Science and Technology premises at Kattankulathur near Chennai today.

SAIL LAUNCHES PROGRESSIVE HR INITIATIVES

New Delhi: To strengthen the culture of sustained learning and development in the organisation, Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) on May 14 launched a number of key progressive Human Resource (HR) initiatives. SAIL has introduced the policy of Work from Other than Workplace, which was launched by Amarendu Prakash, chairman, SAIL. Under this policy, an employee will be allowed to work from other than workplace on undertaking a prescribed self-development activity.

SAARC SECRETARY GENERAL VISITS SAU

New Delhi: Md Golam Sarwar, Secretary General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), visited the South Asian University on May 14. He was warmly received by SAU officials, and students from across South Asian Countries. Sarwar met the president, Professor KK Aggarwal, who briefed him about the journey of the university, the new programmes introduced and avenues for future development. Sarwar appreciated SAU for the achievements it has had in such a short period and underlined the impressive campus and infrastructure of its permanent campus in Maidan Garhi.

Is it time to worry about another trial, asks Aman Sehrawat

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Aman Sehrawat, the lone male Indian wrestler to have qualified for Paris Olympics, finds it annoying that instead of shifting his focus on preparing for the Games, he still has to worry about cutting his weight to prepare for another round of trials.

The 20-year-old Under-23 world champion saved India the blushes by securing a berth in men's freestyle 57kg for the Games at the recent World Qualifiers in Istanbul. In 11 other weight categories where the country's male wrestlers competed, India drew a blank as none of them could qualify.

"So many times I have cut my weight. How many times I have to do it? It causes a lot of weakness. I don't understand do I think of now winning trials again or start preparing for Olympics. I think the work I need to put for a good preparation will be affected if I am asked to go through the trials again," Aman told PTI in an interview.

"By the time trials are finished, Olympics will be almost there, so when do we start preparations? In my opinion trials should not be held," said Aman, whose natural body weight is 62kg.

Aman, who is Asian Games bronze medallist and Asian Championships title winner, is confident that he will be in reckoning for a medal at the Games.

"I see myself in top-3 in the world. Russia and Albania are strong and it will be close with them, others I can manage," he said.

Aman had lost to Albania's Zelimkhan Abakarov in the 2023 World Championship where Serbia's Steven Andria Micici had emerged champion. Zavur Uguev, the two-time world champion from Russia is also a strong wrestler, who had defeated Ravi Dahiya in the Tokyo Games gold medal match.

Most probably Aman will have to beat Ravi Dahiya when the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) holds trials.

Ravi, and the other top-3 wrestlers in men's 57kg category at the last trials held in Sonepat, will have to compete against each other and the winner among them will fight it out with quota winner Aman.

"I would have already left for Russia for training if not for these trials. It is better that I train abroad with good wrestlers. I think I have done enough training in India and now it's time to train and spar with my competitors.

