



OPINION 6

UNVEILING THE ENIGMA OF AN UNUSUAL ELECTION

WORLD 8

IRAN OPENS REGISTRATION FOR JUNE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

MONEY 10

STOCK MARKETS FALL FOR 5TH DAY; SENSEX PLUNGES 617 POINTS

NEW DELHI, FRIDAY MAY 31, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

Established 1864

the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

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

Late City Vol. 34 Issue 150 *Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable



WEARING INDIA JERSEY IS DIFFERENT FEELING: PANT 12 SPORTS

BJP, CONG SWEAR BY CONSTITUTION, BUT GLOVES ARE OFF

'Third-term 125-day roadmap ready'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ HOSHIARPUR (PUNJAB)

Addressing his final rally of the back-to-back hectic 2024 Lok Sabha polls campaign, which spanned about two months, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday attacked the Congress for 'ranting' about the Constitution. He accused them of 'strangling' it during the Emergency and not caring about it when Sikhs were killed in the 1984 riots. "Sikhs were killed after putting burning tyres around them. At that time, they did not care about the Constitution," Modi said in his last poll rally in the seven-phase election. At the rally in favour of his party's candidates in Punjab which goes to polls on Saturday, the Prime Minister also touched upon the issues of reservation, corruption and the Ram Temple.



NDA supporters at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's public meeting for the last phase of Lok Sabha elections, in Hoshiarpur, Punjab, on Thursday

Electoral Commission against the PM's spiritual sojourn." Hitting back at the Congress for its charge that the BJP would scrap the Constitution if voted to power, Modi said, "Nowadays people of the country are hearing rants from the INDI alliance about the Constitution. These are the same people who strangled the Constitution during Emergency". He also charged that the intentions of the Congress and INDIA Bloc were "dangerous". "In the last 10 years, I have always protected reservation for SC/ST/OBCs. Congress and INDI alliance are enraged over my efforts. Their intentions on reservation are dangerous. Their complete

snatch record has been to snatch reservations of SC, ST and OBC," he said, adding he has always protected the reservation for SC/ST and OBCs. Accusing the Opposition of insulting the spirit of the Constitution and sentiments of BR Ambedkar, he said they want reservation on the basis of religion in Government jobs, in sports, in Government tenders and admission in universities. The Prime Minister charged that the Opposition wanted to give reservation rights to Muslims after snatching it from Dalits and down-trodden.

Continued on Page 2

'Nation needs inclusive, nationalist Govt'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/AMRITSAR

In his first statement in the flag-end of ensuing Lok Sabha elections, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on Thursday accused his successor Narendra Modi of lowering the dignity of public discourse and the gravity of the office of the PM by giving "hateful speeches" during the poll campaign. Singh also took the opportunity to make his stand clear after the controversy erupted when Modi had accused Singh of saying that Muslims have the first right on the country's resources. On the last day of two months long campaign, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge also expressed confidence that the INDIA Bloc will secure a clear majority in the Lok Sabha polls and give the country an inclusive and nationalistic Government, while senior leader Rahul Gandhi responded to Modi's assertion that the world only learned of Mahatma Gandhi through the film 'Gandhi'. Rahul criticised those



Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi at Jakhru Temple, Shimla, in the midst of last day of campaign in Himachal Pradesh on Thursday



Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh

Commission's direction of no appeal for votes on caste and religion. Earlier in an appeal to voters, particularly Punjab ahead of the seventh-phase of Lok Sabha polls on Saturday, Singh asserted that only the Congress can ensure growth-oriented progressive future where democracy and Constitution will be safeguarded. The senior Congress leader also hit out at the BJP Government for imposing an "ill-conceived" Agniveer scheme on the Armed forces. "The BJP thinks that the value of patriotism, bravery and service is only four years. This shows their fake nationalism," he said in a letter to voters of Punjab.

Continued on Page 2

As poll commotion ends, prayers begin

RAJESH KUMAR/SAMAR PANDEY ■ NEW DELHI

Amid hostile weather conditions and poll bickering to woo the voters, the 44-day longest ever campaign for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls ended on Thursday evening. The intensity of the campaigns showcased the high stakes and each party's will to maintain their position as the election process neared conclusion. This phase could well be the game changer for the future of the country as well as the political climate. This is probably the first election, where people witnessed Prime Minister Narendra Modi using "Brand Modi" during the 44 days long poll campaign as well as the Opposition parties also used "Modi Brand". Even BJP candidates are banking on Modi's charisma to win and sought votes in the name of Brand Modi.

LOK SABHA ELECTION PHASE VII SEATS		
2024 LS voting concludes for States marked on June 1		
STATES	NO. OF SEATS	CONSTITUENCY
Uttar Pradesh	13	Maharajganj, Gorakhpur, Kushi Nagar, Deoria, Bansgaon, Ghosi, Salempur, Ballia, Ghazipur, Chandauli, Varanasi, Mirzapur, Robertsonj
Bihar	8	Nalanda, Patna Sahib, Pataliputra, Arrah, Buxar, Sasaram, Karakat, Jahanabad
Punjab	13	Gurdaspur, Amritsar, Khadoor Sahib, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Anandpur Sahib, Ludhiana, Fatehgarh Sahib, Faridkot, Firozpur, Bathinda, Sangrur, Patiala
West Bengal	9	Dum Dum, Barasat, Basirhat, Jaynagar, Mathurapur, Diamond Harbour, Jadavpur, Kolkata Dakshin, Kolkata Uttar
Odisha	6	Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Bhubaneswar, Jagatsinghpur
Himachal Pradesh	4	Kangra, Mandi, Hamirpur, Shimla
Jharkhand	3	Rajmahal, Dumka, Godda
Chandigarh	1	Chandigarh

the poll schedule on March 16. The PM surpassed his nearly 145 public engagements during the 2019 polls by a significant margin. The campaign period this time was 76 days, compared to 68 days in the

polls held five years ago. At 73, Modi was not only ahead of any other leader in terms of the sheer number of rallies and the distance he covered but also continued to be the biggest vote magnet for his party.

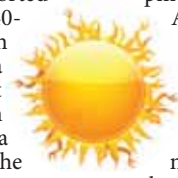
Continued on Page 2

Brutal heat turns fatal in Capital

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

While braving a roasting temperature of 45.6 degrees Celsius, about five degrees above the normal and prevailing heatwave conditions, Delhi reported its first death as a 40-year-old man from Bihar's Darbhanga succumbed to heat stroke at Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) Hospital in the city on Wednesday. Areas like Mungeshpur, Najafgarh and Narela have been reporting temperatures above 49 degrees Celsius for five continuous days and

temperature in other stations have also been soaring above 45 degrees Celsius. The minimum temperature settled at 30.4 degrees Celsius, four degrees above the normal, and the humidity level at 6:30 pm was 36 per cent. According to experts, heatwave conditions affect Delhi more as hot winds from Rajasthan and Haryana rush to the northwest border of the city. Since, areas like Mungeshpur, Narela and Najafgarh are located on the border they take the first blow of the hot summer westerly or north-westerly



Monsoon tiptoes into Kerala, NE

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The southwest monsoon arrived two days earlier than usual on Thursday hitting the Kerala coast and parts of Northeast India simultaneously. This early onset, driven by favourable conditions created by cyclone Remal, has pulled the monsoon flow to the Bay of Bengal, according to the scientists from the India Meteorological Department (IMD). This marks the beginning of the four-month rainy season in the country.



blowing in from Rajasthan or Haryana. The victim was a labourer who died due to multiple organ failure following his temperature rising to as high as 107 degrees Fahrenheit, 10 degrees above the normal. "The patient's kidneys and liver had failed due to excessively high body temperature, following which he died during treatment," Dr Rajesh Shukla of RML Hospital said. Amid the city already facing the scorching sun, impending water crisis and frequent power cuts have worsened the situation.

Continued on Page 2

Kejriwal seeks regular bail in laundering case

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

A city court on Thursday sought the response of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to a bail plea filed by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the money laundering case against him in relation to the Delhi excise policy. Kejriwal is currently out on interim bail, granted by the Supreme Court, in the case till June 1. Kejriwal on Thursday campaigned in Punjab, the last day of campaigning for the seven phases Lok Sabha polls. Special Judge Kavari Baweja also directed the ED to file its response to Kejriwal's plea by Saturday when the ED said it would like to file replies to Kejriwal's plea. The court allowed the same and posted the case for further hearing on June 1 at 2 pm.



Appearing for ED, Additional Solicitor General (ASG) SV Raju sought time to file response to the pleas. The agency claimed he suppressed many facts. Kejriwal, who had been campaigning from the day

he was released on interim bail, is claiming to be unwell as the date for surrender neared, Raju said. "He is not in custody. He has been granted interim bail by the Supreme Court. He is today in Punjab campaigning. His health did not hinder him from campaigning. He moves the bail on the last date so that we get very little time. His conduct doesn't entitle him for any orders today," Raju said. Kejriwal has filed two separate pleas. One plea seeks regular bail in the money laundering case initiated by the ED in relation to the Delhi excise policy scam. A second plea seeks interim bail for seven days on medical grounds. The court on Thursday issued notice on both pleas.

Continued on Page 2

Now, add terror threat to India-Pak match stress

PTI ■ NEW YORK

New York's Nassau County will have unprecedented security arrangements in place for the T20 World Cup clash between India and Pakistan on June 9 due to the threat of a terror attack here even though state Governor Kathy Hochul insisted that it is not credible "at this time". The Eisenhower Park Stadium at the Nassau County will host eight matches of the tournament-proper, including India's three outings. The Indians will also play a practice game against Bangladesh here on June 9.

New York State Governor Kathy Hochul said she has directed state police to elevate security measures to ensure safety of the crowds. "In preparation for the World Cup my team has been working with federal & local law enforcement to keep attendees safe. While there is no credible threat at this time, I've directed @nyspolice (NYPD) to elevate security measures & we'll continue to monitor as the event nears," Hochul said in a post on X. A report on CNN said New York officials are putting safety precautions in place "after terror group ISIS-K made a global threat earlier this year" against the World Cup. Nassau County Police Commissioner Patrick Ryder said on Wednesday that the event received an ISIS-K-linked threat in April. "That was followed by more specific threats on the India versus Pakistan game, scheduled for June 9, and references to a viral video circulating online, which calls for 'that lone wolf to act out'," the report said.

