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EPIC ELECTION BATTLE ENTERS DECISIVE PHASE

WORLD 8

IRAN'S SUPREME LEADER PRAYS FOR LATE PRESIDENT, OTHERS

MONEY 10

MARKETS CLIMB ON BUYING IN RELIANCE, INFOSYS

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

Late City Vol. 34 Issue 142 *Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

NEW DELHI, THURSDAY MAY 23, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

Established 1864

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GURBAZ SAYS KKR IS FAMILY TOO 12 SPORTS

EC makes its presence felt

Underlines nation's inviolable socio-cultural milieu

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With only two phases of the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections remaining, the Election Commission has now upped the ante against political parties particularly the BJP and the Congress asking them to desist from campaigning along caste, community, language, and religious lines, asserting that India's socio-cultural milieu cannot be made a casualty to elections.

The two phases will see polls on 115 seats including in Delhi on Saturday. The Election Commission on Wednesday in a stern warning to both the BJP and the Congress, the EC has also directed them to issue a formal notice to its "star campaigners" disallowing them from making statements that "divide the society" and may cause tension between different castes and communities. The EC had last month issued notices to JP Nadda on Opposition charges that Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a divisive speech in Rajasthan's Banswara. A similar notice had been issued to Mallikarjun Kharge, too, based on the complaints filed by the BJP against him and the main Opposition party's senior leader Rahul Gandhi regarding their remarks. The commission rejected the defence by Nadda and Kharge and asked them to instruct their parties' star campaigners to desist from campaigning along caste, community, language, and religious lines. The EC also asked the Congress not to politicise defence forces and make potentially divisive



statements regarding socio-economic composition of the armed forces. The EC had broken from norms when it issued notices to the BJP and Congress presidents on April 25 on complaints against Modi by the Opposition and against Rahul and Kharge by the ruling party. While the EC did not name Modi or Rahul, it asked Nadda and Kharge for their "comments" on the "star campaigners" alleged MCC violations. "Elections are periodic exercises, they come and go, but political parties like yours endure; even more enduring preserve is India's socio-cultural milieu; political parties are in the task of nurturing leaders for the country for present and future," the commission said. It also asked the Congress to ensure that its star campaigners and candidates do not make statements which give false impression that the Constitution may be abolished or sold. The EC asked the presidents of the two national parties to issue

formal notes to their star campaigners to correct their discourse, exercise care and maintain decorum. Referring to their respective replies to the notices issued to them on April 25, the election authority said "technical loopholes or extreme interpretations of other political party's utterances" cannot discharge the parties and their campaigners from the core responsibility of their own content which ought to be corrective to the ongoing discourse "and not further plummeting the quality of campaign discourse". It reminded the two parties of provisions of the model code which state that no party or candidate will include in any activity which may aggravate existing differences or create mutual hatred or cause tension between different castes and communities, religious or linguistic.

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Voter sympathy for Kejriwal ebbs

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Riding high on the electoral sympathy after the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) seems to have lost its advantages after the alleged assault on Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal in the run up for the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi. The Maliwal incident has dented Kejriwal's image badly, who is facing corruption charges in the excise policy scam case, which is visible in the party's campaign. The saffron party seems to have an upper hand in all seven seats as this has not gone well among the women voters. Top BJP leaders are confident to repeat the 2019 results. The BJP, which is banking on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charisma and corruption free administration in his 10 years rule, has now focussed its strategy, utilising the alleged assault on Maliwal, to portray its top leadership, including Kejriwal, as responsible — first through "silence", acceptance, and then a "direct attack" on Maliwal — for "denigration" and "assault" of their own women colleagues.

On the other hand, Kejriwal who has maintained radio silence, seems to be on back foot, hurting the party's electoral prospects. The BJP's campaign strategy to counter the INDIA Bloc in Delhi has been to target the AAP more than the Congress. Besides, the BJP has consistently raked up corruption allegations against the AAP, including the now-scrapped excise policy and 10 other alleged scams. AAP hopes Kejriwal's arrest will generate sympathy for the party in the general elections and help it win maximum seats in Delhi and Punjab.

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Delhi's Progress

Modi's Guarantee

Bharat Mandapam and the world-class Yashobhoomi Convention Centre have transformed Delhi into an international hub of conference tourism

Network of expressways around Delhi has eased traffic

Pucca house ownership provided to 3,100 slum dwellers and over 30 thousand poor families in Delhi

Delhi Metro's network has doubled in the past 10 years

National War Memorial honors our brave heroes

Removed the signs of colonialism, embraced our national identity

Har Dilli wasi Bol Raha

Dilli Ke Dil Mein Modi

Phir Ek Baar

Modi Sarkar

Press the lotus button Make BJP win



Modi rips into INDIA Bloc's Communal plank

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday tore into the INDIA Bloc accusing it of being extremely "communal, extremely casteist and extremely nepotistic" as he alleged that the Congress is to be blamed for the anti-Sikh riots.

Addressing a rally in West Delhi's Dwarka sector 14, the Prime Minister said the BJP's development model is committed to 'nation first' but for the Congress and the INDIA grouping, the only agenda is 'family first'.

Modi denounced the communal and casteist agendas of the INDIA Bloc, accusing them of prioritising vote-bank politics over the welfare of the nation. He criticised their divisive tactics and highlighted instances of communal violence and corruption under their rule. "The country also understands



Delhiites throng Dwarka sector 14 to welcome Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday

Ranjana Dimri/Pioneer

that if by mistake any vote is cast in favour of the INDIA alliance, that vote is not going to be of any use to the country. Every vote given to BJP will strengthen the resolve of 'Viksit Bharat'. That is why this huge sea of people is also

saying in one voice 'Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar', he said. He said, "The BJP's development model says, Nation First. On the other hand, Congress and the INDIA alliance's only agenda is family first. This INDIA alliance is a

symbol of every evil that exists in the country today. They are highly communal, casteist, and family-oriented. Our Delhi has been a direct witness to their communalism." Attacking the Congress and the INDIA Bloc, he referred

to 1984 riots when Sikhs were burnt alive. "It was in this very Delhi that my Sikh brothers and sisters were burned alive with burning tires around their necks. Whose crime was this? Congress. Today, every party standing under the Congress umbrella is guilty of the Sikh riots. It is Modi who is delivering justice to the victims of the Sikh riots. As soon as Modi came to power, an SIT was formed. Hundreds of cases were reopened. The Congress leaders who were roaming freely have been punished by us," he said.

During his speech, Modi emphasised the stark differences between the governance models of the BJP and the Congress-led INDIA Bloc. He underscored the BJP's commitment to fast-paced development and efficient

governance, contrasting it with the slow progress and systemic injustice perpetuated by the Congress and its allies.

Speaking about the Congress and INDIA Bloc's misrule and caste-based politics, Modi said, "Who doesn't know about the prestigious Jamia Millia Islamia, a Central University in Delhi? For 60 years, it remained a regular educational institution, even there, Dalits, backward classes, and tribals used to get reservations. But in 2011, the Congress Government played a trick. Suddenly Jamia was declared a minority institution. This imposed a 50 per cent reservation for Muslims in Jamia. Earlier, all SC/ST/OBCs used to get reservations in admissions. Now even that has been restricted based on religion."

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SC slams Soren for half truths, he withdraws plea

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Jailed former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Wednesday failed to get any relief from the Supreme Court which pulled him up for "suppressing material facts" in his plea against his arrest in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam. A vacation bench of justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma allowed Soren's counsel Kapil Sibal to withdraw the pleas for interim bail for Lok Sabha poll campaigning and against his arrest after the apex court indicated that it would dismiss them as Soren has not approached the court with clean hands. The court pointed out that Soren did not apprise it of the April 4 order of the special



PMLA court taking cognisance of the prosecution complaint, which is the Enforcement Directorate's equivalent to a charge sheet, and also that his regular bail petition was filed on April 15 and dismissed on May 13. "... You had approached two courts for the same relief... We have doubts that your client (Soren) was acting in a bonafide manner..." it said.

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WORST NOT OVER YET! Brace up for more fire from the skies

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

With the India Meteorological Department (IMD) issuing a red alert in Delhi forecasting the city to sizzle at 47 degrees Celsius on May 25, the day of the Lok Sabha polls, political parties are grappling with speculations about voter participation. A million dollar question is: Whether or not voter turnout in Delhi will surpass the 60 per cent mark recorded in 2019 general elections.

This phase six involves 58 Lok Sabha constituencies across six States, including Delhi, Haryana, Odisha, and Bihar, as well as two Union Territories. All seven seats in Delhi and all ten seats in Haryana will be contested in this phase amid fear of blistering heat with temperature going up. According to senior IMD



scientist Naresh Kumar, the rising temperatures, particularly in Rajasthan, have prompted the issuance of red alerts, indicating extreme heatwave conditions. In Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, while there has been a slight decrease in temperatures due to a western disturbance, the mercury is expected to rise again in the

coming days. As per the IMD, heatwave to severe heatwave conditions are very likely in most parts of West Rajasthan, in many/some pockets over Punjab, Haryana-Chandigarh, East Rajasthan and West Uttar Pradesh, in isolated pockets of northwest Madhya Pradesh and Delhi till Sunday. Mahesh Palawat, vice

president of Skymet Weather and a private Indian weather forecaster, was quoted by a media report that, "Our warning indicates that temperatures are likely to reach high heatwave levels in the national Capital."

The apprehension surrounding voter turnout in Delhi's upcoming elections is likely to be compounded by the heat index, which measures the apparent temperature that people feel outside due to a combination of high temperature and humidity. For example on Wednesday Delhi faced scorching temperatures at 42 degrees Celsius, however, the heat index soared to a staggering 51.6 degrees Celsius, highlighting the severe heat stress and discomfort endured by residents.

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Israel honours Kerala caregivers

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Noor Gilon, the Ambassador of Israel to India, while celebrating National Day of Israel in India said both the Government and the people of India stood on the side of Israel since October 7. Gilon thanked the Government of India and the people for standing with the Jewish nation in its hour of crisis. "From October 7, both the Government and the people of India stood on the side of Israel. And this we will never forget. The amount of support we get here is nothing short of amazing. It's a testimony of the extraordinary relations between the Indian and the Jewish people," said the Israeli Ambassador. Ambassador also paid tributes to two Keralites who risked lives to save aged couple during the attack by Hamas on October 7. "I take



this occasion to salute the heroism of people of Indian descent: Meera and Sabitha, caregivers from Kerala, who saved an elderly couple during the terror attack; and Romi (6), an Israeli child of Indian descent, whose parents were murdered in front of her, tried to protect her little sister — Lia (3) during the attack. They have shown extraordinary courage and a strong spirit, inspiring the entire nation of Israel," said

Gilon. The 76th anniversary of Israel was observed on Tuesday at New Delhi with a call to the Hamas to release the 128 citizens of Israel who were taken hostage by the Hamas on October 7, 2023. Israel's National Day was organised by the Embassy of Israel in India with Vinay Mohan Kwatra, the foreign secretary of India, gracing the occasion as chief guest. Despite the deep wounds inflicted by the

Hamas terrorists on Israeli people, the Ambassador paid glowing tributes to the two caregivers from Kerala who saved an aged couple from the jaws of death.