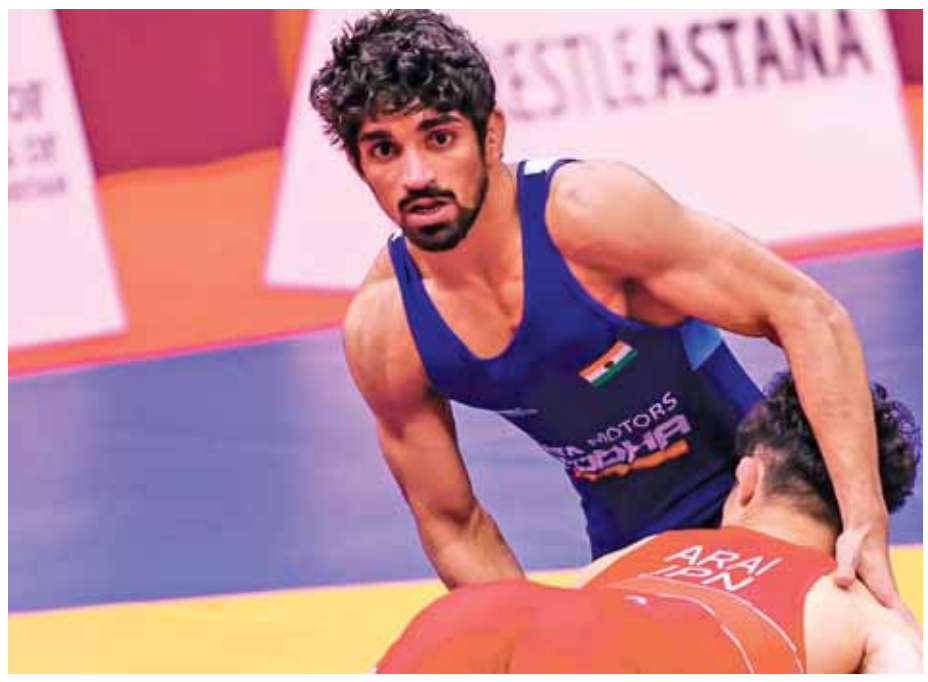
"That will prepare me well for Olympics. I will get a fair idea about my rivals," said Aman, who joined the Chhatarsal Stadium at the age of 10 and has been making a steady progress.

Aman argues that it's not just weight-cut that troubles wrestlers.

"Recovery is also very important. Trials, weight-cut and recovery will eat up a lot of time before Olympics if trials are held again," he said.

Aman also understands the weight of expectations. He is considered the next big thing in Indian wrestling and he is aware of that.

"I hear a lot of things about me. People have expectations now from me. I felt very bad when I could not qualify at the Asian Qualifiers in Bishkek. It does affect if I am not able to meet expectations. I worked hard for World Qualifiers and finally achieved it," he said adding that he likes the fame coming his way.



He lost his parents in 2015 and since then, Chhatarsal Stadium has been his home. He spoke about the support and care he gets from his "brother" Sagar, who is a Greco Roman wrestler.

"I relish my success with Sagar. He is more than a brother for me. He takes care of everything at 'akhada'. I just focus on my practice. He manages what I need to do, what I need to eat, when to eat, and helps in practice," said Aman.

Sagar is six years senior to Aman and wants to see his friend achieve what he could not.

"I lost my chances but now I want him to do what I could not do," said Sagar, who competed in 2019 World Championship in Nur Sultan.

"He was 10 year-old when he joined us. I was 16 then. I know that support at the right time matters. I did not get it, but I try to do it for him. What I like about Aman is that he is honest. He never lies about practice and training."

MY STAMINA IS GOOD BUT DEFENSE IS AN ISSUE: Aman considers endurance, like all other Indian wrestlers, as his strength. He admits that he has to change his bout strategy a bit to continue to excel at the big stage.

"My stamina is pretty good. Defense is my weakness though. They (coaches) want me to attack from the word go. The mistakes I committed in Asian Qualifier, I did not repeat in Istanbul. I was thinking about tiring out my opponent in the first period and then launch an attack, but it did not work, so changed my strategy.

"I also need to work on my leg attacks."

AMAN NEEDS HIS OWN COACH BY HIS SIDE DURING TOURNAMENTS: Lalit Kumar, who is the head coach at Chhatrasal Stadium and has monitored Aman's progress, is a firm believer that he needs to have his personal coach by his side if he has to win medals at global level.

"Look, these guys train at their centres for years. They get ready there with different coaches and then at the competitions, different coaches guide them. This is counter-productive I feel," said Lalit, who is a Dronacharya awardee.

"We know how their bodies react. What kind of warm up they require. This is my personal opinion, rest is up to WFI. We are preparing Ravi also for trials. Let' see who wins."

Daniil Medvedev latest to crash out of Italian Open after loss to Tommy Paul

AP ■ ROME

The curse of the defending champion struck again for Daniil Medvedev.

The second-seeded Medvedev has never successfully defended a title and he failed again on Tuesday as he lost 6-1, 6-4 to American Tommy Paul to become the latest top player to crash out of the Italian Open.