Bus falls into Jammu gorge, 22 die, 64 hurt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

At least 22 pilgrims died and 64 others were injured after an overcrowded bus, headed towards the famous Shiv Khori shrine, rolled down into a deep gorge near Tungi Morh, Chowki Choura area of Akhnour in Jammu division on Thursday. The list of deceased included 10 men, 9 women, and two children. One body is yet to be identified. The majority of the pilgrims hailed from Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, according to a statement issued by the Jammu and Kashmir Police on Thursday.

Detailed report on P2

Agnibaan breaches another frontier, fires off

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Describing successful launch of a rocket Agnibaan powered by world's first single-piece 3D printed semi-cryogenic engine as a "momentous occasion" for India's space sector, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said "it is a testament to our yuvashakti." Chennai-based space start-up Agnikul Cosmos successfully carried out a sub-orbital test-flight of its home-built 3D-printed semi-cryogenic rocket — Agnibaan — from its own launch pad at Sriharikota, making it India's second private entity to do so. Modi, in a post on X, said, "A remarkable feat which will make the entire nation proud!" "The



Agnikul Cosmos successfully carries out a su-orbital test-flight of its home-built 3D-printed semi-cryogenic rocket Agnibaan from its own launch pad at Sriharikota, on Thursday

successful launch of Agnibaan rocket powered by world's first single-piece 3D printed semi-cryogenic engine is a momentous occasion for India's space sector and a testament to the remarkable ingenuity of our Yuva Shakti. My best wishes to the @AgnikulCosmos team for their future endeavours," he said. After four unsuccessful attempts, the test flight of Agnibaan Sub-Orbital Technology Demonstrator (SOOrTeD) on Thursday took place at 7.15 am without any live streaming and in

the presence of fewer dignitaries at the Sriharikota launch pad located within ISRO's Satish Dhawan Space Centre. "Humbled to announce the successful completion of our first flight — Mission 1 of Agnibaan SOOrTeD — from our own and India's first and only private Launchpad within ISRO-SHAR at Sriharikota," Agnikul Cosmos said on X. It said all the mission objectives of this controlled vertical ascent flight were met and performance was nominal. "The vehicle was completely designed in-house and was powered by the world's first single piece 3D printed engine and also happens to be India's first flight with a semi-cryo engine," the start-up said.

Agnikul is looking at flying an orbital mission towards the end of the financial year of 2025. Hyderabad-based Skyroot Aerospace was the first private Indian entity to launch its sub-orbital rocket Vikram-S in November 2022. Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chairman Somanath said, "The success involving many firsts including 3D printed semi-cryogenic engine, flight control systems etc. Demonstrate the prowess of indigenous design and innovation. It motivates ISRO to support the Space startups and Non-Governmental entities for innovation and Atmanirbharata to create a vibrant space ecosystem in the country."

Continued on Page 2



22 pilgrims killed as bus falls into gorge in Jammu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
JAMMU

At least 22 pilgrims died and 64 others received injuries after an overcrowded bus, headed towards the famous Shiv Khori shrine, rolled down into a deep gorge near the Tungi Morh, Chowki Choura area of Akhnoor in Jammu division on Thursday. The list of dead included 10 males, 9 women, and two children. The majority of pilgrims hailed from Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. According to a statement issued by the Jammu and Kashmir Police, the bus bearing registration number UP81CT-4058 was carrying devotees from Kurukshetra towards the Shiv Khori shrine in the Reasi district when it met with an accident at around 12.35 p.m.



An injured man being admitted to the Government Medical College Hospital after a bus carrying pilgrims fell into a gorge in Akhnoor, in Jammu, on Thursday

on Thursday in which 21 passengers died and 54 others received injuries. Initial reports suggested the driver of the ill-fated bus lost control of the wheels while

negotiating a turn. Some of the passengers who survived the fatal accident told local reporters that the bus driver failed to negotiate the turn due to high speed leading to an accident. Transport Commissioner, Jammu and Kashmir Rajinder Singh Tara, who along with senior officers also rushed to the spot, told media teams the accident was caused by human error. We have verified the relevant documents of the bus. The fitness certificate of the bus was found valid, he added. The rescue teams have shifted the dead bodies to the Sub Divisional Hospital in Akhnoor and 54 injured passengers have been rushed to the Government Medical College hospital, Jammu for advanced treatment.

UDF, LDF in Kerala keep fingers crossed ahead of polls results

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■
KOCHI

With just five days to go for the counting of votes in the 2024 Lok Sabha election, situation in Kerala looks fluid as well as tense with both the fronts — UDF and the LDF — keeping their fingers crossed about the outcome of the polls. Though the official news channel of the CPI(M) in its opinion poll held after the election had claimed with enthusiasm that the LDF would win 16 out of the 20 seats at stake, the channel is silent about the same and has focused its attention on ridiculing Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his speeches. The CPI(M) has an exclusive wing specialised in producing and airing cyber capsules for the same. The CPI(M) has also sent word through its court jesters that in the eventuality of the Congress fails to win a respectable number of seats, the party would demand Pinarayi Vijayan be appointed as Prime Minister. They have also put forward the name of A Vijayaraghavan, polit bureau member, as PM candidate if Vijayan opts out of the race citing poor health. Friends of R Bindu, Minister for Higher Education in the LDF Government, has been

saying that she has started packing household articles to be shifted to New Delhi. But the top priority for the CPI(M) is the allocation of the lone Rajya Sabha seats among the constituents in the LDF. The CPI, the Kerala Congress (Mani) and RJD have staked their claims for the lone seat for which election is scheduled for June 25. The CPI, the poor cousin of the CPI(M) has pleaded with the big brother that its nominee Binoy Viswam be fielded as the LDF candidate because his presence would be very much needed in New Delhi for resolving national and international issues that may raise once the INDI Alliance government is sworn in. "Binoy Viswam is a globally accepted person and has a wide network of friends across the world. He is also a poet of reputation having authored poems about Fidel Castro and Rohit Vemula," said A Jayashankar, political critic. But if the CPI(M) overlooks the demand of KC(M) that its chairman Jose K Mani be nominated as Rajya Sabha candidate, the latter would get upset and is likely to cross over to the UDF. For Jose K Mani, son of KC(M) founder K M Mani, Rajya Sabha is the

only means to reach the parliament as he is incapable of winning the Lok Sabha or Assembly elections. The Congress is facing an existential crisis in Kerala as there are many leaders who are getting ready to leave the party in search of greener pastures. K Muraleedharan, the Congress candidate from Thrissur, has made it known in the executive committee of the KPCC that party leaders in Thrissur stabbed him from all sides by not ensuring that the Congress workers vote en masse. Though he was silent about the names of party leaders, he was targeting T N Prathapan, the sitting MP from Thrissur. Padmaja Venugopal, sister of Muraleedharan, who crossed over to the BJP before the election had told The Pioneer that Muraleedharan was certain to lose the election. "He will join the BJP once the results are declared. When I left the Congress and joined the BJP, I spread a green carpet to welcome him. It is sure there would be a massive exodus from the Congress to the BJP," Padmaja had said. The candidates in both the fronts are tense but the electorates are watching the goings on in Kerala a la a comedy show.

Brutal heat turns fatal...

From Page 1

Residents Welfare Associations (RWAs) have also protested against the blackouts amid the heat in several areas of Delhi and adjoining regions of Noida and Ghaziabad. On Thursday, according to the State Load Despatch Centre (SLDC), the peak power demand was 8,091 MW, crossing the mark of 8,000 MW. A tussle between the BJP-led Haryana Government and AAP-led Delhi Government has been ongoing over the alleged claims of the Delhi Government that Haryana is not releasing its share of water. The Delhi Government held an emergency meeting over the crisis and also stated that they will approach the Supreme Court while announcing several measures to keep the situation in check. The Delhi Water Minister Atishi also conducted a field inspection of Wazirabad Yamuna Reservoir and she said she will write a letter to the Central Government over the issue. They said the water crisis is the result of heatwave conditions and Haryana not releasing water. Meanwhile, there is a steep rise in fire related accidents in the city with calls surged to 180 on Wednesday

recording a nearly three-fold rise over the single-day calls received by the Delhi Fire Service (DFS), with officials attributing the increase to heatwave conditions prevailing in the national Capital. The DFS chief Atul Garg said the numbers are massive and alarming as these fires have claimed several lives including 10 because of the fire on Saturday including six newborns in a private neonatal hospital. The services received 220 calls, including 183 fire-related, the highest so far this year. The remaining calls were related to bird and animal rescue. This was the highest single-day call recorded so far this year. Usually, we receive almost 150 calls in the whole summer season — 60 are fire-related and the remaining are related to animal rescue. But this time there is a three-fold rise," he said. According to the data, fire-related incidents have claimed 55 lives and injured more than 300 people in the national Capital so far this year. Sixteen people were killed in fire-related incidents in January, another 16 in February, 12 in March, four in April, and seven till May 26, it said.

Chhota Rajan gets life term for killing hotelier Jaya Shetty

T N RAGHUNATHA ■
MUMBAI

After holding him guilty of the murder of city-based hotelier Jaya Shetty way back in 2001, a Special Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) court on Thursday handed out life sentence to

deported underworld don Chhota Rajan alias Rajendra Sadashiv Nikalje in the case. After convicting him for the murder of hotelier Jaya Shetty, Special MCOCA Judge AM Patil awarded life sentence to Rajan for being part of the conspiracy to kill Jaya Shetty, who owned four restaurants in Mumbai, including the Golden

Crown in Grant Road in south Mumbai. Earlier, three of the co-accused in the case — Ajay Mohite, Pramod Dhonde, and Rahul Pansare — had been convicted earlier by the Special court for their involvement in the murder of Shetty. On 4 May 2001, Shetty was gunned down by two unidentified assailants.