He stated that this Independence Day was complicated and painful. "But our resolve is strong. While we mark this Independence Day, our thoughts are with the 128 loved ones who are still held captive. Their immediate release remains our sincere hope and ongoing mission. Speaking at the event, Foreign Secretary Kwatra said, "We join the people of Israel to celebrate this momentous occasion. It is deeply inspiring that the extraordinary journey of a nation that has not only survived and thrived against all odds, but also transformed itself into a flourishing landscape of innovation, advancement, and growth."

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Delhiites brave scorching heat to attend Modi rally

ABHI SINGHAL ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a scorching temperature of 43.4 degrees Celsius and prevailing heat wave conditions that have ruined many campaigning programmes, nothing deterred the people in the national Capital on Wednesday to witness Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing them in West Delhi's Dwarka. Donning saffron clothes, a massive crowd from across Delhi and neighbouring areas braved the summer heat to gather at the BJP's poll rally site in sector 14 well in advance to listen to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Many sported shirts with quotes like 'phir ek baar modi sarkaar' and 'Modi ka Pariwaar' to show their unwavering support to the BJP. Two female friends wearing saffron sarees sat eagerly with a big grin on their face to meet their beloved PM. Seema, a 45 year old woman, said that she is sitting in the heat to just get a glimpse of Modi once. "I want to really see him. I can bear the heat if it means I get to witness him here. The reason I am voting for BJP this time is because I believe that I'll be voting for development and women empowerment," she said, while adding that woman



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being welcomed during a public meeting in support of BJP candidates for Lok Sabha polls, at Dwarka in New Delhi, on Wednesday. Photo: Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

have been empowered during the 10 year regime of Prime Minister. Ankush Kumar, a resident of Gurgaon in Haryana where polling would be held in the sixth phase on May 25 along with Delhi, said that he reached the rally site, close to Sector 14 Dwarka Metro Station, around 2 pm. "I came here just to see the prime minister," he said. The national capital on Wednesday recorded a maximum temperature of 43.4 degrees Celsius, three notches above the season's average, and remained in the 'Yellow' alert zone. Chants of "Modi, Modi" and "Jai Shree Ram" rent the air while many, including women, danced to drum beats as the prime minister reached the stage around 6.15 pm. They waved their mobiles with flashlights on while chanting

"Modi ji ko Jai Shree Ram" and "Abki baar 400 paar" to greet Modi. "Not only from Delhi, people have arrived from different parts of the country to listen to PM Modi's speech," said Krishna Devi, who reached the rally site from Shahdara. Another person at the rally, Karan Singh, said, "We want a 'Majboot (strong) sarkar', not a 'majboor (helpless) sarkar'. We are witnessing development across the country, look at the expressways. A huge gathering like this is always expected at the PM's address irrespective of the weather." Karuna Singh, a Delhi resident, mentioned the consecration ceremony at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, the 2016 surgical strike and the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 to say, "We are lucky to have witnessed such moments."

**For our unemployed youth
For the backbreaking inflation
For our suffering farmers
For our molested women
For the attacks on reservation**

THE ANSWER IS IN YOUR VOTE

Vote for Congress!

HAATH BADLEGA HALAAT

AAP putting pressure on its leaders to do fake sting operation on me: Maliwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal, who was allegedly assaulted by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar, claimed on Wednesday that the party was putting pressure on everyone to leak her personal photos and do "fake sting operations". She said that she got a call from a senior leader of the party on Tuesday. "He told me how there is a lot of pressure on everyone, they have to speak dirty things against Swati, they have to break her by leaking her personal photos," she said. Maliwal on Wednesday claimed that there is a conspiracy within the Aam Aadmi Party to malign her by "leaking her personal photos". In a post on X, Maliwal, who has accused Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's personal secretary Bibhav Kumar of assaulting her, alleged that AAP leaders are under immense pressure to speak ill of her. She stated, "Yesterday, I got a call from a senior leader of the party. He told me how there is a lot of pressure on everyone, they have to speak dirty things against Swati, they have to break her by leaking her personal photos. It is being said that whoever supports her will be expelled from the party. Someone has been given the duty of doing PC and someone else has been given the duty of tweeting." Maliwal further claimed that party members have been assigned various tasks to undermine her, such as contacting volunteers in America to gather information against her and preparing fake sting operations through beat



reporters close to the accused. Without naming anyone specifically, Maliwal alleged that a woman minister of Delhi was maligning her character. "I am not angry with them, the accused is a very powerful man. Even the biggest leaders are afraid of him. No one has the courage to take a stand against him. I don't even expect anything from anyone. I feel sad that the woman minister of Delhi is smilingly maligning the character of an old female colleague of the party, she said. "I have started a fight for my self-respect, I will continue to fight until I get justice. I am completely alone in this fight but I will not give up," she added. Meanwhile, the Delhi Police has brought back Bibhav Kumar from Mumbai, where he had been taken for data discovery from his iPhone. Kumar is currently in a five-day police custody in connection with the alleged assault on Swati Maliwal at the Delhi CM's residence. His phones, laptop, and CCTV recordings from Kejriwal's house have been sent for forensic examination.

What BJP did to AAP, it will do to other Opposition parties: Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday alleged Prime Minister Narendra Modi is working on a special project of 'one nation, one leader' and claimed that what was happening with the AAP is an experiment that will be replicated with other Opposition parties. Addressing the Adhivakta Sammelan organised by the Aam Aadmi party (AAP) legal cell, Kejriwal, who is out on interim bail till June 1, appealed to the lawyers to "save the country". "I have no personal grudge against Prime Minister Modi. Ensure that PM Modi should not form government again. Lawyers contributed in a big way to freedom struggle. Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru,

Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Moti Lal Nehru — all of them were lawyers. "There is little time left. Whatever you can do for campaigning in Delhi and across the country, please participate," he said. Kejriwal told the gathering that he was not there to ask for votes but to appeal to them to "save the country". "What is happening in the country is dangerous. They arrested me. The PM is working on a special project, 'one nation one leader', he said. Kejriwal said the opposition leaders who speak against him will be put in jail. He named former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren, former Delhi ministers Satyendar Jain and Manish Sisodia and himself who were put behind bars. They have put many ministers



of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata didi (Banerjee) in jail. They can put Tejashwi Yadav or Pinarayi Vijayan in jail. No opposition chief minister will be left. They split the NCP and the Shiv Sena in two parts," he alleged. The chief minister said in Russia, President Vladimir Putin either imprisoned the opposition leaders or got them killed and won the elections. Likewise, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina put the opposition leaders in jail in Bangladesh and won with majority. "Even in Pakistan, Imran Khan was sent to jail and his party

symbol was snatched. Something similar can happen here. Either they will not get elections conducted or even if they will, all the opposition leaders will be in jail," he claimed. "This is going to happen in our country. The AAP is just an experiment. They have made a plan to crush our party," he charged. Stressing that there has been no money trail found in the excise policy case, he said there is a theory that has been floated that the money went to Goa. "Did it vanish in this air? Three days before the Punjab assembly elections, the prime minister said in Abohar that Kejriwal wants to break the country in two parts, wants to make Khalistan and become its prime minister. What is this? Is it toys' play? "Despite this, we got 92 seats out of 117. This means no one takes him seriously. The way this is comical, in the same way the excise policy case is comical," he asserted. He said the AAP has been made an accused in the excise policy case and claimed that this "model will be replicated on other parties too". "But I want to say that the AAP is no longer a four-member party. People love the AAP not because of me but because of our work. The AAP resides in hearts of 140 crore people. It is a thought that is spreading. "If you freeze our bank accounts, people will deposit crores of rupees in multiple ban accounts in the country. If you shut our office, people will open hundreds of offices across the country. It is impossible to trample the AAP," he asserted.

BJP winning all seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi: Puri

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Senior BJP leader and Union Minister, Hardeep Singh Puri on Wednesday claimed that BJP is winning all seven Lok Sabha seats of Delhi. Addressing the media here he said that the party has completed several development works worth 54 thousand crore rupees in the last 10 year in the national capital. Slamming the Arvind Kejriwal led Delhi Government for apathy towards its citizens, he said that Aam Aadmi Party did not implement central flagship like Ayushman Bharat scheme and Pradhan Mantri Awash Yojana in Delhi but the Chief Minister had built luxurious houses for himself. Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls in the national capital, he

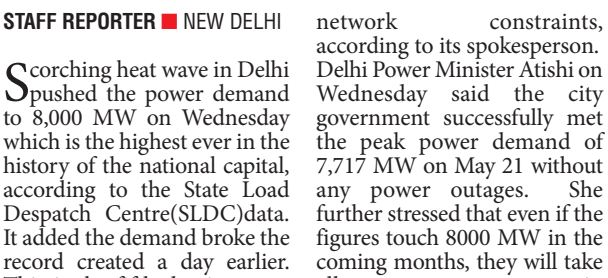
enlisted the details of the projects approved by the Centre in the last one decade. He said that Rs 16,188.29 crores have been approved for DDA/MCD/UDF projects, Rs 31,436.74 crores for Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) during 2014-2024 and Rs 6,422 crores allotted through MoHUA missions. for the national capital. Constituency-wise, Puri said, North West Delhi had received Rs 7560.36 crore for 44 projects of DDA/MCD/UDF, New Delhi (Rs 1,144.86 crore) for 51 projects, South Delhi (Rs 1,832.60 crore) for 111 projects, Chandni Chowk (Rs 271.93 crore) for 18 projects, North East Delhi (Rs 89.98 crore) for 11 projects, East Delhi constituency (Rs 3,039.48 crore) for 32 projects, West Delhi (Rs 2,232.48 crore) for 332 projects.

City power demand soars to highest ever 8,000 MW

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Scorching heat wave in Delhi pushed the power demand to 8,000 MW on Wednesday which is the highest ever in the history of the national capital, according to the State Load Despatch Centre (SLDC) data. It added the demand broke the record created a day earlier. This is the fifth day in a row Delhi's peak power demand has crossed the 7000 MW and broken the previous all time May high of 7070 MW, recorded on May 19, 2022. On their part, BRPL and BYPL successfully met the peak power demand in their respective areas. Tata Power-DDL served an all-time peak power demand of 2,268 MW without any outages and

network constraints, according to its spokesperson. Delhi Power Minister Atishi on Wednesday said the city government successfully met the peak power demand of 7,717 MW on May 21 without any power outages. She further stressed that even if the figures touch 8000 MW in the coming months, they will take all measures to meet it. Addressing a press conference, Atishi said despite peak demand, there was no problem with the power supply. "Despite that peak demand, we are giving 24-hour electricity. There is no load shedding and no blackouts. I would like to recall that in 2014 when Delhi was reeling under a heatwave, the peak power demand had reached



5925 MW. At that time, there were six to eight-hour-long blackouts," she said. She congratulated the power department, the three discoms and their employees for successfully meeting the power demand. On Tuesday afternoon, the power demand surged to an all-time high of 7717 MW, breaking the previous record

of 7695 MW set on June 29, 2022. Remarkably, just hours later at 23:01, this record was surpassed again, reaching 7726 MW in fact, during April 2024, the peak power demand was higher on 83% of the corresponding days compared to April 2023, with a difference of up to 32%. This disparity highlights the profound impact that weather can have on a city's power consumption patterns. The power demand can be attributed to weather conditions that led residents to use more air conditioning / coolers, leading to an increase in electricity consumption. It is interesting to know you know, air conditioning can contribute to 30-50% of a household's or company's yearly energy expense?