"It's disappointing, to be honest," said Medvedev, who has won 20 tour-level titles. "I wanted to do better here. I was not even close. What can I say? The more titles I win, the more chances I have to defend.

"So the more tournaments in a year I'm going to play where I already won, maybe not defend, but at least win twice the same tournament, that's what I'm going to try to do."

The opener lasted just 28 minutes as the 14th-seeded Paul broke Medvedev on all three of his service games and then served out the set to love.

"Was a tough one. Mentally I had to be much better," Medvedev said. "I started to calm myself down and focus on the match only at the end of the match, and it was too late. I had to do better. I was expecting myself to play better."

Medvedev improved slightly in the second set when he broke immediately but Paul broke straight back and never looked back, securing his spot in the quarterfinals when Medvedev sent a backhand long.

The second-seeded Medvedev followed 10-time champion Rafael Nadal and top-ranked Novak Djokovic with early exits in Rome.

The only other players to have won the men's tournament at the Foro Italico in the past 19 years are Andy Murray and Alexander Zverev.

The third-seeded Zverev, who won in 2017, eased past Nuno Borges 6-2, 7-5 and will face Taylor Fritz.

Fritz reached the men's quarterfinals for the first time after recovering from losing a lengthy second-set tiebreaker - during which he let slip match point - to see off Grigor Dimitrov 6-2, 6-7 (11), 6-1.

Alejandro Tabilo backed up his stunning third-round win against Djokovic by edging Karen Khachanov 7-6 (5), 7-6 (10) to reach a Masters quarterfinal for the first time. He will face Zhang Zhizhen, who ousted Thiago Monteiro 7-6 (4), 6-3.

Paul will play Hubert Hurkacz after the seventh seed - who eliminated Nadal in the second round - beat Sebastian Baez 5-7, 7-6 (4), 6-4. The other quarterfinal pits Stefanos Tsitsipas against Nicolas Jarry.

In the women's tournament, top-ranked Iga Swiatek reached the final four when she swept aside former finalist Madison Keys 6-1, 6-3 with the same score she achieved against the American in the Madrid semifinals two weeks ago.

The 16th-ranked Keys grew more frustrated at her inability to convert break points - racking up 10 without converting a single one - and at one point hit her racket against the clay.

Swiatek won the Madrid Open and is attempting to become the first player to win the "dirt double" since Serena Williams and Nadal both did so in 2013.

The two-time champion will next face third-seeded Coco Gauff after the American beat Qinwen Zheng 7-6 (4), 6-1.

Bopanna, Ebden pair bows out of Italian Open with pre QF loss

PTI ■ ROME

The Indo-Australian pair of Rohan Bopanna and Matthew Ebden bowed out of the ATP Italian Open following a pre-quarterfinal loss to local hopes Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori here.

The second seeds went down 2-6 4-6 in a match that lasted one hour and 13 minutes on Tuesday.

They had defeated wildcards Matteo Arnaldi and Francesco Passaro in their opening round clash.

It was a disappointing day for Bopanna and Ebden, who were broken twice in the first set. Their opponents, however, did not concede a single break point in the opener. The Indo-Australian combination also double-faulted twice to concede the early initiative.

In the second set too, Bopanna and Ebden continued to be on the backfoot and were broken thrice. They did manage to break their rivals Bolelli and Vavassori twice but were out of depth overall.

The defeat continues a poor recent run that included a first-round exit from the Madrid Masters earlier this month.

Bopanna and Ebden have nonetheless enjoyed a good run on the circuit, winning the Australian Open men's doubles title this year. Last year, they won the Indian Wells Masters which made the 43-year-old Indian the oldest ever ATP Masters 1000 champion.

The duo made the men's doubles semi-finals at Wimbledon and the final of the US Open in the same season. Bopanna also became the oldest world number one in doubles, thanks to the Australian Open triumph In January.