Kejriwal seeks regular bail in laundering case

From Page 1

Later, adding a Press conference, Delhi Minister Atishi on Thursday said the ED has opposed Kejriwal's bail plea on medical grounds, as she questioned the probe agency's stand and asked it why it was not allowing the politician to undergo tests as has been suggested by his doctors. Atishi said Kejriwal experienced sudden and unexplained weight loss during the ED custody and in judicial custody. "Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal filed an application for seven-day interim bail at the Rouse Avenue Court. He sought an extension to the bail for his health check-ups, because during his ED custody, he lost 6-7 kg of his weight. Such sudden and unexplained weight loss is an indicator of several serious diseases. Not just this, his ketone level has reached a critical level. His sugar level is on a continuous spike," she said. Atishi claimed that Kejriwal's doctors have advised him to undergo tests

for cancer, kidney ailments and heart related issues. "Why is ED opposing his interim bail plea? Why is the BJP opposing it? I want to ask BJP and ED, 'Why are you opposing Kejriwal's tests?' I want to ask them, 'What did you do to Kejriwal that he experienced unexplained weight loss?'" she said. Earlier, the Supreme Court Registrar recently rejected an application filed by Kejriwal seeking extension of his interim bail by one week in the Delhi Excise Policy case. (Arvind Kejriwal v. Directorate of Enforcement) The AAP leader had sought extension of his interim bail by seven days to undergo a host of medical tests, including a PET-CT scan, in view of "sudden and unexplained weight loss coupled with high ketone levels", which are indicative of kidney, serious cardiac ailments and even cancer. Registrar (Judicial Listing) Pavanesh D in an order passed on May 28 said the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader cannot seek extension of interim relief when the

decision on his main plea is pending. "Order XV Rule 5 of the Supreme Court Rules, 2013, enables the Registrar to refuse receiving a petition on the ground that it discloses no reasonable cause or is frivolous or contains scandalous matter. When the prayer made by the Applicant in this Application is considered, I am of the opinion that no reasonable cause or grounds are made out by the Applicant to entertain this application." However, the Registrar observed that the relief sought was 'misconceived' and 'directly in conflict' with the apex court order. "It is well settled that interim relief can be sought only in aid to the main relief. The relief sought for is beyond the scope of the main appeal since the issue relating to the validity of arrest of the Applicant is in question and not relating to his release on bail...For all these reasons, I refuse to receive the present application, as it does not disclose any reasonable cause for being entertained," it said.

India takes part in Red Flag multinational exercise in US

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

IAF is taking part in the prestigious Red Flag multinational exercise in Alaska, US. Eight Rafale jets, a C-17 transport aircraft and an IL-78 mid-air refueller are part of the IAF contingent for the prestigious drill. Giving details, IAF said its contingent arrived on Thursday at the Eielson AF Base of US air force to participate in the upcoming edition of the multi-national exercise Red Flag 24. Aboard supported by its IL-78 air to air refuellers and the C-17 transport aircraft, the IAF Rafale jet fighters took a transatlantic flight with staging halts at Greece and Portugal. Aimed to integrate aircrew in a multinational environment, Exercise Red Flag is a two-week advanced aerial combat training exercise beginning Thursday. The exercise in Alaska is organised by the Pacific Air Forces (PACAF), the air component command of the United States' Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM).



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath presents an idol of Balaknath to Union Information Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur at a rally in Himachal Pradesh on Thursday

Monsoon...

From Page 1

The typical monsoon onset date for Kerala is June 1, and for Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and most parts of Tripura, Meghalaya, and Assam, it is June 5. However, while Kerala and the Northeast regions have welcomed the monsoon rains, Delhi and several areas in Northwest and Central India continue to endure intense heat under the scorching sun with the IMD forecasting some respite in these regions soon. "The Southwest monsoon has set in over Kerala and

Mahe, and has advanced into most parts of Northeast India, including Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, and most parts of Tripura, Meghalaya, and Assam as of May 30, 2024," said the IMD scientists. On May 15, the weather office had predicted the monsoon onset over Kerala by May 31. Kerala has been experiencing heavy rainfall over the past few days, resulting in a surplus of May rainfall, with waterlogging reported from various parts, according to weather office data.

'Third-term...

From Page 1

Further attacking the Congress over the issue of corruption, Modi called it 'bhasrishtachar ki janni' (Mother of corruption) and said the party has done a "double PhD in corruption". Training his guns at the AAP, Modi said now 'kattar bharashtachri' (thoroughly dishonest) has joined hands with the Congress. Calling AAP also as 'bhayankar jhoothwadi party', Modi said the AAP formed the first Government in Delhi with the support of the Congress. Alleging that the AAP has learnt lessons of indulging in corruption from the Congress, he said 'kattar bharishtachari' (AAP) has taken birth from the "womb of the grand old party". Since its inception, the AAP has been a corrupt party, he alleged. While the AAP claimed it would wipe out the drug menace from the State, they made drugs as a source of their income after forming Government, Modi charged. Modi said the politics of selfishness of the Congress and INDIA Bloc has caused loss to the country. "After we form Government, in the third term, what the Government will do in the next 125 days, how it will do, for whom it will

do and for how long, work on this roadmap has been done," he said. Modi also sharpened his attack against the INDIA Bloc, accusing it of making the Army a "weapon of politics" and said there cannot be a "bigger sin than this". His attack came in the backdrop of the Congress and INDIA Bloc members targeting the Modi Government over the Agnipath scheme. Notably, the Congress has said it will scrap the Agnipath scheme if the INDIA Bloc comes to power. Modi said it was his target to make the Indian defence forces as the most modern and capable force, self-reliant in the real sense. The PM said armies are not made only for the Republic Day parade. The Army is made for a fight, to defeat an enemy and to save our motherland, he said. "I am telling the INDI alliance that I am silent. Do not make any mistake in understanding Modi. The day Modi opens his mouth, I will beed out all your sins -- 'saat pedhni ke paap' (sins of seven generations)," he said. Training guns on the Congress, Modi referred to the Jeep scam, Bofors, submarine and Army truck scam and said they never cared about the requirements of the Army.

Agnibaan breaches another...

From Page 1

Pawan Goenka, chairman of space regulator Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACE) said the successful launch of Agnibaan SORTeD was a historic moment for India's space sector. "The successful launch of the Agnibaan SORTeD is not just a milestone for Agnikul Cosmos but marks a significant moment for private players who are contributing to growing India's space sector," Goenka said. This was the fifth attempt by Agnikul to launch the Agnibaan SORTeD since

March 22. The earlier attempts on March 22, April 6, April 7 and May 28 had to be called off due to technical difficulties. "We are proud to present India's first Semi-cryo rocket engine, which is also the world's most integrated single shot 3D printed piece. It signals the ability to rapidly assemble rockets that is unparalleled," Satyanarayanan R Chakravarthy, founding advisor of Agnikul Cosmos and Head of the National Centre for Combustion Research and Development (NCCRD) at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras said.

The Agnikul team consists of over 200 engineers and is associated with NCCRD at IIT Madras and is also guided by 45 former scientists from ISRO. "This is the culmination of 1000s of hours of reviews and hard work by the team. We are blessed to have had the opportunity and the full support of IN-SPACE and ISRO to design and build original space worthy hardware in India," Srinath Ravichandran, Co-Founder and CEO, Agnikul Cosmos, said. "This is a huge boost and a proud moment for India's thriving private space industry and just a glimpse

into what the future holds for us, our hearty congratulations to the entire team behind this and best wishes for their future efforts," Lt Gen A K Bhatt (ret'd) Director General, Indian Space Association (ISPA) said. Agnibaan is a customisable, two-stage launch vehicle that can carry a payload of up to 300 kg into orbit of about 700 km, according to the company. The rocket uses a semi-cryogenic engine with a mix of liquid and gas propellants, a technology that is yet to be demonstrated by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in any of its rockets.

'Nation needs inclusive,...

From Page 1

Mounting an attack on Modi, the former PM said, "I have been keenly following the political discourse during this election campaign. Modi has indulged in the most vicious form of hate speeches, which are purely divisive in nature. Modi is the first Prime Minister to lower the dignity of public discourse, and thereby the gravity of the office of the Prime Minister. "No Prime Minister in the past has uttered such hateful, unparliamentary and coarse terms, meant to target either a specific section of society or the Opposition. He has also

attributed some false statements to me. I have never in my life singled out one community from the other. That is the sole copyright of the BJP," the former Prime Minister said. Modi had accused Singh of saying that Muslims have the first right on the country's resources. Singh said people of India are seeing through all of this. "This narrative of dehumanisation has now reached its peak. It is now our duty to save our beloved nation from these forces of discord," Singh said in the letter. Addressing a Press conference at the AICC headquarters on the last of campaigning for the seventh and final phase of the Lok Sabha polls, Kharage said people have endorsed their view that "it will be the

end of democracy if the current Government gets another chance". He also said Modi in his speeches in the last 15 days took the Congress' name 232 times and his own name 758 times. He didn't talk about unemployment even once, Kharage claimed. Kharage also took a swipe at the Prime Minister over his comments in an interview that global awareness about Mahatma Gandhi came after Richard Attenborough's film, saying he may not have studied about Gandhi but the Mahatma is known the world over. "Modi said he came to know about Mahatma Gandhi after watching the film 'Gandhi'. This is laughable, perhaps Modi has never read about Gandhi. The whole world

knows Mahatma Gandhi, his statues are there at different places in the world, including in the UN," Kharage said. Kharage said Modi must read Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography to know more about him after June 4 when he will have a "lot of free time". During his last leg rally in Odisha, Rahul on Thursday said renowned figures like Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela, and Albert Einstein drew inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi. "Whose training is done in 'sakha' of RSS, they are followers of Godse, they do not know anything about Gandhi. They do not know about the history of Hindustan, truth and violence."