Political powerhouse South Delhi to see Bidhuri vs Pehalwan battle

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

South Delhi Lok Sabha Constituency in Delhi is a political powerhouse renowned for its significant influence in Indian politics. The plush farmhouses on barren lands in Chhatrapur, the vast rural belt behind them, the planned neighbourhoods such as Saket and Vasant Kunj and the congested unauthorised colonies in Sangam Vihar and Palam all reflect the wide variety in demography and topography of South Delhi Parliamentary constituency which will witness a direct contest between BJP's Ramvir Singh Bidhuri and AAP's Sahi Ram Pehalwan who is the INDIA bloc candidate. The election is being fought on the issue of 'Abki baar Modi Sarkar'. In the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the AAP and Congress have forged an alliance in Delhi which has seven Lok Sabha seats. The South Delhi Lok Sabha constituency constituted

in 1966, comprises Bijwasan, Palam, Mehrauli, Chhattarpur, Deoli (SC), Ambedkar Nagar (SC), Sangam Vihar, Kalkaji, Tughlakabad and Badarpur assembly segments. On vote share parameter, there are three major players - Gujjars, Jats and Purvanchalis. Together, according to the numbers pegged by the political parties, Jats, Gujjars and Purvanchalis make almost one-third of the total voting population in South Delhi. And in this Jat-Gujjar-Purvanchali mix, the Purvanchalis form one half, and the Gujjars and Jats taken together form another. Delimitation and immigration have affected vote bases in multiple ways. Traditionally, Badarpur, Chhattarpur, Tughlakabad, Bijwasan and parts of Mehrauli are Gurjar dominated while Jat-dominated areas are Bijwasan, Palam and parts of Deoli and Sangam Vihar. Caste has been an important factor in elections as well. For



Bijwasan has always had an MLA who is a Jat. In the past two decades, several villages in Chhattarpur and Badarpur have transformed from Gujjardominated villages to Purvanchal-dominated pockets. Some have resulted in the formation of urbanised slums such as Aya Nagar and Palam Village. The biggest unauthorised colony in Delhi such

as Sangam Vihar are now a melting pot of identities. Currently, the rural belt where most such villages are located are marked by the frequent presence of posh farmhouses, some of them paving way for villages in the interiors. Bidhuri, a seasoned politician, is currently an MLA from the Badarpur Assembly segment and the Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Assembly. Bidhuri listed the development work for Delhi done by the Modi government, including peripheral roads, Eco Park, six-lane National Highway, India Gate Tunnel, National War Memorial, Kartavya Marg, new Parliament building, and the statue of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose at India Gate. During his election speech, Bidhuri has focused on corruption cases of Arvind Kejriwal. BJP candidate started his political journey in 1970 as an ABVP member. He was associated with Jana Sangh till 1974 as an active member. He was the Chairman of the Haryana State Warehousing Corporation with the rank of Cabinet Minister from 1981-85. He was elected to the first Legislative Assembly of Delhi in 1993 and since then has been elected as a member of the Legislative Assembly four times. After being elected MLA for the fourth time in 2020, he was elected the Leader of the BJP

Legislature Party and became the Leader of the Opposition with the rank of a cabinet minister. Bidhuri was nominated as a member of the National Executive of the BJP in 2013. Sahi Ram Pehalwan is a two-time MLA from Tughlakabad and a Gujjar leader. Earlier, he was with the BSP and was a two-time councillor. Pehalwan was also the Deputy Mayor of the South Delhi Municipal Corporation. Lack of schools, colleges, healthcare facilities, poor roads, water and drainage are among the top issues that echo across all 10 assembly segments in South Delhi constituency. But the priorities differ from place to place and, often, from one community to another in the same place. In 2008, when delimitation was carried out for Delhi's parliamentary constituencies, all assembly segments in erstwhile South Delhi, except Kalkaji, went to

the current Lok Sabha segments of New Delhi, East Delhi and the newly formed West Delhi. The assembly constituencies that the old South Delhi seat had to part with include Janakpuri, Tilak Nagar, Hari Nagar, Rajouri Garden, Delhi Cantonment, R K Puram, Hauz Khas, Malviya Nagar and Okhla. South Delhi Lok Sabha constituency, established in 1966, is among Delhi's seven parliamentary seats. Initially a Bharatiya Janata Party stronghold, it transitioned to Indian National Congress post-2009 delimitation. Ramesh Bidhuri, BJP's representative, has held the Member of Parliament position since 2014. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, BJP's Ramesh Bidhuri won the South Delhi Lok Sabha seat bagging 56.68 per cent of the votes polled. The BJP won all seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi in 2019. In 2009, AAP's Candidate Raghav Chadha Lost Against BJP's Ramesh Bidhuri From The South Delhi Seat.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Warcraft for all

Project Udbhav celebrates India's rich heritage in military statecraft and makes it citizen-inclusive

The adage, "If you want peace, be prepared for war," reflects a longstanding philosophy in India. Historically, India has maintained peace while staying strong, refraining from warmongering unless provoked. This approach stems from ancient Indian wisdom, emphasising the importance of advancement in warfare to deter any potential threats. India's rich and ancient heritage in military statecraft, rooted in the Vedas, Puranas and the Mahabharata, forms a significant yet often overlooked aspect of its cultural legacy. The Army's Project Udbhav aims to bring this historical wealth into the public eye, engaging citizens in the defence domain and fostering a deeper understanding of India's strategic and military traditions. The Vedas, among the oldest sacred texts, provide early references to warfare, strategy and the ethical dimensions of combat. The Puranas, a genre of ancient Indian literature, elaborated on the principles of statecraft and warfare. Texts like the Vishnu Purana and Agni Purana offer insights into military organisation, the roles and responsibilities of warriors and the strategic use of resources. The Mahabharata, one of the greatest epics in world literature, is a treasure trove of military wisdom. The epic not only narrates the Kurukshetra war but also delves into detailed discussions on strategy, the art of war and the moral dilemmas faced by warriors.

Other ancient Indian texts offer timeless wisdom adaptable to modern defence strategies, such as intelligence, psychological warfare and ethical conduct. Launched last year, Project Udbhav delves deep into these ancient texts and aims to promote indigenous discourse in the Army by integrating India's ancient strategic acumen

into contemporary military domain, ensuring that the force remains future-ready. It is also an endeavour to involve our citizens and educate them about warfare for any eventuality. Involving citizens in understanding warfare and being prepared is crucial for several reasons. It fosters national pride and identity by highlighting India's intellectual and strategic achievements, countering one-dimensional portrayals of its history. Under Project Udbhav, workshops, seminars and online courses will educate citizens about ancient Indian military texts and their modern relevance. Collaborations with universities and research institutions will ensure academic rigour and accessibility. Additionally, a series of books, documentaries and articles will highlight various aspects of Indian military statecraft, including translations and commentaries on key texts for a broader audience. Project Udbhav is laudable as it represents an endeavour to weave a strategic vocabulary and conceptual framework deeply embedded in India's philosophical and cultural heritage. This initiative underscores the importance of understanding and valuing the rich military heritage that has shaped India's strategic culture, offering invaluable lessons for contemporary and future defence strategies. It is indeed a praiseworthy effort to revive ancient wisdom lest it is lost.

PICTALK



Weaver birds build a nest on a tree, in Nadia

PTI

Fighting age fraud for Indian football's integrity

From local matches to the big leagues, age falsification distorts fair play and erodes the essence of sportsmanship

The issue of age fraud has plagued Indian football for decades. This persistent dishonesty has not only undermined the integrity of the sport but has also stunted the growth of genuine talent, ultimately leading to India's poor performance at the senior team level.

For the last 50 years, age fraud has been an open secret within the football community. Players, coaches and officials are all aware of it, yet the problem persists unchecked. From local tournaments to State, district and national leagues, age fraud is rampant. Shockingly, it even extends to the national team, where overage players take the field under pretences. This systemic dishonesty is a national disgrace. The lack of genuineness and honesty in our footballing ecosystem is a national embarrassment.

My personal experience highlights this issue vividly. When I was 14, I shared accommodation with much older players—some even 24—yet they possessed fake birth certificates claiming



they were my age. These older players competed alongside me in national leagues, creating an uneven playing field and undermining the credibility of the competitions. This personal encounter opened my eyes to the widespread nature of this fraud.

The impact of age fraud is profound. Young, talented players who play by the rules find their careers destroyed by those who cheat the system. Genuine athletes are overshadowed by older players who dominate youth categories through sheer physical C cognitive advantage. This not only robs honest play-

ers of opportunities but also skews the development pathway, leaving India with a senior team that lacks the authentic experience and growth needed to compete internationally.

Cases of age fraud emerge regularly from all corners of the country, yet there is little action from authorities. Until the Government takes decisive measures to eradicate this issue, Indian football will remain stagnant. The current State of affairs ensures that we will never achieve success on the international stage. It is a profound shame and it undermines the spirit of the sport. The rigged system favours deceit over talent

and honesty, leaving the sport in shambles. It is time for a rigorous overhaul, strict enforcement of age verification processes and a zero-tolerance policy towards fraud. Only through a genuine commitment to integrity can Indian football hope to reclaim its lost potential and earn respect on the global stage.