Satwik, Chirag sail into Thailand Open second round, Prannoy loses

PTI ■ BANGKOK

Star Indian pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty progressed to the men's doubles pre-quarterfinals but it was curtains for fifth seed HS Prannoy after being stunned by compatriot Meiraba Luwang Maisnam in the men's singles opening round of Thailand Open here on Wednesday. Top seeds Satwik and Chirag took just 34 minutes to get past the Malaysian pair of Nur Mohd Azriyn Ayub Azriyn and Tan Wee Kiong 21-13 21-13 in the opening round.

The Indian combination of Satwik and Chirag will play the Chinese pair of Xie Hao Nan and Zeng Wei Han in the next round. But Prannoy failed to clear the first hurdle, losing 19-21 18-21 to Meiraba in a match lasting 55 minutes.

Meiraba will take on Denmark's Mads Christophersen, who beat India's Kiran George 21-15 13-21 21-17.

In women's singles, Ashmita Chaliha came from behind to enter the second round of with a hard-fought 19-21 21-15 21-14 win over Ester Nurumi Tri Wardoyo of Indonesia. But a tough second round encounter awaits Ashmita as she will be up against top seed Han Yue of China.

Yue got the better of another Indian in Malvika Bansod, registering a comfortable 21-11 21-10 win.

Unnati Hooda also failed to cross the opening round as she squandered a game advantage to lose 21-14 14-21 9-21 against Lianne Tan of Belgium.

FIFA moves toward ending soccer tradition and letting league games be staged in other countries

AP ■ BANGKOK

FIFA moved Wednesday toward ending decades of soccer tradition by reviewing the rules that currently block domestic league games being played in other countries.

Fans are likely to object to their teams' home matches potentially being moved thousands of miles (kilometers) away. The United States and Saudi Arabia are expected to be willing hosts to lure competitive games from top European countries, and FIFA recently agreed to withdraw from an ongoing court case in New York filed by promoter Relevent to challenge the policy. The new FIFA policy will likely be attractive to the growing number of international owners of European clubs, including the wave of U.S. Investors in the English Premier League, Italy's Serie A and France's Ligue 1, and state-backed teams like Abu Dhabi-owned Manchester City, Qatar-owned Paris Saint-Germain and Saudi-owned Newcastle.

FIFA is now creating a panel of 10-15 people representing soccer stakeholders to advise within months on amending the rules on so-called "out-of-territory" games. The rules were last amended in 2014.

Attempts since then to have European league games abroad, including taking Barcelona to Miami in 2019, were blocked as U.S. Promoters seek to give fans more than just preseason exhibition games involving the world's best club teams. FIFA directed its working group, which is yet to be appointed, to consider fairness and giving "advance notice to fans who may miss the opportunity to attend a home or away match in the home territory." Other factors for the FIFA panel include "respect for the recognized structure of international football" and potential disruption to fans, teams and leagues in the country hosting "out-of-territory" games.

F1 driver Alex Albon signs a multiyear contract extension with Williams

AP ■ GROVE (UK)

Formula One driver Alex Albon has ended speculation about his future by signing a multiyear contract extension with Williams.

The F1 team made the announcement on Wednesday, ahead of this weekend's Emilia Romagna Grand Prix.

The British-born Thai driver had been linked with moves to both Red Bull and Mercedes. He was under contract at Williams through 2025.

Williams said the new deal will keep Albon at the team "into the new era of Formula 1 regulations," which kick off in 2026. It did not give more details.

"I am incredibly happy to be remaining with Williams Racing and to continue working with such a talented and dedicated team of people," Albon said in a press release.

The 28-year-old Albon is in his third consecutive season with Williams. He has yet to score a point this year.

"It has been a difficult start to the year but since joining Williams we have made significant progress together and I have seen the huge changes happening behind the scenes to take us back to the front of the grid," he said.

Albon started his career in 2019 with Red Bull's junior team but was dropped by Red Bull in 2020. Albon last season scored 27 points to help Williams finish seventh in the constructors' championship, the team's best result in six years.