As poll commotion ends, prayers begin

From Page 1
His comments, panned by critics and embraced by the BJP's ardent supporters, set the narratives of the election." The Prime Minister also gave a total of 80 media interviews, averaging more than one daily since the polls began. The campaigning saw BJP leaders led by Modi accusing the Congress and the INDIA Bloc of being corrupt, anti-Hindu and engaging in loot, appeasement and dynastic politics. The Opposition

parties have been claiming that the BJP is anti-farmer, anti-youth and will change and scrap the Constitution if they win the elections. For the Congress, Kharage and party leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra led the campaign. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, out on interim bail in the excise policy case, also led an aggressive campaign for his party candidates along with Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann. In Punjab and Bihar, the stakes are high for the Badal clan and Lalu Prasad's daughter Misa Bharti who are in the fray to save the legacy

of their families. The last phase of 57 parliamentary seats is crucial for the BJP as it does not want to leave anything to chance. It is also crucial for the opposition to restrict the BJP/NDA to less than 300 seats. Data shows of the 57 seats, the BJP won 25 in both the 2014 and the 2019 elections, less than 50 per cent. This was amongst the worst phases of the BJP across the seven phases in 2019. In phase seven, 28 seats go to polls in the Hindi heartland of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Himachal Pradesh. 13 seats will be polling in Punjab, and 15 in

Bengal and Odisha combined. The BJP-led NDA swept the Hindi heartland states in 2019 winning 26 of the 30 on offer. It needs to maintain a winning streak without significant dents here. Congress won only three seats in 2014 and eight in 2019. Altogether, 24 seats are strongholds of different parties. The Trinamool Congress and the BJP have eight strongholds each. The remaining eight strongholds belong to the Biju Janata Dal, the Congress, the Janata Dal (United), and the Shiromani Akali Dal. Analysis of the 2019 Lok

Sabha polls shows there are five clean sweep seats in the seventh phase where the victory margin was more than 35 per cent in the 2019 elections. These seats are Mandi, Hamirpur, Shimla, and Kangra in Himachal Pradesh; and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh. The BJP won all five. Prime Minister Narendra Modi won the Varanasi seat by a 45.2 per cent margin. In six seats, the contest was very tough in the last election. This is the third consecutive time, Modi is seeking reelection, having twice been elected from Varanasi in 2014 and 2019. People are now talking

about the victory margin of Modi in Varanasi. In UP, the BJP is facing a stiff challenge from the INDIA Bloc, the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress party alliance in the Purvanchal region. The Lalu family seeks to break the jinx in the Patliputra constituency as earlier RJD chief Lalu also suffered a defeat in 2009. RJD patriarch Lal Prasad failed to win from here in 2009. His daughter Misa lost in 2014 and 2019 elections. In the battle for Lalu pride this time, the family is being challenged by Modi who confidentially asked supporters to be ready with maner ladoos on June 4.

It's a head-to-head contest between the BJP and the RJD on the parliamentary seat of Pataliputra, with sitting MP Ram Kripal Yadav vying for a third consecutive term. In Punjab, Bhatinda, the last bastion of the Akali and the Badal family in Punjab, Harsimrat Kaur, former Union Minister and wife of Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chief Sukhbir Singh Badal, is fighting to save the family's borough. Though this is the first election being fought without the BJP and Prakash Singh Badal, most prominent face of the party, who died last year. Due to a multi cornered contest,

Harsimrat is facing a tough time here. Polling is scheduled in all 13 seats of Punjab and four of Himachal Pradesh, 13 constituencies in Uttar Pradesh, nine in West Bengal, eight in Bihar, six in Odisha and three seats in Jharkhand besides Chandigarh. Modi is seeking a third consecutive term from Varanasi. Voting is already over in 486 seats in 28 States and Union Territories. The turnout in the first six phases was 66.14 per cent, 66.71, 65.68, 69.16, 62.2 and 63.36 per cent respectively. Counting of votes will be taken up on June 4.

We will move SC over Haryana not releasing Capital share of water: Atishi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
The Delhi Government will approach the Supreme Court over Haryana not releasing the national Capital's share of water, which has led to a crisis situation, while announcing several measures to keep the situation in check. Addressing a Press conference, senior AAP leader and Delhi Water Minister Atishi said Delhi is starting at an "emergency situation" and announced a slew of emergency measures to tackle the crisis. "We will approach the Supreme Court on Thursday itself over Haryana not releasing the share of Delhi's water," she added. She also conducted a field inspection of Wazirabad Yamuna Reservoir and said she will write a letter to the central government over the issue of alleged non-release of water. Taking to X (formerly Twitter), she wrote in Hindi, "Today, I will also write a letter to the central government. It is also their responsibility to ensure

that Delhi gets its share of water. Haryana has no right to stop the water of Delhi." The minister said a central water tanker control room is being set up in the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) and it will be monitored by an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer. "There will be a central command and control room and people will have to call 1916 if they need a water tanker. This central command and control room will inform the water tanker control room about the call. From June 5, ADM and SDM-level officers will be deployed at the 11 water zones in Delhi. They will assess the situation at the hotspots facing a water shortage and deploy water tankers at those places," she said. Besides, teams will be formed in the DJB's electrical department that will function round the clock to address complaints related to borewells. "There will be 200 enforcement teams under an IAS officer to check water wastage and issue challans.



Delhi Minister Atishi inspects the Wazirabad water treatment plant amid a water crisis, in New Delhi, on Thursday PTI

From Friday, there will be a ban on the use of potable water at construction sites and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi will carry out an inspection and take action if these sites are found flouting the ban. "Similarly, the government is imposing a ban on the use of drinking water for washing cars and at car-service centres. Teams from the Delhi Pollution Control Committee will be inspecting these centres and if they are found flouting the ban, they will be sealed," Atishi said, while requesting people to use water judiciously. "We are in an emergency situation. This situation is due to the heatwave and Haryana not releasing Delhi's share of water," the minister said. The government held an emergency meeting regarding the water crisis that the city is facing amid a heatwave. The capital is facing a water shortage due to unprecedented summer heat, with temperatures hovering around the 50 degree-Celsius mark in parts of the city.

BJP Mahila Morcha holds protest over water crisis in city

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
Delhi BJP Mahila Morcha's office bearers on Thursday held a protest outside senior AAP leader and Delhi Water Minister Atishi's residence at Mathura road over water crisis, while carrying earthen pots on their shoulders and placards during the demonstration. Displaying posters that had quotes like "har ghar bacha bimar hai, pani ki darkar hai", "puche Delhi ek sawal, pani kab doge Kejriwal", "pani se Delhi past, Kejriwal mast", protestors raised slogans against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal outside Atishi's residence at Mathura road. They also broke their earthen pots in a display of their anger against the shortage of water being faced by Delhiites. Speaking on the occasion, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva said that the people of Delhi are suffering today not due to a natural crisis but due to the corruption nexus created by the Kejriwal government while also announcing that on Friday, BJP will raise the voice of the people of Delhi against the incumbent government outside the Delhi Secretariat. Stating that Atishi hiding the truth while claiming that the Haryana government is not providing them water, he said, "Just a few days ago, officials from the Delhi government's Flood Department and Jal Board went to Hathini Kund Barrage, where officials from the Haryana government were also present. After checking the system set up to measure the water, officials from the Flood Department and Jal Board returned satisfied because the Haryana government is supplying more water to Delhi than promised." He said that according to the agreement, Haryana is supposed to provide 719



cusecs of water to Delhi, but Haryana is providing 1049 cusecs of water daily. "Now the question arises, what is the reason of water cuts in Delhi when it is receiving more water than promised," he questioned. Upon the city government on Wednesday imposing a fine of Rs 2,000 on wastage of water and forming 200 teams to enforce the penalty, Sachdeva said, "Water is being wasted and stolen and the Delhi government has completely failed to stop this wastage and theft. Shamefully they have imposed a fine of Rs. 2000. The Kejriwal government is encouraging the tanker mafia and the number of tankers supplying water in Delhi are increasing but the number will only exist on paper. The money saved from each vehicle will be distributed among the higher officials of the Water Ministry and Jal Board from bottom to top." The Delhi government on Thursday held an emergency meeting regarding the water crisis that the city is facing amid a prevailing heatwave. The national capital is facing water shortage due to unprecedented summer heat with temperatures hovering around the 50 degrees Celsius mark in parts of the city.

AC blast triggers fire in flat in Noida high-rise society

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA
A fire broke out inside a flat in a posh high-rise society in Noida on Thursday morning apparently due to a blast in an air conditioner in the house, officials said. There were no casualties in the incident that took place at Lotus Boulevard society in Sector 100, they said. The fire which comes amid a scorching heatwave in North India, led to panic among the residents. People in the nearby flats rushed to the ground as heavy smoke billowed from the affected flat. Chief Fire Officer Pradeep Kumar Choubey said locals and society residents alerted the fire service unit about the incident in the flat on the 10th floor of the building at 10.10 am. "We immediately rushed five vehicles (water tenders) to the spot. But before our vehicles could reach there, the firefighting systems installed in the society managed to put out the fire within 10 minutes," he said. "The fire was triggered by a blast in the AC (air conditioner). Since the firefighting systems like sprinklers, extinguishers, hoses, were working fine, the fire did not spread out much and was contained in one room (of the flat)," Choubey



Smoke billows out after a fire broke out in the Lotus Boulevard Society at Sector 100 in Noida PTI

said, adding that there was no loss of life or injury to any person in the episode. Videos on social media showed heavy smoke billowing from the apartment in one of the residential towers of the society. An "AC blast" generally refers to an explosion or fire involving an air conditioning (AC) unit. Such incidents can occur due to various factors, often related to electrical or mechanical failures, according to officials.