Until then, we must acknowledge this harsh reality: as long as we continue to cheat, we will never truly win. The future of Indian football depends on our ability to foster a culture of honesty and fairness, giving every player a fair chance to shine based on merit, not deception. The future of Indian football hinges on our commitment to integrity. We must give every player a fair chance to succeed based on their true abilities. Until we do, our dreams of footballing glory will remain just that—dreams. The time for change is now, for the sake of our sport and the generations of players to come. *(The writer is a football coach; views are personal)*



ARYAN RAJVANSH

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Epic election battle enters decisive phase

The ultimate battleground is UP, where Yogi Adityanath's unwavering leadership is crucial in the BJP's fight to maintain its stronghold



SIDHARTH MISHRA

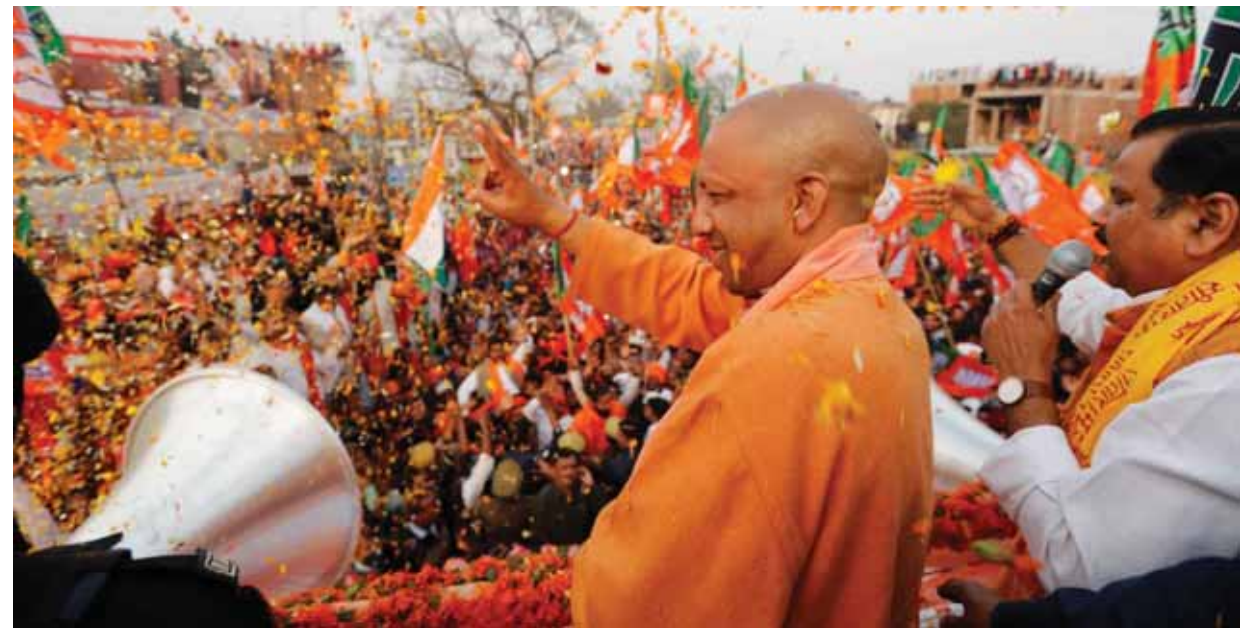
Another 10 days to go and the two-month-long election process would be over. These elections would be remembered for the spearhead of the ruling party, Narendra Modi and of the opposition, Rahul Gandhi battling the heat and dust of the famed Indian summer to spur their cadres to give the best performance.

In the national media, what's being discussed is the punishing schedule of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president JP Nadda trying to match him with almost equal vigour. From the opposition side, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has ensured to create the perspective that the campaign just did not rest on the shoulders of the Gandhi family.

In any war, there always is a clinching battle that decides who won and who lost. In World War II, the Battle for Berlin proved to be the most crucial. It's the image of the Soviet soldiers putting the flag of the USSR on the Reichstag in Berlin in May 1945 which marked the defeat of Germany under Adolf Hitler.

Similarly, the general elections of 2024 will always be remembered and will be decided on who wins the battle of Uttar Pradesh. With 80 seats, Uttar Pradesh is the citadel of the BJP monolith, which has a dominant presence in the Hindi heartland States of Bihar, UP, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Haryana. Unlike MP, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Haryana, in Uttar Pradesh the BJP is not in a direct contest with the Congress but a strong regional outfit — Samajwadi Party. UP also cannot be compared to Bihar, where it's fighting another strong regional party — the Rashtriya Janata Dal but in the companionship of another strong regional outfit — the Janata Dal (United).

Thus in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP is completely on its own with nowhere else to look forward to but its cadres and leaders. Here the role of Uttar Pradesh chief



minister Yogi Adityanath becomes crucial. The Mahant of the Goraknath Math has been in campaign mode ever since he retained power with a thumping majority in 2022.

He first delivered the Ram temple at Ayodhya. The consecration of the idol at Ramlalla temple in January this year has been the biggest-ever achievement of the right-wing schema in the country. This would not have been possible but for the determined, firm and passionate execution of the construction plan by the Uttar Pradesh Government of not just the temple complex but the whole of the city of Ayodhya.

The second has been to galvanise the cadres and keep them functioning for a full two months to ensure that the rivals are stopped and checked in their determined assault. He started the polls campaign with the Prabudh Jan Sammelan on March 27 and would continue it till May-end the last phase of polling.

Prime Minister Modi's campaign has been faulted several times and has also caused concern among his supporters for allowing the achieve-



YOGI ADITYANATH, WHO IN THE PAST SEVEN YEARS HAS COMBINED HIS VISION WITH A STRONG EMPHASIS ON LAW AND ORDER AND CULTURAL NATIONALISM (HINDUTVA), HAS CONTINUED TO KEEP HIS CAMPAIGN ON THE SAME TRACK

ments of the past ten years to be pushed to the background in pursuing a very polarising agenda. The campaign has not aligned with Modi's espousal of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas" (Collective Efforts, Inclusive Growth, Everyone's Trust) slogan, which encapsulates an inclusive approach aimed at fostering economic growth and social cohesion.

Prime Minister's initiatives, such as Make in India, Digital India and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission), which underscore his commitment to modernising India's economy and infrastructure, have seldom found space in his speeches. This has somewhere allowed the opposition to attack the Government. On the other hand, Yogi Adityanath, who in the past seven years has combined his vision with a strong emphasis on law and order and cultural nationalism (Hindutva), has continued to keep his campaign on the same track. His leadership in Uttar Pradesh is characterised by a drive to restore cultural heritage and end minority appeasement, as seen in initiatives like the grand celebration of Diwali in Ayodhya and the renam-

ing of places to reflect their historical Hindu significance.

The lynchpin of his governance has been the emphasis on strict law enforcement, aiming to improve safety and reduce crime, which resonates even with many of his non-Hindu constituents. His determined perusal of anti-crime drives has found a fan following that goes beyond the traditional Hindutva admirers. Coming back to the battle of Uttar Pradesh, it would take the collective strength of the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Uttar Pradesh chief minister to make the BJP bandwagon have a safe journey to the national Capital. Modi and Yogi are both distinct personalities and both have significantly impacted Indian politics and governance, albeit in different ways. On June 4, in the event of the BJP unfurling its flag, the contributions of the Uttar Pradesh chief minister would as much be accounted for as that of the Prime Minister.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AMOeba KILLS

Madam — Strange are the ways of meeting death for a young soul. A five-year-old girl has died of brain-eating amoeba after taking a bath in a pond in Malappuram district of Kerala. She was undergoing treatment at the Kozhikode Medical College of Institute of Maternal and Child Health. She had taken a dip in the pond on May 1 and started showing symptoms of fever, headache and vomiting on May 10. The girl, afflicted by amoebic meningoencephalitis, a rare brain infection caused by a free-living amoeba found in contaminated waters. Still waters are dangerous. Don't let go.

This is not the first case reported. Amebiasis is an intestinal (bowel) illness caused by a microscopic (tiny) parasite called Entamoeba histolytica, which is spread through human feces (poop). Often there are no symptoms, but sometimes it causes diarrhoea (loose stool/poop), nausea (a feeling of sickness in the stomach) and weight loss. The main symptoms of the disease are fever, headache, vomiting and seizures. All infected patients have lost their lives due to the disease so far, as the mortality rate for this rare brain infection is 100 per cent.

Jayanthi Subramaniam | Mumbai

DRONES IN AGRICULTURE

Madam — Apropos the article, "Promise and challenges of drones in agriculture," published on May 20, this is my response. Drones, or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) are becoming increasingly popular in India's agricultural sector. Drones offer a range of benefits to farmers, like improved efficiency and enhanced crop yields. However, some challenges may hinder the adoption of drone technology such as fear of job loss, lack of knowledge and training and regulatory barriers. Drones can capture high-resolution images and provide information on crop health, growth and yield.

Leadership vacuum in Iran



Apropos to the front page article, "Iran Presidies in chopper crash after stinging Israel," published on May 21. The shocking death of the President in a helicopter crash had left Iran in the lurch and uncertainty from

all sides. For the last three years; after he took the Presidential position in 2021, Mr Raisi has managed to frame Iran as a Shia Muslim leader block of the world with his conservative cleric ideology.

His sudden death had created a leadership vacuum in Iran in the devil's time. The US and Israel are among the direct culprits of Tehran's current situation, despite their denial on personal grounds respectively. Iran needs time to cope with all the big losses it has suffered recently, according to the according to the President, Foreign Minister and other key authorities. The recent death incident had scratched the old scars of Iran when it lost its Revolutionary Guard General Qasem Soleimani. Iran has been a victim of targeted killings especially for VVIPs, ever since its bitter relationship with the US over the last two decades. Time will heal everything itself, the domestic and international uncertainty will shed away for Iran with time and normalcy will be restored.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

This can help farmers to identify issues early and take corrective measures to optimise their inputs and outputs. But, drones are expensive and many farmers may not have the financial resources to invest in this technology. Hence, there is a need for more subsidies incentives and economical financing options to make drones more affordable and attractive to farmers. It requires a coordinated effort from the Government, the industry, farmers and the civil society to create a conducive and supportive environment for the use of drones in agriculture. There is little doubt that drones can be a powerful tool for transforming Indian agriculture and ensuring the country's food security and prosperity.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

MUSEUMS PRESERVE HISTORY

Madam — Apropos of the article "Museums are pillars of culture and education," published on May 21. Museums

are an inevitable part of our lives as they depict culture, history and artefacts. They tell us about the evolution of man and let us get familiar with the historical and scientific facts as well. But these days, people, especially children, hardly show interest in visiting museums as they find it boring. The educational institutions must include visits to museums in the curriculum to enable students to broaden their horizons and get valuable knowledge. Museums are a great source of understanding our civilisation, culture and heritage and help explore various branches of research work. The Government should take the initiative to help the masses visit museums as they are the storehouses for preserving our ancient history and heritage.

Abhilasha Gupta | Mohali

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

DELETERIOUS EFFECTS OF WORKPLACE GASLIGHTING

It is a menace that undermines individuals' perceptions, beliefs and reality



SAKSHI SETHI

In the network of modern workplaces, emerges a shadowy spectre, threatening the very fabric of organisational culture and well-being - Gaslighting, a form of psychological manipulation in which one person seeks to undermine another person's perceptions, beliefs or reality often done regularly or subtly making the victim doubt their perception, memories or sanity by shifting blame or responsibility onto the victim.

Gaslighting can create a hostile work environment where employees feel anxious and confused and at times even question their competence causing a detrimental effect on themselves, their teams and organisational culture. It is a form of psychological manipulation that can have serious consequences for the well-being and productivity of those involved. When talked about the workplace, the term Gaslight can manifest in myriad forms, often subtle and insidious. It may begin with seemingly innocuous comments undermining an individual's contributions or abilities and may gradually lead to dealing with small instances of manipulation that escalate over time. Gaslighting tactics often target an individual's sense of self-worth, competence and confidence resulting in significant emotional distress, including feelings of anxiety, depression and confusion. It even isolates victims from their support networks by undermining their relationships with coworkers, friends and even family members.