"We are delighted to secure Alex's long-term future with Williams Racing," said Williams team principal James Vowles. "He has exceptional talent, technical input and dedication to the cause and this is a huge vote of confidence in Williams and the journey back to competitiveness that we are on.

Anjum, Aishwary top qualifications of third 3P Olympic Selection Trial

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Anjum Moudgil and Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar came out on top of the women's and men's 50m rifle 3 positions Olympic Selection Trial (OST) T3 qualification round respectively at the M.P. State Shooting Academy (MPSSA) ranges here on Wednesday.

After the customary 20 shots in the kneeling, prone and standing positions, Anjum shot a score of 592/600, her highest of the OSTs so far, while Aishwary shot yet another quality score of 590 to top the five-man field.

The duo will come back along with their four other competitors on Thursday morning for the finals of the event, where crucial podium points are up for grabs in what is building up to be a fight to the finish.

Indian number one and finals world record holder Sift Kaur Samra came in second with a score of 589 in the women's 3P, while three others, Ashi Chouksey, Nishchal and Shriyanka Sadangi, logged identical totals of 585.

In the men's 3P, Swapnil Kusale extended a good trials run with a score of 587 to come in second behind Aishwary, while Akhil Sheoran's 584 for a third-place finish was his worst of the three trials so far.

Chain Singh and Niraj Kumar were fourth and fifth with scores of 583 each.

Besides the 3P OST T3 finals, the qualification rounds of the men's and women's 10m air pistol OST T3 matches will also take place.

PSG says Mbappé will not play against Nice in French league because of hamstring pain

AP ■ PARIS

Departing Paris Saint-Germain striker Kylian Mbappé was left out of the squad traveling to Nice in the French league because of pain in his left hamstring, the club said. PSG has already secured a 12th league title and plays the Riviera club later Wednesday in a rearranged fixture. PSG will then conclude its league campaign on Sunday at Metz.

PSG also will be missing forward Ousmane Dembélé, who received a knock on his left thigh in the 3-1 loss against Toulouse last weekend.

Mbappé grabbed his league-leading 27th goal of the season against Toulouse in what was his last home game for the club.

Mbappé publicly confirmed last week that he is leaving at the end of the season, having already informed the club in February. Although he has yet to announce his destination, Mbappé is widely expected to join Real Madrid.

PSG hopes he will be fit again to feature in the French Cup final against Lyon on May 25 with a chance to add to his club-record tally of 256 goals.

Fifth-place Nice is four points behind Lille and Brest and can still qualify for next season's Champions League.

SUNRISERS LOOK TO SEAL PLAYOFF BERTH

GT AIM TO END CAMPAIGN ON A HIGH

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Masters of their own fate right now despite being erratic, Sunrisers Hyderabad will hope their destructive batting line-up delivers when they take on Gujarat Titans in pursuit of a playoffs berth in the Indian Premier League here on Thursday.

Another win will be enough for Sunrisers to seal a playoff berth as they need only one point to ensure qualification.

But the Pat Cummins-led side will also want to challenge for the top two spots, which is a possibility considering they have one more game after this match and a healthy net run rate of +0.406. SRH have 14 points from 12 matches and can reach a maximum of 18 points, which may be enough to ensure a top-two finish if other results go their way.

Not only are the Sunrisers players well-rested ahead of the clash against GT as they got a week off, their morale will also be sky high after notching yet another record-breaking win against Lucknow Super Giants on May 8.

If the bowlers did a commendable job to restrict LSG to a blow-par score, the opening duo of Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma made a mockery of the hosts by chasing down 166 in just 9.4 overs to notch a 10-wicket win at home.

SRH have made a habit of securing unbelievable victories throughout the season but they have also suffered sizeable defeats, including against GT (by 7 wickets) earlier in the competition.

The boom or bust approach by the batters has either done exceedingly well or has simply let the side down, including three times in the last five games, where SRH lost to RCB (by 35 runs), CSK (by 78 runs) and MI (by 7 wickets).