Fire related calls surged to 180 on Wednesday: DFS

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
As Delhi is experiencing at 49 degree Celsius, the Delhi Fire Service on Thursday said fire-related calls surged to 180 on Wednesday recording a nearly three-fold rise over the single-day calls received by the Delhi Fire Service, with officials attributing the increase to heatwave conditions prevailing in the national capital. The Delhi Fire Services (DFS) received 220 calls, including 183 fire-related, on Wednesday, the highest so far this year, officials said. The remaining calls were related to bird and animal rescue. From January 1 to May 26, the department received 8,912 fire-related calls, according to the data shared by the DFS on Monday. "We received 183 calls fire-related 24 hours, ending midnight of May 29," DFS chief Atul Garg said. "This was



Photo: Pankaj Kumar / The Pioneer

the highest single-day calls recorded so far this year. Usually, we receive almost 150 calls in the whole summer season — 60 are fire-related and the remaining are related to animal rescue. But this time there is a three-fold rise," he said. With the temperature soaring in the city and hovering near the 50-degree Celsius mark, Delhi is seeing a rise in fire-related incidents, claiming several lives. According to the data, fire-related incidents have claimed 55 lives and injured more than 300 people in the national capital so far this year. Sixteen people were killed in fire-related incidents in January, another 16 in February, 12 in March, four in April, and seven till May 26, it said. "In January we received 1,204 calls, 1,032 fire-related calls in February, 1,328 calls in March, in April we received 2,357 calls, and 2,991 calls till May

DFS chief said. "The massive fire was only one in which 16 cars were damaged in a blaze at a parking lot in east Delhi," he said. According to the fire department, on Thursday most of the fire-related calls were due to electrical short-circuit. "Almost 70 per cent of calls were related to electricity short-circuits and 30 per cent of calls were related to small fires in homes, cars or kitchens, Garg said. Cautioning Delhiites of electricity overload, he said, "If there are four ACs in a house, one must check the electricity load on the wirings. If the wirings are not able to take that load, they should get it changed." He advised people to ensure that there is no leakage in gas pipelines or cylinders and keep them turned off when not in use. The rise in mercury is leading to multiple fire incidents be it in factories or residential areas in the city.

HELPING ANIMALS BEAT HEAT



Water being sprinkled on deer on a hot summer day. (Inset) A zookeeper sprinkles water on an elephant on a hot summer day at the National Zoological Park in New Delhi on Thursday Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

Former aide of Tharoor held at IGIA for smuggling gold

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
Delhi Customs officials at Indira Gandhi International airport have nabbed former aide of senior Congress leader and Lok Sabha MP Shashi Tharoor along with one passenger, who had arrived from Bangkok on Wednesday, for smuggling gold valued over Rs 35 lakhs. The MP's ex-staffer was identified as Shiv Kumar Prasad and he was carrying an Aerodrome Entry permit ID mentioning him as Personal Assistant (PA). "The circumstances of acquisition of Aerodrome Entry Permit, as a part of the protocol team for a Member of Parliament, are being looked into," Joint Commissioner of Customs (IGI airport) Varun Koundinya said. Reacting to the news, Tharoor took to X (formerly Twitter) and stated, "While I am in Dharamshala for campaigning purposes, I was shocked to hear of an incident involving a

former member of my staff who has been rendering part-time service to me in terms of airport facilitation assistance. He is a 72 year old retiree undergoing frequent dialysis and was retained on a part-time basis on compassionate grounds. I do not condone any alleged wrongdoing and fully support the authorities in their efforts to take any necessary action as may be required to investigate the matter. The law must take its own course." According to Customs officials, on the basis of suspicion, officers booked a case of smuggling of gold against an Indian national who arrived at IGI Airport from Bangkok by flight TG-323. "Further investigations revealed involvement of another individual who had come to the airport to receive the passenger and also assist in smuggling. The said individual was intercepted and a heavy gold chain weighing 500 gms was recovered from him which

was handed over to him by the passenger inside the arrival hall," said the Joint Commissioner, adding that enquiry revealed that the individual had a valid Aerodrome Entry Permit. "The circumstances of acquisition of Aerodrome Entry Permit by the receiver, as a part of the protocol team for a MP, are being looked into. Gold valued totally at Rs. 35.22 Lakhs was recovered. The recovered gold has been seized under section 110 of the Customs Act, 1962," he added. Taking a dig at Congress, Tharoor's opponent in Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha seat this election Rajeev Chandrasekhar, the Union Minister and senior BJP leader, said that first Chief Minister Secretary was involved in Gold smuggling "Now Cong MP 'aide'/PA detained for gold smuggling. CPM and Cong - both INDI alliance partners - alliance of gold smugglers," he said on X.



Delhi student gets Chicago Booth Impact Award

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
An alumnus of Netaji Subash University of Technology, Delhi, Luv Aggarwal has received the prestigious Chicago Booth Impact Award at a ceremony on May 11. The Dean of the University of Chicago presented the award, acknowledging Aggarwal's significant contributions to the entrepreneurial and tech communities. Also an alumnus of Columbia University New York and the University of Chicago, Aggarwal has an extraordinary career, having worked at Google and currently working with a high-impact startup. His leadership and innovation in the tech industry have set him apart as a notable figure. Beyond his professional achievements, Aggarwal is a mentor to many aspiring entrepreneurs. He has guided numerous startups in various fields, including Information Technology, Health Tech, Online Retailing, and Insurance Tech. His dedication towards promoting new talent has made a significant impact on the startup ecosystem. The Chicago Booth Impact Award highlights Aggarwal's influence and his commitment to encourage positive change in the business and technology sectors. His achievements serve as an inspiration to many in the entrepreneurial community.

MCD orders urgent preventive measures for fire safety

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI
Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) on Thursday issued urgent preventive measures for fire safety of its buildings. These measures will be adopted in hospitals, dispensaries, schools, community centres, Multi level parking, Zonal offices and other buildings where there is large gathering. All the concerned officials are directed to implement fire safety instructions which includes inspection of fire fighting system, electrical load audit, Installation of Smoke Detectors, Fire Alarms and automatic water sprinklers. The Electrical Department must regularly inspect fire-fighting equipment such as fire extinguishers, hydrants,

and alarms. This includes checking the expiry dates of extinguishers, ensuring hydrants are accessible and have adequate water pressure, and that fire alarms are operational and audible throughout the facility. Establish a maintenance schedule for all fire safety equipment. This should include monthly checks of fire extinguishers, quarterly tests of fire alarms and hydrants. Conduct electrical audits bi-annually to evaluate the building's power consumption, particularly in high-demand areas like ICUs. In areas with oxygen tanks or piped oxygen, implement strict no-smoking policies

and controls on heat sources. Installation of Smoke Detectors and Fire Alarms: Ensure fire smoke detectors and fire alarms are installed in all hospital areas, particularly in patient rooms, hallways and common areas. Audit materials used in hospital construction and furnishings to identify and replace combustible materials with non-combustible or fire-resistant alternatives, especially in patient care areas. Inspect electrical ducts to ensure they are sealed with materials like intumescent, fire-stop sealants that prevent the spread of fire and smoke through openings.

Use power management systems to monitor electrical loads and prevent overloading. Ensure that multiple high-power devices are not connected to a single circuit. Fit critical areas, including ICUs and operation theatres, with automatic sprinklers systems and accessible hose pipes. These systems should be linked in sync with the fire alarm system to be activated in the event of a fire. Regularly review and updated hospital infrastructure to comply with the latest fire safety standards outlined in the National Building Code 2016. This includes ensuring proper ventilation system,

fire-resistant doors, an emergency lighting in corridors and stairwells. Annually Renew the Fire Safety No-Objection Certificate as per Fire Safety Rules of Govt. of NCT of Delhi. This includes submitting up-to-date fire safety plans and records of equipment maintenance and staff training. Implement a continuous training program for all staff on fire prevention, emergency procedures, and the use of fire-fighting equipment. Conduct bi-annual fire drills, including evacuation drills, to ensure staff, doctors, and patients know how to respond in an emergency.

Develop comprehensive evacuation plans that include clear, well-marked escape routes, emergency exits free of obstructions, and designated safe assembly areas. Plans should be displayed prominently throughout the hospital and in staff training programs. Each hospital has to formulate an SoP to be followed in case of a fire incident. By implementing these measures, MCD aims to significantly enhance the fire safety and preparedness of its buildings, thereby safeguarding the lives of residents, employees and property.

By implementing these measures, MCD aims to significantly enhance the fire safety and preparedness of its buildings, thereby safeguarding the lives of residents, employees and property.

MODI ENDS LS POLL CAMPAIGN

BJP hails S&P ratings on India's growth

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi ended his whirlwind Lok Sabha poll campaign with a rally in Punjab's Hoshiarpur on Thursday, closing out his electioneering the way he began — by focussing on a region where he has invested heavily over the years for the BJP to make a mark outside its strongholds. Modi notched up a total of 206 public-outreach programmes, including rallies and roadshows, since the Election Commission (EC) announced the poll schedule on March 16. The Prime Minister surpassed his nearly-145 public engagements on the stump during the 2019 polls by a big margin. The campaign period this time was of 76 days, compared to the 68 days in the polls held five years ago. When the EC announced the polls, Modi was on a political tour of southern India, covering all five states in the three days between March 15 and March 17. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is eyeing to boost its fortunes in



Prime Minister Narendra Modi waves at crowd during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections in Hoshiarpur, Punjab, on Thursday. PTI

Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh — three states where it won no seat in 2019 — and looking to maintain its strength in Karnataka and increase its tally in Telangana.