It is often believed that toxic workplace gaslighting can stem from various causes that are often rooted in systemic issues, interpersonal dynamics or individual motivations such as power imbalances, insecure leadership, lack of accountability, interpersonal conflicts and many more. When communication breaks down, tensions escalate, egos clash and employees/individuals start resorting to gaslighting as a means of gaining leverage or inflicting harm.

Addressing the toxic workplace gaslighting requires a comprehensive approach that involves raising awareness, fostering a culture of respect and accountability and providing support for those impacted. Promoting transparency, accountability and psychological safety in organisations is crucial to recognise toxic gaslighting behaviour effectively.

Undoubtedly, workplace gaslighting thrives on power imbalances and psychological manipulation. Victims of gaslighting suffer immense stress, anxiety and identity erosion. Prolonged exposure leads to physical health issues like headaches, GI problems and sleep disturbances, weakening immunity and increasing illness risks.

It becomes crucial for the victims to first recognise and validate their experiences, refusing to internalise the gaslighter's manipulations. The use of assertive communication techniques, such as "I" Statements and boundary-setting, can help individuals confront gaslighting behaviour while preserving their self-esteem and dignity. Additionally, fostering a culture of accountability and transparency within organisations empowers employees to speak out against gaslighting tactics without fear of reprisal. Remember, when personal gain takes precedence over ethical conduct, gaslighting may become a tempting strategy. The only way that may benefit the victims of gaslighting is by seeking support from trusted colleagues, mentors or mental health professionals. By creating a workplace culture that promotes open communication, respect and accountability can the organisation help prevent gaslighting and other forms of manipulation from taking hold as left unchecked, it can inflict lasting psychological harm, exacerbating issues of mental health and well-being in the workplace.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Do not withdraw capital support for oil PSUs



UTTAM GUPTA

The Government slashes equity infusions for three major oil sector CPSUs by 50 per cent, contradicting its 2023-24 budget commitments



In the Budget for the financial year 2023-24 (April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024) presented on February 1 last year, the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced an equity infusion of Rs 30,000 crore in three Central public sector undertakings (CPSUs) viz. Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL), are majority-owned by the Government of India (GOI). She had also proposed Rs 5,000 crore for buying crude oil to bolster its strategic reserves (SRs) in underground storages at Mangalore in Karnataka and Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh. The equity infusions in IOCL/BPCL/HPCL were meant to support their capital investment plans for the transition to 'Green Energy' and achieve 'Net Zero' objectives. Net zero refers to a situation where the emissions of polluting gases such as carbon dioxide due to human activities and their removals are in balance over a given period. On the other hand, the allocation for SRs was meant to guard against the possibility of any disruption in its supply.

Under the above, IOCL and BPCL had done necessary spade work including approval by their respective boards for coming up with 'rights issues' of requisite amounts to enable the Union Government to give effect to its capital contribution (albeit by way of equity) promised in the budget. In the case of HPCL, the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) having acquired majority equity shares from the GOI in FY 2017-18 was to come up with the issue of the preferential issue to give effect to the latter's budgetary intention. However, in a big climb down, in November 2023, the Government reduced the amount of equity infusion to the trio by 50 per cent to Rs 15,000 crore even while deferring implementation of the budgetary announcement on the SRs. Meanwhile, the Interim Budget for FY 2024-25 presented by Sitharaman on February 1, 2024, didn't show any allocation for equity infusion for FY 2023-24. The said amount has been earmarked for the FY 2024-25. This was confirmed by Finance Secretary T V

Somanathan at a post-budget press conference. As for SRs, the budget documents do not provide any funds either in the revised estimate for FY 2023-24 or during FY 2024-25.

Why did the Government climb down?

Even as the Ministry of Finance (MoF) hasn't given any reason, it seems the decision was prompted by a significant boost to their profitability during 2023-24. The IOCL posted a standalone net profit of close to Rs 40,000 crore as against a profit of a little over Rs 8000 crore during 2022-23. The BPCL posted a net profit of around Rs 26,500 crore in 2023-24, compared to about Rs 1,850 crore profit during 2022-23. The HPCL posted a profit of around Rs 14,500 crore during 2023-24 against a loss of about Rs 9,000 crore in 2022-23.



JUST BECAUSE DURING FY 2023-24, THEY HAVE IMPROVED THEIR PROFITS DUE TO CONTINUING MODERATION IN THE PRICE OF CRUDE OIL, IT WON'T BE LOGICAL TO TRIM THE PROMISED BUDGETARY SUPPORT

When the companies can generate good profits hence, a good investible surplus for meeting their investment commitments, why do they need the Government's budgetary support? But, there is much more than what meets the eye on a plain reading of the profit numbers. First, out of the net profit, a substantial amount is paid as dividends to the shareholders. For instance, in case IOCL @Rs 7 on a share of Rs 10 each, the payout during 2023-24 on a total of 1,412 crore outstanding shares would be around Rs 10,000 crore.

Second, these undertakings are engaged in the business of refining crude oil to produce a range of finished products such as petrol, diesel, LPG etc besides importing them to meet their demand. That makes their operations highly capital-intensive. Consequently, their investment requirements for expansion and growth are heavy. This is exacerbated by their commitments regarding the transition to 'Green Energy'. While IOCL has decided to

achieve 'Net Zero' by 2040, BPCL and HPCL intend to reach this goal by 2045.

Third, the most potent reason as to why the Government shouldn't backtrack on the capital support once promised to oil PSUs has to do with the loss the latter had suffered during FY 2022-23, courtesy of directions given by the former regarding setting retail prices of petrol and diesel. To understand the full ramifications of such orders, let us look at some basics.

Petrol and diesel were deregulated long back in June 2010 and November 2014 respectively. As a result, oil PSUs got the freedom to fix their retail prices. The price is fixed as refinery-gate price or RGP (import parity price or IPP and export parity price or EPP of the fuel in the ratio of 80:20) plus freight, marketing costs, marketing margin, dealers' commission taxes and duties. Considering that over 85 per cent of India's crude oil needed for making refined products is imported (the balance 15 per cent is sourced from domestic companies such as ONGC, Oil India Limited or OIL) etc, an increase/decrease in its international price should lead to corresponding increase/decrease in the retail price of petrol and diesel but only if the marketing PSUs are allowed to fix the price strictly as per the formula. But, this is rarely done. The Government issues tacit instructions to IOCL/BPCL/HPCL (together, they account for around 90 per cent of the domestic fuel retail network in the country) to fix the retail price. This is driven by extraneous considerations. Ever since the start of the Ukraine war in February 2022, the international price of oil has been on the boil. The average of the basket of crude oil that India imports during April-September 2022 was \$ 103.7 per barrel against the \$90 per barrel that prevailed before the war started. But,

these PSUs were told to keep the price of petrol and diesel unchanged for six months. This led to substantial under-recovery from the sale of these products.

For instance, in June 2022, the price of petrol in Delhi remained at Rs 97 per litre corresponding to the pre-war crude price of US\$ 90 per barrel. This was despite the price of crude jumping to US\$ 116 per barrel which would have required the price to be set at Rs 112 per litre. Consequently, on the sale of petrol during June 2022, the PSUs suffered under-recovery of Rs 15 per litre (112-97).

Cumulatively, the three PSUs incurred a loss of around Rs 40,000 crore during the first half of FY 2022-23. As the crude price started to decrease from October 2022 onward, their finances became a shade better during the second half. For the whole year, they posted a meagre profit of Rs 850 crore. The capital infusion of Rs 30,000 crore proposed in the budget for 2023-24 was meant to help them offset the losses incurred in the previous year.

Just because during FY 2023-24, they have improved their profits due to continuing moderation in the price of crude oil, it won't be logical to trim the promised budgetary support. Moreover, they need some cushion to guard against crude prices moving north yet again; that possibility is not ruled out considering the continuing tense geo-political situation. For the same reason, the Government shouldn't defer bolstering the strategic buffer of crude oil.

In sync with its emphasis on 'predictability' and 'stability' of the policy, having deregulated petrol and diesel, the Government shouldn't interfere in the process of setting prices by the oil PSUs.

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

Is AI a game changer or a disruptor in the communication landscape?

Artificial Intelligence has introduced complex dilemmas, balancing data-driven insights with human ingenuity and profoundly impacting various sectors

The growing tentacles of AI have become a push factor for change, innovation and disruption in the borderless world that we live in today. AI tools, processes and its vast architecture have been billed as game changers, influencing a vast range of stakeholders including policymakers, Governments, multi-lateral bodies, agencies and institutions, which are responsible for carving out the road ahead. The debate today hovers around whether AI has become a disruptor or a transformative catalyst leading to a new normal, which is unpredictable, tech-driven and bereft of the necessary human connection. It has disrupted the communication engagement matrix to a terrain that at



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

times is daunting, unpredictable, spontaneous and instant. In the given context, it is important to understand that AI has truly created layers of dilemma, a tug-of-war related to ideas, content, data analysis and the conflict between human minds and data-driven mindsets. We are in a situation perhaps where we over-depend on machines, their learning tools & predictability leading to an

ecosystem that is technology savvy, the behaviour of stakeholders being driven by data metrics and accompanying models and influenced by the power of prediction. The impact of AI has been profound in several areas, as the search for the unknown has grown bigger. A report on India's media and entertainment sector published by EY #Reinventin 2024 mentions that AI can provide an Rs 450 billion boost to the Indian M&E sector by 2027. The report also mentions AI and especially Gen AI - gives it the tools the sector has always dreamed of and can result in a 10 per cent revenue growth and 15 per cent cost efficiency. AI is now used for measuring the effectiveness of campaigns, the growth of cus-

tomised solutions for addressing issues, analysing data for data-driven narratives and stakeholder engagement and changing equations in the context of the client-agency relationship. There is a need to balance human competence with tech tools and the fear of the unknown in the future. For AI to succeed its performance indicators must be based on open, transparent and inclusive. Its tools are re-engineered to reflect the spirit of "Oneness", and "The World is One Family" and the social and economic impact is studied and analysed. As far as outreach is concerned, the need is to balance the technology push that characterises AI outlining its operational efficiency and the creative quotient of human

beings. As a tool for outreach AI supplements outreach with data-focused audience insights which provide practitioners with a feel of audience preferences and behaviours leading to focused and targeted communication strategies. The data processing of the medium also leads to a better and more comprehensive understanding of stakeholder demographics, dynamics, strategy protocols and audience behaviour. There is an urgent need to integrate the communication matrix with the broad themes to ensure a seamless operation of both verticals. AI being futuristic commands the means to create a positive perception of the AI architecture. Some of the themes to be discussed are AI and Machine

Learning in communication networks, AI-powered communication networks: Shaping a greener digital future and including other sectors such as health, environment and education. In all such discussions, the process of communicating the theme will be critical for both policymakers and practitioners. It is also critical that in the era of change, the continuity of technology is weaved with access that is open and democratic. The benefits of positive change must be beneficial to all through the principle of open sourcing; tools, processes, opportunities and community participation. There must be standard operating procedures and processes that ensure the standardisation of algorithms, address

the frailties of human behaviour and integrate the machine and human mind. Technological advancement is only possible if the gap is bridged between the haves and have-nots. AI as a tool for policy formulation and information dissemination should be based on the strong foundations of adaptability, cohesiveness, inclusivity, access and a proper understanding of the complex and diverse social ecosystem of which we are its key constituents. As the impact of AI grows across different terrains, the evolution has to be in sync with human abilities and the irreplaceable human trait that characterises outreach. To ensure a sustainable process, AI needs to follow the five mantras of outreach commu-

nication: Being Receptive, Responsive, Responsible and Reciprocal and Reconcile to the needs and requirements of an ecosystem that believes in equity, equal participation, mutual recognition and collaboration. The success of communication depends on the balance between perception, tools and trust i.e. positioned across different platforms and sectors. A model of this nature will certainly ensure a perfect symphony between AI and the communication landscape bringing forth an effective and lasting communication process.