The 2016 champions would hope Head and Sharma deliver as SRH are heavily dependent on the explosive starts provided by the duo.

They will also want to do a better job at re-building their innings, especially while chasing. The likes of Nitish Reddy, Heinrich Klassen and Abdul Samad need to manage that better.

On the other hand, the Titans, who have only five wins from 13 games and are on 11 points, are out of the reckoning and will look to end their forgettable campaign on a high.

With former skipper Hardik Pandya moving to Mumbai Indians this season, GT struggled to find a replacement for the all-rounder who was key to their title-winning run in 2022 and runners-up finish last year.

The absence of pacer Mohammed Shami, who was ruled out of the tournament due to injury, has also hurt them.

GT's bowling hasn't been as effective this season, with inconsistent pacers and leaky spinners.

Their last match against Kolkata Knight Riders was a washout but the bowlers showed promise by taking three wickets in the first three overs against CSK.

Mohit Sharma's variations and knuckle balls were particularly effective, and Rashid Khan's clever bowling was noticeable. They'll hope for an encore.

In the batting department, much will depend on skipper Shubman Gill and B Sai Sudharsan, who revelled in the role of an opener. David Miller has looked off-colour this season and his big hits would be crucial to ensure that the side signs off on a positive note.

SQUADS:

Sunrisers Hyderabad: Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Aiden Markram, Abdul Samad, Nitish Reddy, Shahbaz Ahmed, Pat Cummins (c), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jaydev Unadkat, T Natarajan, Mayank Markande, Umran Malik, Anmolpreet Singh, Glenn Phillips (wk), Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Upendra Yadav (wk), Jhathavedh Subramanyan, Sanvir Singh, Vijayakanth Viyaskanth, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Marco Jansen, Akash Maharaj Singh, Mayank Agarwal.

Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), David Miller, Matthew Wade, Wriddhiman Saha, Kane Williamson, Abhinav Manohar, B. Sai Sudharsan, Darshan Nalkande, Vijay Shankar, Jayant Yadav, Rahul Tewatia, Noor Ahmad, Sai Kishore, Rashid Khan, Joshua Little, Mohit Sharma, Azmatullah Omarzai, Umesh Yadav, Shahrukh Khan, Sushant Mishra, Kartik Tyagi, Manav Suthar, Spencer Johnson, Sandeep Warrier and BR Sharath.

Hopefully we get the momentum at the right time: Phil Salt

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Kolkata Knight Riders have been remarkable in the league phase of this IPL season and big-hitting opener Phil Salt is now hoping for the side to sustain the momentum and "put our best foot forward" in the play-offs.

Two-time champions KKR are currently at the top of the pecking order with 9 points following nine wins and three losses in 13 matches.

"It's about taking it day by day and hopefully we put our best foot forward and get the momentum at the right time," Salt said on KKR's Knights Dugout Podcast.

Salt has been one of the key players in KKR's impressive run to the play-offs, forming a formidable partnership with fellow opener Sunil Narine by taking the opposition bowling attack to the cleaners.

Left-arm pacer Micthell Starc, Salt's colleague at KKR, said the team is desperate to regain the trophy they won twice in the past.

"I'm excited to get involved here at KKR and hopefully it will be a really successful season for us. We're here to get the trophy and that's what we're aiming for and hopefully we're going to do exactly that," Starc said.

The Australian pacer also shed some light on his return to IPL after 10 years.

"It's been a while since I've been here. Was supposed to be here with KKR in 2018 but I got injured. So it's exciting to be back and looking forward to it."

Meanwhile, Salt touched upon his first experience with the England squad.

"That was my first experience at being flooded with messages on my phone. I'm generally not someone who uses the phone a lot but it was an incredible experience. My phone was blowing up with messages congratulating me and it was great."

He went on to share an anecdote about facing Jofra Archer in the nets.

"I think Jofra is the fastest I have faced in the nets and that too from 18 yards. He bowls it at that pace from 18 yards with three bouncers in an over. It's good because it helps sharpen the reflexes but there have been times when he's hit me right before the match day and then all hell has broken loose," Salt said.