The extent of his barnstorming campaign's success will only be known on June 4, when the polls results are scheduled to be declared. At 73, Modi was not only ahead of any other leader in terms of the sheer number of rallies and distance he covered, but continued to be the biggest vote magnet for his party whose comments, panned by critics and lapped up by the BJP's ardent supporters, set the narratives of the election. The prime minister also gave a total of 80 media interviews, averaging more than one daily since the polls began. Modi will be in Kanyakumari from Thursday evening to June 1 for meditation, engaging in spiritual pursuit at the site associated with Swami Vivekananda.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Thursday hailed the S&P Global Ratings' report on India's growth prospects as a "stamp of authority" on the success of the Centre's policies and hit out at opposition parties, saying they cannot see it as they are blindfolded. After a gap of about 10 years, S&P Global Ratings on Wednesday upped India's outlook to positive from stable on robust growth prospects for the next three years and public spending, and raised hopes for an upgrade in two years, provided the Centre continues with its reforms and policies to keep fiscal deficit under check. "It is a big achievement and a stamp of authority on the policies of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the decisions taken by his government in the last 10 years," Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) national spokesperson Syed Zafarul Islam told a press conference at the party headquarters here. He said global rating agencies



have started understanding Modi's resolve to make India a developed country with the results of his government's policy initiatives and decisions taken for the country's progress now becoming visible. "Our opposition parties cannot see it as they are blindfolded. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and the leaders of other opposition parties are blindfolded, not the global agencies. They are clearly seeing the growth of the Indian economy. That is why they have upped India's outlook to positive," the BJP leader added. He said the people of the country are also able to see the country's progress under Modi and showing faith in his leadership. "We are fully confident that this time again, they will ensure the BJP's victory (in the Lok Sabha polls) with a thumping majority," Islam said. The last phase of polling for the parliamentary election is scheduled to be held on June 1 for 57 constituencies spread across eight states, including Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The counting of the votes cast in all the seven phases of the election will be taken up on June 4.

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Audited Financial Results for the Quarter and Year Ended March 31, 2024 (Rs. in million)												
S. No.	Particulars	Standalone				Consolidated				Year ended	Year ended	
		31-Mar-24 Audited	31-Mar-23 Audited	31-Mar-24 Unaudited	31-Mar-23 Unaudited	31-Mar-24 Audited	31-Mar-23 Audited	31-Mar-24 Unaudited	31-Mar-23 Unaudited	31-Mar-24 Audited	31-Mar-23 Audited	
1	Total Income from Operations	2,483.40	4,360.56	27,565.67	17,657.62	3,490.11	4,479.40	29,137.73	18,318.99			
2	Net profit/(loss) for the period/year (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	(3,680.02)	673.23	(2,385.20)	97.07	(1,823.78)	399.50	(1,306.07)	(76.74)			
3	Net profit/(loss) for the period/year before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	(3,680.02)	673.23	(2,385.20)	(1,186.78)	(1,823.78)	399.50	(1,306.07)	(1,360.59)			
4	Net profit/(loss) for the period/year after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	(3,680.02)	673.23	(2,385.20)	(1,186.78)	(1,829.62)	392.14	(1,340.84)	(1,408.38)			
5	Total Comprehensive income/(loss) for the period/year (Comprising Profit / (Loss) for the period/year (after tax) and other Comprehensive Income (after tax))	(3,686.68)	674.17	(2,382.86)	(1,178.98)	(1,829.54)	398.46	(1,338.72)	(1,454.34)			
6	Paid up Equity Share Capital	1,693.87	1,693.87	1,693.87	1,693.87	1,693.87	1,693.87	1,693.87	1,693.87			
7	Reserves (excluding Revaluation Reserve)			(39,951.20)	(37,568.33)			(35,432.54)	(34,141.89)			
8	Net Worth			(38,257.33)	(35,136.33)			(33,738.67)	(32,448.02)			
9	Paid up Debt Capital / Outstanding Debt	78,726.31	78,831.95	78,726.31	78,485.34	78,832.27	78,485.34	78,832.27	78,485.34			
10	Outstanding Redeemable Preference Shares											
11	Debt Equity Ratio	(2.10)	(2.06)	(2.05)	(2.06)	(2.30)	(2.28)	(2.30)	(2.28)			
12	Earning / (Loss) Per Share (in Rupees) (Basic & Diluted)	(21.73)	3.97	(11.50)	(7.01)	(10.81)	2.32	(2.48)	(8.25)			
13	Capital Redemption Reserve											
14	Debt Redemption Reserve	738.13	738.13	738.13	738.13	738.13	738.13	738.13	738.13			
15	Debt Service Coverage Ratio	(0.38)	1.07	0.08	0.12	(0.01)	0.95	0.27	0.12			
16	Interest Service Coverage Ratio	(1.11)	1.43	0.64	0.83	(0.04)	1.26	0.82	0.81			

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EXTRACT OF STATEMENT OF AUDITED STANDALONE FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER & YEAR ENDED 31.03.2024 (Rs. in Lakhs)												
Sr. No.	PARTICULARS	Quarter Ended (Audited)			Year Ended (Audited)							
		31.03.2024	31.03.2023	31.03.2024	31.03.2023							
1.	Total income from operations (Net)	2700.79	2990.60	10381.31	151.04							
2.	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extra ordinary items)	-112.00	50.69	151.04								
3.	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	-112.00	50.69	151.04								
4.	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	-113.92	19.46	100.60								
5.	Total Comprehensive Income for the period (Comprising Profit/(Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after Tax))	-113.92	19.46	100.60								
6.	Equity share capital (Face value Rs. 10/- each)	329.00	329	329								
7.	Reserves (excluding Revaluation Reserve) as shown in the Audited Balance Sheet of the previous year	950.67	836.94	950.67								
8.	Earnings per share (of Rs. 10/- each) (for continuing and discontinued operations)	-3.46	0.59	3.06								
	a) Basic	-3.46	0.59	3.06								
	b) Diluted											

Phase III clinical trials of dengue vaccine to be launched soon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) along with the Pune-based National Institute of Virology (NIV) and other research institutes are set to launch phase-3 clinical trials of the recombinant dengue vaccine. Apurva Chandra, Union Health Secretary, while addressing the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) Health Ministers' Meeting on the sidelines of the 77th World Health Assembly (WHA) of the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva also informed that the BRICS Vaccine Research and Development Centre was virtually launched during India's presidency in March 2022. "India has demonstrated active engagement in BRICS health track initiatives, promoting collaborative endeavours to advance joint health agendas aimed at fortifying health systems across BRICS nations, thereby addressing critical global health challenges," Chandra said. "ICMR along with NIV and a network of other partner Institutes is embarking on phase-3 clinical trials of recombinant dengue vaccine." "In addition, ICMR and other partners will also work towards research and trials for locally endemic diseases such as Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), Nipah



virus, Human Papillomavirus, MTB-VAC (Mycobacterium Tuberculosis Vaccine), and influenza," he added. Further, Chandra noted that India's national action plan on AMR, launched in 2017, is in line with the objectives outlined in the WHO's Global Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR). "India recognises AMR as a global concern and advocates fostering collaboration among BRICS nations to devise and execute protocols, projects, and platforms to tackle AMR," the Union Health Secretary said. He noted that "India acknowledges the importance of advancing collaboration within BRICS countries in nuclear medicine and radio-pharmaceutical science." The country also aims to strengthen "the radio-pharmaceutical supply chain and enhance isotopes production, alongside fostering the development and commercialisation of advanced digital solutions," he added. Chandra urged member states to enhance collaboration and work together to find solutions to various health challenges.



INTEGRATED INDUSTRIES LIMITED
(Formerly Integrated Technologies Limited)
CIN: L107190DL1995PLC277176
Regd. Off.: 288 Basement AGCR Enclave East Delhi Shahdara DL 110092 IN
Ph: 011-45511351, Email: info@integratedindustries.in

STATEMENT OF AUDITED STANDALONE FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER AND YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH, 2024 (Rs. in crores except EPS)

S. No.	Particulars	Quarter Ended		Year Ended	
		31/03/2024 Audited	31/12/2023 Unaudited	31/03/2023 Audited	31/03/2023 Audited
1	Total Income from Operations	17.79	20.09	0.04	56.16
2	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period (before Tax, exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	-0.44	0.92	0.01	1.26
3	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period before Tax (after exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	-0.44	0.92	0.01	1.26
4	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	-0.37	0.69	-3.62	0.88
5	Total Comprehensive Income for the period (Comprising Profit/(Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax))	-0.37	0.69	-3.62	0.88
6	Equity Share Capital	9.60	8.20	4.78	9.62
7	Reserves (Excluding Revaluation Reserves)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
8	Earnings per Share (of Rs. 10 each) (for continuing and discontinued operations) (not annualized)	(0.41)	0.85	(7.57)	1.27
	Basic (in Rs.)	(0.41)	0.85	(7.57)	1.27
	Diluted (in Rs.)	(0.38)	0.78	(7.57)	1.14

Notes:

- These above audited standalone financial results for the quarter & year ended 31st March 2024 ("the results") of the Integrated Industries Ltd ("the Company") (formerly Integrated Technologies Ltd) have been reviewed and recommended by the Audit Committee and subsequently approved by the Board of Directors at its meeting held on May 29, 2024. The statutory auditor of the company have conducted audit of these financial results in terms of regulation 33 of SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015, as amended.
- The audited standalone financial results for the quarter & year ended 31st March 2024 of Integrated Industries Ltd have been prepared in accordance with Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS) prescribed under Section 133 of Companies Act, 2013 ("The Act") read with the relevant rules thereunder.
- In the context of reporting business / geographical segment as required by Ind AS 108 - "Operating Segments", the Company's operations comprise of mainly one business segment - Trading in Food Products. Hence, there is no reportable segment as per Ind AS 108.
- The standalone results of the Company for the quarter and year ended 31st March 2024 have been audited by the Statutory Auditor and they have issued an unmodified audit report on the same. The audit report of the statutory auditors is being filed with BSE Ltd ("BSE") and is also available on the Company's website.
- The figures for the quarter ended 31st March 2024 and 31st March 2023 are the balancing figures between the audited figures in respect of the full financial years and the published unaudited year to date figures upto third quarter of the respective financial years. Also the figures upto the end of the third quarter were only reviewed and not subject to audit.
- During the year ended 31st March 2024, the company acquired Nuture Well LLC, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, registered with Sharjah Media City-Free Zone Authority (a Wholly Owned Subsidiary) on 30th May, 2023. The said foreign subsidiary, have been transferred to M/s Nuture Well Foods Private Limited (a wholly owned subsidiary of the company) at cost and accordingly this foreign subsidiary ceases to be the subsidiary of the Integrated Industries Limited w.e.f 26th March 2024.
- Previous period figures have been regrouped/recast/reclassified, wherever necessary to correspond with the current period's classification/disclosure.