(The writer is a former civil servant. Views are Personal. Inputs by Vaishnavie Srinivasan and Zoya Ahmad)

Markets climb on buying in Reliance, Infosys



Equity benchmark indices ended with gains on Wednesday amid buying in blue-chips Reliance Industries and Infosys amid mixed cues from global markets.

Rupee rises 3 paise to close at 83.28 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee appreciated by 3 paise to settle at 83.28 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday amid softening crude oil prices.



positive tone in the domestic markets and weakness in crude oil prices may support the rupee at lower levels, Choudhary added.

expected to trade in a range of Rs 83 to Rs 83.55, Choudhary added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, advanced 0.09 per cent to 104.75, as most Fed officials warned of cutting interest rates too early and need more data to cut rates.

rose 68.75 points, or 0.31 per cent, to close at 22,597.80 points. Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Tuesday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 1,874.54 crore, according to exchange data.

Mahindra Finance gets IRDAI nod to sell insurance products as corporate agent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mahindra & Mahindra Financial Services on Wednesday said it has received corporate agency licence from insurance regulator IRDAI, which will enable it to sell life and general insurance policies offered by various insurers.

Suzlon bags new orders of 402 MW wind energy from Juniper Green Energy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Renewable energy solutions provider Suzlon Group on Wednesday said it has bagged new orders for the development of 402 MW wind energy projects from Juniper Green Energy.



customer for us, and we are delighted to partner with them again. This order helps us expand our footprint in Rajasthan," Girish Tanti, Vice Chairman, Suzlon Group, said in the statement.

Paper, paperboard imports up 34 per cent in FY24: IPMA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Imports of paper and paperboard in the country rose by 34 per cent to 19.3 lakh tonnes in 2023-24, driven by higher shipments from ASEAN countries, an industry association said on Wednesday.



trade agreement, doubled to 5.1 lakh tonnes during the year from 2.7 lakh tonnes in FY23," the association said citing commerce ministry data.

doubled to Rs 13,248 crore in FY24 from Rs 6,140 crore in FY21, the body said. "The unprecedented imports of paper and paperboard pose a significant threat to India's Make-in-India initiative Aatmanirbhar Bharat," IPMA said.

The process would augment the company's existing sources of revenue and profits as it would deploy its common infrastructure of branch network and feet on street.

Housing prices near peak level, nominal growth seen in coming years, says C&W India head

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Growth in housing prices is expected to be nominal in short to medium term after rising sharply over the last two years due to surge in demand post the COVID pandemic, according to Cushman & Wakefield India head Anshul Jain.



was quite muted from 2013-2014, all the way to 2019. The prices were stagnant. There was a wave at that point in time, where people, particularly youngsters did not want to own anything.

while really spurred the demand for housing," he said. Jain noted that housing sales and prices went up driven by end-user demand. "Seeing the prices going up, the investors came into the market. So, a combination of that became a perfect cocktail, for a very strong demand post COVID from a housing perspective," Jain observed.

India exports over 45,000 tonnes onion after lifting ban

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



India has exported more than 45,000 tonnes of onion since the ban on outbound shipments was lifted early this month, a top government official said on Wednesday.

period, the government on May 4 lifted the ban but imposed a minimum export price (MEP) of USD 550 per tonne. Khare said the forecast of a good monsoon this year will ensure better sowing of kharif (summer) crops, including onion from June onwards.

Paytm net loss widens to ₹550 crore in Q4

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fintech firm One97 Communications, which owns the Paytm brand, on Wednesday said its loss in the fourth quarter of the financial year 2023-24 has widened to Rs 550 crore following the ban imposed by the RBI on transactions related to its payments bank.



impairment provision of Rs 2,271 crore, representing the carrying value of its investment in PPBL and disclosed the same as impairment of investment in associate," the company said in an audit note.

NHPC organises Shramdaan programme under Swachhata Pakhwada 2024

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

NHPC organised a Shramdaan programme for cleanliness campaign under 'Swachhata Pakhwada 2024' on 21st May 2024. RP Goyal, CMD, NHPC, Shri Uttam Lal, Director (Personnel), NHPC and RK Chaudhary, Director (Technical & Projects), NHPC, senior NHPC officers and employees performed Shramdaan by running a cleanliness drive in Mughal Bridge over Budhia Wala Nala (a monument), in Faridabad.

enthusiastically along with the NHPC employees. NHPC is observing 'Swachhata Pakhwada 2024' at its Corporate Office and all its Regional Offices, Projects and Power Stations across the country from 16th May to 31st May 2024 as per guidelines issued by the Government of India.

NTPC secures third rank at ATD BEST Award 2024

New Delhi: NTPC has achieved an impressive milestone by securing the 3rd rank globally at the ATD BEST Award 2024, the highest ranking among all Indian companies. Notably, NTPC is the only PSU to have received this prestigious award seven times in the past eight years.

Government needs to further expand scheme to make India global drone hub, says report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



(compounded annual growth rate) during the 2024-30 period. With innovation and expansion of its application portfolio, India has the potential of becoming the global drone hub by 2030, it stated.

Border Surveillance, Rescue Disaster Management, and COVID management etc. The drone services industry's operations in logistics, data processing, and traffic management etc are far bigger in scale and will outshine the other related sectors very soon, the report highlighted on Tuesday.

control, and simulator developers were also part of the survey. The survey was conducted across 10 states - Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

POWERGRID wins prestigious award for third time



Gurugram: Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID), a Maharatna CPSE under Ministry of Power, Government of India, has been conferred the prestigious ATD BEST Award 2024 for strategic approach to talent development driving business results.

Sindhu sails to Malaysia Masters second round

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Returning from a break, two-time Olympic medalist P V Sindhu progressed to the women's singles second round with a straight-game win over Scotland's Kirsty Gilmour at the Malaysia Masters Super 500 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

World No. 15 Sindhu, who had skipped the Uber Cup and Thailand Open, notched up a 21-17 21-16 win over Gilmour, who is ranked 22nd, in the opening-round match that lasted 46 minutes.

The fifth-seeded Indian, who last won a title in 2022 Singapore Open, will next face Korea's Sim Yu Jin.

In mixed doubles, B Sumeeth Reddy and N Sikki Reddy, world No. 53, also advanced to the second round after outlasting Hong Kong qualifiers Lui Chun Wai and Fu Chi Yan 21-15 12-21 21-17 in 47 minutes.

The husband-wife duo will have the task of taming the top



seeds Chen Tang Jie and Toh Ee Wei of Malaysia next.

For Sindhu, it was her third win over Gilmour, a two-time medallist in the Commonwealth Games.

The 28-year-old Sindhu was quick to open up a 7-1 lead but Gilmour managed to claw back at 14-14 and 15-15. The Indian, however, dashed her hopes of a challenge as she grabbed six of the next eight points to take the first game.

After the change of sides, Sindhu was more ruthless as she didn't allow her opponent to make any comeback after once again gaining an early 3-0 lead. Sindhu was 11-6 at the break and kept moving ahead to grab eight match points. To her credit, Gilmour saved four match points before Sindhu sealed the match comfortably.

Sindhu, a former world champion, has endured a series of narrow losses ever since returning from a knee injury early this year. She is eyeing a good show here to boost her confidence ahead of the Paris Olympics.



Archery World Cup Stage 2

Compound women team in final, men miss bronze medal

PTI ■ YECHAEON (SOUTH KOREA)

World number one Indian women's compound team stormed into the final of the archery World Cup Stage II but the men's team will return empty-handed from the tournament after losing the bronze medal clash to Australia here Wednesday.

The trio of Jyothi Surekha Vennam, Parneet Kaur and Aditi Swami, that had clinched gold medal in World Cup Stage I in Shanghai last month, knocked out world number four USA 233-229 in the semi-final.

India will now clash with world number seven Turkey in the gold medal clash on Saturday. Turkey had stunned top-seed and local favourites South Korea 234-233 in the other semi-final.

It was an overall easy sailing for the Indian women's team, which got a bye into the quarters after finishing second in the qualifying round. They eliminated Italy 236-234 in the last-eight.

The world number one men's team of Priyansh, Prathamesh Fuge and veteran Abhishek Verma, who had slipped to fourth in the qualifying round on Tuesday, lost to lowly-ranked Australia 133-133 (10-10*) in a shoot-off.

The Aussies, who are world ranked 21st, took the Indian trio by surprise starting with a 59, dropping just one point.

The Aussies team of Bailey Wildman, Brandon Hawes and Jonathon Milne continued its fine run and overcame a one-point deficit after the second round to make it 233-all after the regulation four ended.

The two teams were 30-all in the ensuing shoot-off but the Aussies edged out the inconsistent Indians by

shooting two Xs (arrows closer to centre) to secure the bronze medal.

Having started their campaign with an easy 235-212 win over lowly-ranked Vietnam, India overcame tough competition from Denmark and top seed USA, winning both the matches in shoot-off.

Meanwhile, the veteran duo of Tarundeep Rai and Deepika Kumari finished fourth and sixth in their respective qualifiers as recurve competition got underway.

The 2010 Asian Games silver medalist Rai shot 681 points for a sixth spot in rankings, while Dhiraj Bommadevara narrowly missed a top-10 finish on X (closer to centre) count after five archers shot 678 with the Indian finishing 11th.

The Army duo's solid finish ensured Indian recurve men's team No 2 seeding in their title defence. India and top-seeded South Korea will begin their campaign at the opposite ends of the draw.

Indian men's team shocked the world champions South Korea for the first time in a World Cup to take the gold in Stage I of the event in Shanghai last month.

Deepika missed the top-three finish in the rankings by just one point, shooting 677 as the Korean duo of Lim Sihyeon (685), Jeon Hunyoung (680) and Li Jiaman (678) took the 1-2-3 seedings.

The other Indians however fell way short with Bhajan Kaur (653 points) and Ankita Bhakat (646) were the next best Indians at lowly 34th and 49th places respectively. As a result, the women's team seedings could not be better than six.