KKR play the second-placed Rajasthan Royals in Guwahati on the concluding day of the league stage on May 19.

Abhishek's performance in IPL this season will help him play for India: Markram

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sunrisers Hyderabad's South African import Aiden Markram believes Abhishek Sharma's destructive IPL form would fetch him an India cap in the not so distant future.

Sharma, who is striking at over 200 in the ongoing edition, has 401 runs in 12 matches. He and Australian Travis Head make for an explosive opening pair and most recently chased down over 160 runs in a less 10 overs against Lucknow Super Giants.

Markram, who is the captain of the South African team, described the duo as "brothers of destruction" in an interview to PTI Videos.

"Abhi (Abhishek) has made massive strides this season. He was showing some really positive signs in the previous seasons and what he's achieved so far this season puts him in good stead for hopefully representing India one day," Markram said of the 23-year-old left-hander.

"He's got a very calm and level head on his shoulders and he'll take everything in his stride. But my fingers are certainly crossed for him to go to higher honours," he added.

IMPACT PLAYER RULE GIVES FREEDOM: Joining the debate surrounding the impact player rule, Markram said that the addition of an extra batter in the line-up has allowed teams to adopt a more aggressive approach.

"Naturally, when you have that extra batter in your batting line-up, you feel more freedom as a player. And obviously from the start of the innings, the openers feel that extra bit of freedom as well," he explained.

"I think we've seen it with quite a few other teams that have been doing it. So I'll definitely say that the impact players have created that and created probably a new brand of T20 cricket that happens here in IPL," he said.

Markram also commended the team's bowling unit, particularly the leadership of Bhuvneshwar Kumar.

"I don't think he's (Bhuvneshwar Kumar) ever lost it, to be honest. He sort of leads from the front in his own calm and silent way. It's been fantastic for us to watch.

"But the bowling unit as a whole has really confronted this challenge of the batters that's been happening this season with the scene of impact player. They found their own unique ways to try to keep the batters calm and also try to find ways to keep taking wickets," he said.

"But definitely someone like Bhuvi leading from the front, as he's done for many, many years, has been excellent for you," he added.

Markram hasn't had the best of seasons so far and has managed 199 runs from nine matches so far. The 30-year-old said he is happy with the effort he is putting into his game.

"I'm still feeling really good. IPL is a tough beast to crack and you as a player have to appreciate that. It's all for good reasons. For me, it's spending lots of time working on my game, working hard off the field as well.

"And if you get another opportunity, you'll feel ready to take that and grab that opportunity hopefully. And if it doesn't work out, then whatever cricket lies ahead, you trust that this preparation puts you in a good state for that," he said acknowledging being out of form.

Pant is an instinctive captain, he will get better with time: Ganguly

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Capitals' Director of Cricket Sourav Ganguly feels Rishabh Pant is an instinctive captain and his leadership skills will refine with time and experience.

The dashing wicket-keeper batter returned to competitive cricket after a painstakingly long rehab following a horrific car crash in December 2022.

The 26-year-old resumed his duties as the Delhi Capitals captain.

"Pant is a young captain, he'll learn with time. The way he returned from injury to play a full season; we had our doubts during the off season," Ganguly told JioCinema.

"Indian players are crucial, especially since the TATA IPL shifted to 10 teams. I am very happy for him that he returned to play so well over a full season. He has all my well wishes for whatever is next," Ganguly added.

Pant has time and again showcased his astute captaincy during the IPL, while he has also erred in his decisions a few times.

"With time, he'll become a better captain. Nobody is a great captain from day one, but he is an instinctual captain, he makes decisions on the ground. With more time, he'll get better."

DC ended their league stage with seven wins and seven losses. Although they are still alive in the playoffs race as they have a mathematical chance, but in all probability they have all but played their last game this season.

The likes of pacers Mukesh Kumar and Rasikh Dar Salam rose to the occasion a few times this season and Ganguly was lavish in his praise for the duo.