For INTEGRATED INDUSTRIES LIMITED (Formerly Integrated Technologies Limited)
Sd/-
Saurabh Goyal (Managing Director)
DIN: 01094455
Place: Delhi
Date: 29th May, 2024



INTEGRATED INDUSTRIES LIMITED
(Formerly Integrated Technologies Limited)
CIN: L107190DL1995PLC277176
Regd. Off.: 288 Basement AGCR Enclave East Delhi Shahdara DL 110092 IN
Ph: 011-45511351, Email: info@integratedindustries.in

STATEMENT OF AUDITED CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER AND YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH, 2024 (Rs. in crores except EPS)

S. No.	Particulars	Quarter Ended			Year Ended	
		31/03/2024 Audited	31/12/2023 Unaudited	31/03/2023 Audited	31/03/2024 Audited	31/03/2023 Audited
1	Total Income from Operations	139.27	125.77	0.04	331.26	5.14
2	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period (before Tax, exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	13.71	9.66	0.01	26.74	4.99
3	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period before Tax (after exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	13.71	9.66	0.01	26.74	4.99
4	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	13.23	9.19	-7.24	24.89	1.36
5	Total Comprehensive Income for the period (Comprising Profit/(Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax))	13.23	9.19	-7.24	24.89	1.36
6	Equity Share Capital	9.62	8.20	4.78	9.62	4.78
7	Reserves (Excluding Revaluation Reserves)	124.38	0.00	0.00	124.38	0.00
8	Earnings per Share (of Rs. 10 each) (for continuing and discontinued operations) (not annualized)	14.79	11.33	(7.57)	36.40	2.85
	Basic (in Rs.)	14.79	11.33	(7.57)	36.40	2.85
	Diluted (in Rs.)	13.60	10.41	(7.57)	32.65	2.85

Notes:

- These above audited consolidated financial results for the quarter & year ended 31st March 2024 ("the results") of the Integrated Industries Ltd ("the Company") (formerly Integrated Technologies Ltd) and its subsidiaries have been reviewed and recommended by the Audit Committee and subsequently approved by the Board of Directors at its meeting held on 29th May, 2024. The statutory auditor of the company have conducted audit of these financial results in terms of regulation 33 of SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015, as amended.
- The audited consolidated financial results for the quarter & year ended 31st March 2024 of the Integrated Industries Ltd and its subsidiary have been prepared in accordance with Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS) prescribed under Section 133 of Companies Act, 2013 ("The Act") read with the relevant rules thereunder.
- In the context of reporting business / geographical segment as required by Ind AS 108 - "Operating Segments", the Company's operations comprise of mainly two business segment - Trading in Food Products and manufacturing of food products. Audited consolidated segment information for the Quarter and year ended 31st March 2024 has been attached.
- The Audited consolidated financial results for the Quarter and year ended 31st March 2024 includes the audited results of one subsidiary. The financial results of one subsidiary have been consolidated in accordance with Ind AS 110- Consolidated Financial Statements.
- The consolidated results of the Company for the quarter and year ended 31st March 2024 have been audited by the Statutory Auditor and they have issued an unmodified audit report on the same. The audit report of the statutory auditors is being filed with BSE Ltd ("BSE") and is also available on the Company's website.
- The figures for the quarter ended 31st March 2024 and 31st March 2023 are the balancing figures between the audited figures in respect of the full financial years and the published unaudited year to date figures upto third quarter of the respective financial years. Also the figures upto the end of the third quarter were only reviewed and not subject to audit.
- During the year ended 31st March 2024, the company acquired Nuture Well LLC, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, registered with Sharjah Media City-Free Zone Authority (a Wholly Owned Subsidiary) on 30th May, 2023. The said foreign subsidiary, have been transferred to M/s Nuture Well Foods Private Limited (a wholly owned subsidiary of the company) at cost and accordingly foreign subsidiary has become step-subsidiary of the company.
- Previous period figures have been regrouped/recast/reclassified, wherever necessary to correspond with the current period's classification/disclosure.

For INTEGRATED INDUSTRIES LIMITED (Formerly Integrated Technologies Limited)
Sd/-
Saurabh Goyal (Managing Director)
DIN: 01094455
Place: Delhi
Date: 29th May, 2024

MoU signed to boost innovation, research in medical devices for soldiers



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Hyderabad to collaborate on research and training. The MoU was signed by Director General of Armed Forces Medical Services Lt General Daljit Singh, and Director of IIT Hyderabad Professor B S Murty, Defence Ministry said here on Thursday. The MoU aims to foster innovation and research in developing novel medical devices and addressing health issues specific to soldiers serving in varied terrains. IIT Hyderabad, with its departments of Biotechnology, Biomedical Engineering, and Bioinformatics, will provide the necessary technical expertise to tackle the diverse medical challenges faced by the Armed Forces. Key areas of collaboration discussed include drone-based patient transport, telemedicine innovations, the application of

Artificial Intelligence in the medical field, and advancements in nanotechnology. Additionally, the MoU will facilitate student exchange programs, short-term courses for undergraduates, and faculty exchange initiatives. Lt General Singh emphasized the AFMS's commitment to delivering comprehensive medical care to soldiers, both in peripheral and tertiary care settings. He highlighted that partnering with an institute like IIT Hyderabad, known for its cutting-edge technology, represents a significant step towards enhancing research and training, ultimately improving the quality of life for soldiers and their families. Professor B S Murty expressed IIT Hyderabad's dedication to addressing the problem statements presented by the Armed Forces, ensuring prompt and effective solutions to the challenges they face. This collaboration marks a significant milestone in leveraging advanced technology and research to enhance the health and well-being of military personnel.



Modi slams INDIA Bloc, accuses it of making Army as weapon of politics

PTI ■ HOSHIARPUR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday sharpened his attack against the INDIA bloc, accusing it of making the Army a "weapon of politics" and said there cannot be a "bigger sin than this". Modi further hit out at the opposition, alleging that the Congress and "INDIA alliance" never left any effort in weakening the Indian armed forces.

Modi was addressing his last poll rally of the Lok Sabha polls here.

His attack came in the backdrop of the Congress and INDIA bloc members targeting the Narendra Modi government over the Agnipath scheme.

Notably, the Congress has



said it will scrap the Agnipath scheme if the INDIA bloc comes to power. Modi said it was his target to make the Indian defence forces as the most modern and capable force, self-reliant in the real sense.

But this initiative blocks the ways for the "INDIA alliance" to make black money. Therefore, they are taking out anger against "Modi", he said. "It is clear that we need to keep all things in mind to see with whom we fight... And we

have to prepare our army accordingly," he said. The prime minister said armies are not made only for the Republic Day parade. The Army is made for a fight, to defeat an enemy and to save our motherland, he said. But the opposition made the Army as a weapon of politics, Modi alleged, and added that there cannot be a bigger sin than this.

"I am telling the INDIA alliance that I am silent. Do not make any mistake in understanding Modi. The day Modi opens his mouth, I will bring out all your sins out — 'saat peedhi ke paap' (sins of seven generations)," he said. Modi said Punjab is a land of brave and valour but the INDIA bloc insulted the brave at each step.

Repeated polls not good for country, says Rajnath

PTI ■ KUSHINAGAR (UP)

Union Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said frequent elections are not good for the country and efforts will be made to install the "one nation, one election" system in the next five years. Singh said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) believe that the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls should be held simultaneously across the country. "In five years, we will try our best to make provisions for one nation, one election," the defence minister said, addressing a rally in support of Vijay Kumar Dubey, the BJP's Lok Sabha poll candidate from Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh. Singh heaped praise on Modi for his leadership and taking the country to



new heights. "When India speaks today, the world listens," he said, adding that even politicians in Pakistan are praising India, but those in the Congress and Samajwadi Party (SP) do not understand this. "They (SP and Congress) are opposing Modi," he said. Hitting out at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Singh said his great grandfather Jawaharlal Nehru, grandmother Indira Gandhi and father Rajiv Gandhi were prime ministers. "Rahul Gandhi says he has seen the system very closely. He says the system was anti-backward, anti-poor. He is talking about the governments of his great grandfather, grandmother and father, and saying the system during their times was anti-backward and anti-poor."

Create new turnout record, PM Modi appeals to Varanasi voters

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday appealed to the voters of his parliamentary constituency Varanasi to create a new record of voting on June 1 for the creation of a developed India. In a video message to the voters of Varanasi, the prime minister said representing Kashi, the cultural capital of the world and the land of music and "Shastrarth" (debate), in Parliament is possible only due to the infinite grace of Baba Vishwanath and the blessings of the people of the holy city. Modi, who is vying for the third consecutive term as a BJP candidate for the Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency, which is going to vote in the seventh and final phase of the Lok Sabha elections, said, "Now Maai Ganga has adopted me." Modi said the election for Kashi this time is also one for the creation of a developed India along with "Nav Kashi" (new Kashi). The people of Kashi have to create a new record of voting on June 1, he appealed. "We remember how the young generation was in a different kind of enthusiasm on the day of our nomination. This is our request that now this enthusiasm should be seen at every booth," he said. The prime minister said it is now the opportunity to take Kashi's development to new heights. This will only be possible when the people of Varanasi vote in large numbers on June 1, he added.

"We have a special request to the youth, women and farmers of Kashi that each of your votes will increase our strength. It will give us new energy. We have to get every person from your society, every elderly person of Kashi to vote. "You have to remember that first vote, then refreshment," he added. Stating that in the last 10 years, Kashi has supported him in every scheme of the central government, he said it has guided him. "Baba Vishwanath's grand Dham, Kashi Ring Road project, development of Banaras railway station and development of Ganga Ghat, road projects, every scheme has linked not only Kashi but the entire Purvanchal (eastern UP) with new development. Now the pace of this development will be taken forward by your votes," the PM added. Modi said, "Kashi has become the capital of youth welfare and development in the last 10 years. We have seen your enthusiasm in the MP (member of Parliament) sports competition. "Lakhs of people of Kashi are getting cataract treatment, employment in the city is increasing due to tourism development, and every scheme and campaign is giving new strength to the young generation of Kashi, women and farmers," he said. Modi won the election from Varanasi seat in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections. In this year's election, he is being challenged by Congress candidate Ajay Rai.