Rai and Deepika combined to get a cumulative 1358 points for the second spot behind South Korea in the recurve mixed team category.



Concussion replacements added for Copa America under the pink substitution pass system

AP ■ LUQUE (PARAGUAY)

Coaches at next month's Copa America will be able to make a 6th and extra substitution in cases of suspected head trauma or concussion.

South American soccer's governing body CONMEBOL announced the decision Tuesday, making it valid for all its competitions once the Copa America starts in the United States on June 20.

CONMEBOL issued a statement saying coaches will need to notify the referee or the 4th match official of the concussion replacement through a pink substitution pass. A similar method was implemented in Major League Soccer in 2021 as part of a FIFA pilot program.

The player who leaves the pitch under those conditions will have to go to the locker rooms or a hospital for assessment.

"The substitution for concussion will take place regardless of the number of substitutions until the moment it happens," CONMEBOL said. "When the concussion substitution takes place, the opposing team will automatically be allowed to make an additional substitution."

Team doctors who detect a suspected concussion or head trauma on the pitch will have up to 24 hours to send a medical report to CONMEBOL, the South American body said.

Brazil's Vasco da Gama and 777 Partners in legal battle for control of soccer club

AP ■ SAO PAULO

Brazil's Vasco da Gama and investment group 777 Partners are intensifying their legal battle after the American company went to court Tuesday to reclaim its rights over the top-flight soccer club.

Last week, a Rio de Janeiro judge preemptively removed 777 Partners from Vasco's soccer department's administration after a series of complaints from the club. Brazilian law allows foreign entities to buy the rights to soccer sections of multi-sport clubs, in an operation known as SAF.

The preliminary ruling is yet to be confirmed, but the American group stepped up the fight in court and accused the club of not making image rights payments to its players on Monday, as scheduled.

"It was the first time that wages or image rights payments have been delayed since we took over 18 months ago," 777 said in a statement Tuesday. "The injunction that momentarily pushes us out of the command of Vasco's SAF stopped us from making a bridge payment, as we did last year in the same period of the year, when soccer revenues are lower."

Image rights are part of the payment for footballers.



Vasco executives have said the payment of wages is up to date for all players.

The tug of war in Brazil adds to the pressure on the Miami-based company, which has recently faced setbacks in court over its ownership of Belgium's Standard Liege plus other financial problems.

A court in Liege last week ruled in favor of Standard's former owner Bruno Venanzi and shareholders of the company holding the club's stadium. They claimed 777 had defaulted on a payment.

The legal woes for the 777 add to its period of financial turmoil. The Miami-based investment company has also seen its airline in Australia grounded in recent weeks. It also faces a fraud lawsuit in New York.

777's other clubs include Genoa in Italy's top tier and Hertha Berlin in Germany's second division.

Playing Carlsen in his home turf not a challenge for me: Praggnanandhaa

PTI ■ STAVANGER (NORWAY)

Having beaten Magnus Carlsen several times in the last couple of years, young Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa feels he will be under no pressure when he takes on the multiple-time world champion in his home turf during the Norway Chess tournament, which gets underway here on May 27.

Praggnanandhaa last beat the 33-year-old Carlsen in the Superbet rapid and blitz tournament, a part of the Grand Chess Tour, in Warsaw earlier this month.

"I don't think playing Magnus in his home turf is a challenge for me. Usually, it matters to the player playing in his home but it won't matter so much for me," said Praggnanandhaa, who will also have his sister R. Vaishali playing the Norway Chess Women's Tournament for the first time.

The 11-day tournament will see a very strong field including the likes of world champion Ding Liren and Hikaru Nakamura besides home favourite Carlsen.

Reflecting on his contest with Carlsen at last year's FIDE World Cup where Praggnanandhaa gave the Norwegian a tough challenge, the Indian GM said the experience here would help him in future competitions.



"I always enjoy a good challenge. After the World Cup last year, this will be my first classical game with him. I am quite excited to play him and equally excited to play the others. No doubt the experience here will help me in future tournaments," said Praggnanandhaa in a Norway Chess release.

"I am very happy and excited to play in Norway Chess. The field is extremely strong. This is perhaps the strongest field I have played and I see this as an opportunity and a challenge to give my best."

"I am also looking forward to play in this time control which I have not played anywhere else," added the 18-year-old.

The tournament will be played in a double round-robin format with a time control of 120 minutes.

The teenaged Indian GM also expressed happiness with the growth of chess worldwide.

"It is a busy schedule this year.

After the Norway Chess, we move to Budapest for the Chess Olympiad and I will also be playing the Global Chess League later this year. It is really good to have such an exciting league which I think will definitely help grow the game. "As a chess fan, I'm happy to see this league grow. For now, my focus is on Norway Chess and I am physically and mentally well-prepared to do my best there."

With sister Vaishali competing in the women's category, Praggnanandhaa said he will also be tracking her progress in the tournament.

"I am happy to see an exclusive women's tournament being introduced in Norway Chess. It is a very good initiative because there are not many tournaments for women. This will encourage other organizations to come up with women's tournaments too.

Emma Hayes' first roster as coach of the US women team includes two first time call ups

AP ■ NEW YORK

Coach Emma Hayes has selected her first roster for the United States ahead of a pair of friendlies as she prepares to lead the women's national team at the Paris Olympics.

Hayes, named U.S. Coach last November, finished her final season as coach of Chelsea on Saturday, winning the team's fifth straight Women's Super League Title with a 6-0 rout of Manchester United.

Her first U.S. Roster announced Tuesday includes two National Women's Soccer League players called up to the national team for the first time, Chicago Red Stars defender Sam Staab and Washington Spirit midfielder Hal

Hershfeldt. A notable omission from the roster is veteran goalkeeper Alyssa Naeyer, who injured her left thigh while playing in a match for the Chicago Red Stars on May 12.

The team will play South Korea on June 1 in Commerce City, Colorado, before a rematch on June 4 in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The 23-player roster is Hayes' last chance to look at players before she names an 18-player roster for the Olympics. The United States will play a pair of sendoff matches in July.

"I expect complete commitment from everyone to absorb very quickly the things that I value as the most important so that we can compete this summer. I know they are a highly coachable group and



I'm looking forward to challenging them," Hayes said in a statement. "It's time to go to work. I can't wait to meet the fans and it's really time to get behind the team as we get

closer to putting a roster together for the Olympics." Hayes is expected to announce her Olympic roster in late June.

Former coach Vlatko Andonovski

resigned from the U.S. Team following last year's disappointing finish in the Women's World Cup. Twila Kilgore led the team in the interim while Hayes finished the season with Chelsea. Kilgore, who went 10-1 with the team, will now serve as an assistant coach under Hayes.

Captain Lindsey Horan, among five players from European teams on the roster, will join training camp after her club, Lyon, faces Barcelona for the Champions League title on Saturday.

Alex Morgan and Jaedyn Shaw were included on the squad despite missing recent matches with the San Diego Wave because of injuries. Lynn Williams, who was left off the team that played in the SheBelieves Cup, was not on

the latest roster.

Crystal Dunn, who has played mostly at outside back for the national team in recent years, was listed by Hayes as a forward.

Hayes also added three training players to the roster: Olivia Moultrie of the Portland Thorns and Croix Bethune and Kate Wiesner, who both play for the Washington Spirit.

The players are due to report to camp in Colorado on Monday.

The U.S. Roster by position with club affiliation:

GOALKEEPERS: Jane Campbell (Houston Dash), Aubrey Kingsbury (Washington Spirit), Casey Murphy (North Carolina Courage).

DEFENDERS: Tiarna Davidson (NJ/NY Gotham), Emily Fox

(Arsenal), Naomi Girma (San Diego Wave), Casey Krueger (Washington Spirit), Jenna Nighswonger (NJ/NY Gotham), Emily Sonnett (NJ/NY Gotham), Sam Staab (Chicago Red Stars).

MIDFIELDER: Korbin Albert (Paris Saint-Germain), Sam Coffey (Portland Thorns), Hal Hershfeldt (Washington Spirit), Lindsey Horan (Lyon), Rose Lavelle (NJ/NY Gotham), Lily Yohannes (Ajax).

FORWARDS: Crystal Dunn (NJ/NY Gotham), Catarina Macario (Chelsea), Alex Morgan (San Diego Wave), Trinity Rodman (Washington Spirit), Jaedyn Shaw (San Diego Wave), Sophia Smith (Portland Thorns), Mallory Swanson (Chicago Red Stars).



It's hard to leave ailing mother in hospital but KKR is family too, says Gurbaz

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD
Afghanistan wicketkeeper-batter Rahmanullah Gurbaz has revealed that he made the difficult choice of leaving his ailing mother in hospital when his IPL franchise Kolkata Knight Riders sought his services ahead of the playoff clash against Sunrisers Hyderabad here as the team is also his "family".
 Gurbaz, in his maiden game of the season, played a vital role in KKR's win over SRH by taking two vital catches and giving his side a blazing start with a 14-ball 23 on Tuesday. He replaced Englishman Phil Salt at the top and hit the ground running to help the two-time champions enter the IPL final with their comfortable eight-wicket victory here on Tuesday.
 "As a cricketer, you (should) know, what to do. (In) League cricket, only a few players can play. If there is opportunity for you, you should do best. If there's no

opportunity for you, you should be prepared, well prepared for the opportunity," Gurbaz told the media here after the match.
 "My mom is still sick. I went (back) there and the call from here was (that) Phil Salt was leaving. They called and they messaged me that 'Gurbaz, we need you, and what is your feedback for us?'," he revealed.
 "I said, 'yes, I will come'. My mom is still in hospital, and I'm always talking to her, but this is also my family. I should manage both of that, my mom and my KKR family. It's hard, it's tough, but still, I need to manage it," he added.
 SRH skipper Pat Cummins' decision to bat first backfired. Gurbaz said KKR had planned to bowl first had they won the toss.
 "We all (had) decided that we should go and we should bowl first, because in this kind of moment, and team likes Sunrisers that have a strong batting side and you should know what (is) the total and then you go for it," he said.



"We bowled really well, actually. (To get a) team likes Sunrisers all out on 160, that was bowling effort. And then once we come to the batting end, we also not just try to, we should win the circle (powerplay).
 "(In) my mind was (the) only (thought) that I should win the circle, because sometime in low total like this, you need to have a good circle, otherwise, match can be difficult in the end."
 Gurbaz said it was the best he had seen KKR pacer Mitchell Starc bowl after the left-arm pacer took three wickets in the powerplay to set up the game for his side.
 "He was just unbelievable. The way he bowled today, he's one of the best, he has a lot of experience, he knows how to manage the big games. I saw him today totally different than other games," he said.
 Gurbaz said Afghanistan players are preparing well for the T20 World Cup next month. He said

franchise cricket is something that comes second and doing well for their country is always their priority.
 "It's all about hard work. It doesn't mean that you come from Afghanistan, you come from India, you come from Australia, whatever. It's all about hard work, I think. If you work hard, if you know what to do, and it's help you in every situation.
 "Afghanistan is not the same Afghanistan. We know what to do and how can we represent our country. Everything is good for cricket there, and we played really well, the last World Cup, and from the last six-seven years, Afghanistan is doing great," he said.
 "Our mindset (is) not (just) to play for league cricket, our mindset is always to do something better for our country, and then come the leagues. If you do good for your country, all leagues will pick you, and that's the point that we play all the leagues," he added.