"You've seen Rasikh's development over time. The more matches he played, the better he got. It's not easy to bowl on the Delhi wicket. This wicket is great, and the ground isn't that big, so I think for any bowler, it isn't easy to bowl here. Rasikh has improved a lot.

"Mukesh has been our best bowler this season. He bowls all the difficult overs, whether at the start or at the death. There has been no match this season where we didn't need his bowling in the death," he said. "We knew that conceding sixes would lead to more losses, so he has consistently delivered there. Our Indian bowlers have been great this season."

Injured Rabada returns home from IPL, impact on T20 World Cup preparation unlikely

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

South Africa pace spearhead Kagiso Rabada has returned home from the Indian Premier League due to a lower limb soft tissue infection, the country's cricket board said on Wednesday.

Rabada represented Punjab Kings in the IPL, taking 11 wickets in as many games. Punjab have already been eliminated from the IPL play-offs race and will play their last league game on May 19.

"The 28-year-old consulted a specialist on arrival in South Africa and is being closely monitored by the Cricket South Africa medical team," said Cricket South Africa (CSA) in a statement.

CSA also said that the injury is unlikely to impact Rabada's preparation for the T20 World Cup in the Americas next month.

"His preparation for the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup in West Indies and USA is not expected to be affected," CSA added.

South Africa open their World Cup campaign against Sri Lanka in New York on June 3.

Ultra aggressive cricket transformed T20 but time will tell if players can do it in WC: Langer

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ultra-aggressive cricket, especially in the powerplay, has transformed the shortest format but it remains to be seen if the players can replicate it in the upcoming T20 World Cup in the Americas, said Lucknow Super Giants head coach Justin Langer.

IPL teams have scored 200 or more 37 times this season so far but LSG managed to achieve the feat only once — against Chennai Super Kings last month — and Langer admitted that they had struggled in the powerplay.

"The Lucknow wicket has been a real contest between bat and ball whereas a lot in this tournament has been very one sided towards the bat. So that's certainly, we haven't capitalised in our powerplay like some of the other teams have," Langer said after LSG lost by 19 runs to Delhi Capitals here on Tuesday night.

"...It's been absolutely amazing watching some of these powerplays. It's almost transformed the game. And whether people can continue to do this and whether they can do it during the World Cup, time will tell. But it's certainly been ultra aggressive cricket."

Defending 209, DC had reduced LSG to 71 for 5 but pace all-rounder Arshad Khan gave a real scare when he slammed an unbeaten 33-ball 58 before the hosts held their nerves to limit the visitors to 189 for 9.

"I think Arshad is a very good cricketer. You saw that he swung the ball early. He's a good fieldsman and to be able to bat like that, he's a very good package," Langer said.

"I've thought the whole way through watching this tournament that he's got huge potential and he showed some of that tonight. So when he becomes more consistent, particularly with his bowling, he could be a real handful and a very, very good all-around cricketer."

For DC, Tristan Stubbs was sensational as he smashed a 25-ball 57 and then returned to take a wicket.

"I think Tristan Stubbs, that wicket was important obviously. We tried (Deepak) Hooda when the two left-handers were in and he got a wicket for us two games ago, he didn't get one this game, whereas Stubbs did," Langer said.

"So I thought if we had been a little more intelligent with our batting today, that was a chaseable score on this wicket. He's (Stubbs) a very good cricketer. I've been seeing the power plays in the first six, but we're also seeing the way some of these teams are finishing off, and I think Stubbs is an outstanding cricketer."

Talking about the focus on match-ups these days, Langer said: "There's so much data these days, so when you do your analysis leading into every game and what often happens traditionally is left-handers don't have as much impact on the game against off-spin when the ball's spinning away.

"You saw Bishy (Ravi Bishnoi) bowled beautifully when they're spinning away, whereas when the ball's spinning back into the left-hander or the off-spin is spinning back into the right-hander, it tends to be more in the arc to be hitting some of these sixes.

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