Till I play Tests, I will limit franchise appearances to only two events a year: Travis Head

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Travis Head might have taken this year's IPL by storm but Test cricket remains his top priority and till the time he is playing the format, the Australian big-hitter would like to limit his participation in T20 leagues to just two events per year.
 Head, who has enjoyed an incredible last 10 months, has been a nemesis for India with centuries in both the World Test Championship and the ODI World Cup finals. Currently, He has blazed to 533 runs for Sunrisers Hyderabad, forging a fabulous opening partnership with uncapped Indian Abhishek Sharma.
 Needless to say he is sought after and asked how he plans to manage the lucrative T20 offers with his commitment for the 'Baggy Green', Head said it's a no brainer.
 "This has been the first year in IPL for me in quite a while (since 2017). I would put all my eggs in Test basket for the moment, I will continue to do that," Head told PTI during an exclusive interview organised by Prime Video ahead of their upcoming docu-series, 'The Test Season 3', featuring the Australian team's tour of England last year.
 "After Tests, I will pick formats, and see in which different ways I am available for selection." T20 events have mushroomed across the world with some like West Indies' Andre Russell and Sunil Narine appearing in multiple events, adding up to more than five a year.
 Having had a great run for the 'Orange Army' this season, Head is keen on coming back to IPL next year too.
 "At this stage, I would like to be back here in IPL next year. Like I will play Major League Cricket (MLC in USA) this year right after the World T20 but next year might just look a lot different.
 "Each year, you prioritise what you can and can't do. Next year, Test cricket is around, we tour the West Indies and probably I will not feature in many other franchises," the 30-year-old was categorical.
 "Look, in few years when I am finished with Test cricket, then probably there will be few more opportunities to play a bit more franchise cricket. But at this time, I would try to limit it to a couple of franchise may

be, and (focus on) Test cricket." The last 10 months have been very hectic for Head starting with the WTC final, followed by the Ashes and then the World Cup where he came in during the second half after recovering from a hand injury. Right now, more than two months of IPL will be followed by World T20 in the Americas. But the southpaw doesn't want to make a big deal about workload management.
 "I will be home in a couple of days' time once we are done with IPL. Be home for two-three days and make the trip to the West Indies with family and start all over again.
 "Look, we are very fortunate to do what we do and I am not going to do it forever. So try and make the most of it as we can, we are lucky that we are well looked after."
 He then tried to put things in perspective.
 "I know in a few years, I can retire and do nothing, I will have plenty of time to look back and wish I was back on tour, I would like to be in the moment, keep batting through and stay in the moment, enjoying the moment."
CRACKING THE 'INDIA CODE': The performance that Head has delivered over the past few months, he believes that the seeds of it were sown early in 2023 when he came with the Test team, a hard-fought series that Australia lost 1-2.
 "I think a lot of that has come from the Test tour last year, spending time here and working on things and also being a bit older, understanding my game and its blueprint and how you want to go about it and being content and my family being around, all those things," he explained.
 "In IPL, I have evolved continuously while getting better but I still have some work to do," he seemed confident.
 His national team skipper Pat Cummins has been his SRH skipper and he says they have developed a chemistry where both know what to expect of each other.
 "We are just close friends and just enjoy each other's company. Not too much game stuff and over time when you build relationships, he now knows how I will go about it (my job)...," he said.

I could not have made better choices: Former RCB owner Mallya on Kohli

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Former Royal Challengers Bengaluru owner Vijay Mallya on Wednesday said he couldn't have made a better choice when he bid for Virat Kohli in the inaugural IPL auction as he lauded the superstar batter for his brilliant run in the ongoing season.
 RCB have made a tremendous comeback after losing seven out of their first eight games to qualify for the playoffs with six straight victories, riding on Kohli's sublime form which

has so far fetched him 708 runs from 14 innings.
 RCB will face Rajasthan Royals in the Eliminator on Wednesday night.
 "When I bid for the RCB franchise and I bid for Virat, my inner instinct told me that I could not have made better choices," Mallya, who currently lives in the United Kingdom and is trying to avoid extradition to India, wrote on 'X'. "My inner instinct tells me that RCB have the best chance to go for the IPL Trophy. Onward and upward. Best of luck."
 Kohli was bought by RCB for USD



30,000 ahead of the 2008 IPL following his title-winning run with India's U19 World Cup.
 RCB, however, hasn't been able to lift the trophy despite reaching the final three — in 2009, 2011 and 2016.
 Mallya is accused in a bank loan default matter of over Rs 9,000 crore involving his defunct Kingfisher Airlines.
 He has been living in the United Kingdom since March 2016. The same year he had to forego his ownership of RCB due to the legal proceedings against him.

Sunrisers Hyderabad batting approach was puzzling: Gavaskar

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD
Legendary Sunil Gavaskar has questioned the "puzzling" batting approach of Sunrisers Hyderabad during the powerplay in the first IPL Qualifier, suggesting their reckless strategy may have cost them the match against Kolkata Knight Riders.
 Having cleaned up his fellow Australian Travis Head with a peach of a delivery with his second ball, Mitchell Starc blew away the SRH top-order in his opening spell of 3-0-22-3.
 SRH lost four wickets inside the powerplay to be dismissed for a paltry 159, a target KKR shot down in 13.4 overs to storm into the Sunday's summit clash in Chennai.
 "It was a terrific performance, no question. Such an impressive display with both the bat and the ball. They took four wickets in the power play,



and that's where the Sunrisers were pushed onto the back foot, really on the ropes. They couldn't recover from that," the former Indian captain told Star Sports Cricket Live.

"There was a partnership of sorts, but to me, the approach of the SRH batters in those first six overs was puzzling."
 With Vaibhav Arora dismissing the in-form

Abhishek Sharma in the next over, SRH's explosive opening pair were out for 13 runs. Gavaskar said after losing two key wickets, SRH's batters should have played more

cautiously. Instead, they continued to play aggressively, which led to further losses and ultimately cost them the match.
 "When you've lost two wickets and the two who have been scoring runs for you, a certain amount of caution is required. Sure, don't miss out on scoring opportunities, but don't look to throw your bat at everything. That's what we saw.
 "They lost those four wickets, and losing four top batters means you can't really expect numbers five, six, seven, eight, and nine to get you to 200. So, that is where they may have lost it. But full credit to Kolkata for the way they attacked and took advantage of that pitch as well," Gavaskar said.
 The former India opener was all praise for Venkatesh Iyer and emphasised his value as a versatile player, a top left-handed batter and a capable medium-pace bowler, even if he hasn't bowled much recently.
 Venkatesh struck a 28-ball 51 not out in an unbroken partnership with his skipper Shreyas Iyer (58 not out; 24b) to seal their eight-wicket win with 38 balls to spare.
 "He's been a very good player for such a long time. His first season, a couple of seasons ago, was outstanding. Then, as it happens to everybody, the second season is harder because opponents have a better idea of how to bowl to you," Gavaskar said.
 "But Venkatesh is the kind of cricketer you want in your team. He's a top batter, a left-handed batter, and he can bowl medium pace. We haven't seen him bowl much recently, but he's a very good medium-pace bowler. He might not always pick up wickets, but he can bowl those few overs that can make a significant difference," he added.

OTHER SPORTS

Khilari defends gold at World Para Athletics, India surpasses best ever tally

PTI ■ KOBE (JAPAN)
India's Sachin Sarjerao Khilari defended his gold medal in the men's shot put F46 category with an Asian record at the World Para Athletics Championship as the country surpassed its best-ever haul in the global competition here on Wednesday.
 India, now have 11 medals, five of them gold. They bettered their previous best tally of 10 (3 gold, 4 silver and 3 bronze) in the 2023 edition in Paris.
 Sachin heaved the iron ball to a distance of 16.30 metres, bettering his own Asian record of 16.21 metres set during the World Para Athletics Championship in Paris last year. The F46 category in para athletics events is for those with moderately affected movement in one or both arms or the absence of limbs. These athletes have to transmit power from hips and legs into the throw.
 In the case of Sachin, who hails from Karagani village in Maharashtra's Sangli district, he suffered a mishap during his school days leading to disability in his left hand.
 The stocky 34-year-old lost his



muscles from the elbow due to gangrene and despite multiple surgeries, his arm never recovered.
 On Tuesday, India had reaped a rich haul of five medals to swell its tally to 10 (4 gold, 4 silver, 2 bronze). China is currently leading the medals tally followed by Brazil.
 The Hangzhou Asian Games gold-medallist thrower told PTI that he was confident of taking the top podium spot.

"I was expecting the gold here and I am happy. I have also qualified for Paris Olympics and hope to win gold there also," Sachin said from Kobe.
 With three more days still to go, India are in with a chance of winning a few more medals including gold and head coach Satyanarayan said he was quite optimistic. "We are expecting two more gold medals and hoping to touch the 17-medal mark," said Satyanarayan.

On Tuesday, Reigning Paralympics champion Sumit Antil had defended his F64 javelin throw world title, while Thangavelu Mariyappan and Ekta Bhanu also grabbed gold medals in their respective events as India jumped to third place in the World Para Athletics Championships here.
 Antil, who had won gold medals in the Tokyo Paralympics and 2023 World Para Athletics Championships, sent his spear to a distance of 69.50m to stand on top of the podium.
 The 25-year-old Haryana athlete thus continued his global domination in the F64 javelin event. He is the current world record holder also, courtesy his massive 73.29m throw while winning gold in the Para Asian Games in Hangzhou, China last year.
 He also holds the World Para Athletics Championships record of 70.83m which he had produced while winning the gold in the last edition in Paris in 2023. Compatriot Sandeep won the bronze medal in the same event with a throw of 60.41m. Sri Lanka's Dulan Kodithuwakku took the silver with a throw of 66.49m.



Hina, Kanika strike as India juniors beat Dutch hockey club 2-0

PTI ■ BREDA (NETHERLANDS)
Hina Bano and Kanika Siwach scored a goal each as the Indian junior women's hockey team began their tour of Europe with a 2-0 win against Netherlands club Bredase Hockey Vereniging Push here.
 After a goalless first half on Tuesday, which saw both sides testing each others' strengths, India broke the deadlock with Hina scoring off a penalty corner after three failed attempts with the set-pieces in the second quarter.
 Bredase Hockey Vereniging pushed aggressively for the equaliser but success eluded them despite the hosts earning three PCs in the third quarter. Kanika Siwach found the back of the net to double India's lead in the fourth quarter following which the defenders did well to ward off several spirited attacks from the opponents in the last few minutes.
 The Indian junior team will play their next match against Belgium in Breda, Netherlands later on Wednesday.