BSES Rajdhani Power Limited, New Delhi

TENDER NOTICE Date: 31.05.2024

Sealed tenders under two parts (Un priced & priced) are invited for the following from all bidders:-

NIT No.	Brief Tender Description	Estimated Cost (₹)	Cost of EMD (₹)	Dup Date & Time of Submission	Date & Time of Opening
CMC/BR/24-25/RB/PR/MS/1192	TENDER FOR SETTING UP OF DATA CENTER FOR DISASTER RECOVERY, BACKUP SOFTWARE, HARDWARE & SUPPORT IN BRPL	3.72 Crores	7,44,000/-	20.06.2024 15:00 HRS	21.06.2024 15:00 HRS

Cost of each Tender Document: ₹ 1180/- (Including GST)
For any query call on 011-49107235 or e-mail on Bpl.Eauction@relianceceada.com
For details in respect of Equipment/BOM/Services, Qualifying requirements, Terms & conditions, purchase/submission of tender documents etc. please visit our website www.bsesdelhi.com

Head (Contracts & Materials)
Regd. Off.: BSES Rajdhani Power Limited, BSES Bhawan, Nehru Place, New Delhi-110019 | Corporate Identification No.: U40109DL2001PLC111527
Telephone No. +91 11 4910 7235 | Website: www.bsesdelhi.com

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Limited, Plot No-23, Shal Tower, 3rd Floor, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, New Delhi-110005

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

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

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

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Ms Safety Doors LLP, Mohit Kapoor (Partner), Sahil Goel (Partner), Mohit Kapoor, Sahil Goel, Shammil Kapoor Shalini Kapoor, 731605000042 & 731605000001	House No./ Plot No.7 (Third Floor With Roof Rights), Block-I, Pocket-11, Sector-16, Rohini, Delhi, 110089. & House No./ Plot No.6 (Third Floor With Roof Rights), Block-I, Pocket-11, Sector-16, Rohini, Delhi-110089/ May 28, 2024	February 23, 2024 Rs. 46,34,400.00/- & 11,26,112.00/-	Delhi & NCR

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

Date: May 31, 2024
Place: Delhi/ NCR
Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

SC AGROTECH LIMITED

CIN: L01122DL1990PLC042207
Regd Address: RZ-1484/28 Ground Floor Tughlakabad Ext New Delhi-110019
Email: sheel102@gmail.com, Web: www.scagrotech.in

Extract from the Audited Financial Results for the Quarter and Year Ended On 31.03.2024

S. No.	Particulars	Quarter ended on				
		31.03.2024	31.12.2023	31.03.2023	31.03.2024	31.03.2023
1	Total Income From operation	107.36	28.62	40.75	166.54	307.49
2	Total Expenses	96.14	17.80	23.52	141.02	108.72
3	Net profit/(loss) for the period (before tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	11.22	10.82	17.23	25.52	198.77
4	Net profit/(loss) for the period (before tax, after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	11.22	10.82	17.23	25.52	198.77
5	Net profit/(loss) for the period (after tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	11.22	10.82	17.23	23.95	198.96
6	Total comprehensive Income for the period (Comprising profit/loss) for the period (after tax) and other comprehensive (after tax)	11.22	10.82	17.23	23.95	198.96
7	Paid up equity Share capital (face value of Rs. 10/- each)	599.50	599.50	599.50	599.50	599.50
8	Earning per share (of Rs. 10/-Each)					
	BASIC and Diluted Earning per share (in Rs)	0.19	0.18	0.29	0.40	3.32

1. The above is an extract of the detailed format of financial results filed with Stock Exchange under Regulation 33 of the SEBI LODR 2015. Full Financial results are available on the Stock Exchange website. (www.bseindia.com) and on the Company website (www.scagrotech.in)
2. The result of the Quarter and year ended on 31st March 2024 were reviewed by the Audit Committee and approved by the Board of Directors at its meeting held on 29th May 2024.

Place : New Delhi
Date: 29.05.2024

For SC AGROTECH LTD
Vijay Shankar Thakur
Whole Time Director, DIN 972062

HINDUSTAN AUTO FINANCE LIMITED

CIN:L65910DL1980PLC010617
E-mail: hindaf1980@gmail.com, Website: www.hindaf.in
Regd. Off: Cabin No. DA-8, 02nd Floor, Vikas Marg, Shakarpur, New Delhi-110092

EXTRACT OF AUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS OF THE QUARTER AND FINANCIAL YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH, 2024

(₹ in Rs. Lakhs)

SL. No.	Particulars	Quarter ended		
		31.03.2024	31.12.2023	31.03.2023
1	Total Income from Operations	3.41	13.63	-0.57
2	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period (before tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	1.94	0.82	-11.60
3	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	1.94	0.82	-11.60
4	Net Profit/(Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	1.94	0.82	-11.60
5	Total Comprehensive Income for the period [Comprising Profit/(Loss) for the period (after tax) and other Comprehensive Income (after tax)]	1.94	0.82	-11.60
6	Equity Share Capital	35.03	35.03	35.03
7	Reserves (Excluding Revaluation Reserves) as shown in the Audited Balance Sheet of the previous year.	-	-106.12	-
8	Earning per share (of Rs. 10 each/-) (for continuing and discontinued operations)			
	1. Basic	0.06	0.02	-0.33
	2. Diluted	0.06	0.02	-0.33

Notes:

- The above audited Financial Results for the quarter and year ended March 31, 2024 were reviewed by the Audit Committee and thereafter approved and taken on record by the Board of Directors at their meeting held on 30th May, 2024. The Statutory Auditors of the Company have carried out an audit of the above financial results and they have issued an unqualified report.
- Based on the guiding principles given in Ind As-108 "Operating Segments", the Company's business activity falls within a single operating segment.
- The above is an extract of detailed quarterly financial results for the quarter and financial year ended 31st March, 2024 filed with the Stock Exchange under Reg. 33 of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full financial results for the quarter and financial year ended 31st March, 2024 are available on the Company's website www.hindaf.in and website of Metropolitan Stock Exchange of India Ltd (www.mse.in).

For M/s Hindustan Auto Finance Limited
Sd/-
Subhash Sapa
Managing Director
DIN:00241940
Date: 30.05.2024
Place: New Delhi

SUPERIOR FINLEASE LIMITED

CIN : L74899DL1994PLC061995
Regd. Off: NS-92, Khasra No-33/21, Ranaji Enclave, Najafgarh, Near Arjun Park Bus Stand, New Delhi-110043
Email id : superiorfinlease@gmail.com; Website : www.superiorfinlease.com

Extract of Statement of Audited Financial Results for the Quarter and Year ended 31st March, 2024

(Rupees in lacs)

Sl. No.	Particulars	Quarter ended			Year ended	
		31-03-24 Audited	31-12-23 Unaudited	31-03-23 Audited	31-03-24 Audited	31-03-23 Audited
1	Total Income from Opeeration	26.94	31.34	85.59	123.89	223.81
2	Profit / (loss) before exceptional items and tax (III-IV)	-1.04	11.22	7.42	8.57	45.08
3	Profit/(loss) before tax (V-VI)	-1.04	11.22	7.42	8.57	45.08
4	Profit / (loss) for the period from continuing operations (VII-VIII)	-1.04	11.22	7.42	6.11	33.36
5	Total Comprehensive income for the period (XIII + XV)	-1.04	11.22	7.42	6.11	33.36
6	Paid up equity share capital (Face value Rs. 1/- per share)	300.10	300.10	300.10	300.10	300.10
7	Reserve excluding Revaluation Reserves as per balance sheet of previous accounting year	377.68	377.68	377.68	377.68	377.68
8	Earnings per equity share					
	(1) Basic (in Rupees)	-0.00	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.11
	(2) Diluted (in Rupees)	-0.00	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.11

Note: The above is an Extract of the detailed format of Quarterly and Year ended Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchange under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirement) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly and Year ended Financial Results are available on the Stock Exchange Website i.e., www.mse.in and www.bseindia.com and Company's website i.e. www.superiorfinlease.com

For Superior Finlease Limited
Sd/-
Rajneesh Kumar
Director
DIN: 02463693
Date : 29.05.2024
Place : New Delhi

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Limited Plot No-23, Shal Tower, 3rd Floor, New Rohtak Road, Karol Bagh, New Delhi-110005

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

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

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

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice/ Amount in Demand Notice (Rs.)	Name of Branch
1.	Ms Safety Doors LLP, Mohit Kapoor (Partner), Sahil Goel (Partner), Mohit Kapoor, Sahil Goel, Shammil Kapoor Shalini Kapoor, 731605000042 & 731605000001	House No./ Plot No.7 (Third Floor With Roof Rights), Block-I, Pocket-11, Sector-16, Rohini, Delhi, 110089. & House No./ Plot No.6 (Third Floor With Roof Rights), Block-I, Pocket-11, Sector-16, Rohini, Delhi-110089/ May 28, 2024	February 23, 2024 Rs. 46,34,400.00/- & 11,26,112.00/-	Delhi & NCR

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

Date: May 31, 2024
Place: Delhi/ NCR
Authorized Officer
ICICI Bank Limited

GOLDEGE ESTATE AND INVESTMENT LIMITED

Regd Office:- C-115,Ground Floor, Mansarovar Garden, New Delhi-110015
CIN: L7010DL1992PLC047541

EXTRACT OF CONSOLIDATED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER AND YEAR ENDED MARCH 31, 2024

Rs. in lakhs except per share data

S. No.	Particulars	CONSOLIDATED				
		Quarter Ended		Year Ended	Year Ended	
		31-03-2024 (Audited)	31-Dec-23 (Unaudited)	31-Mar-24 (Audited)	31-Mar-24 (Audited)	31-Mar-23 (Audited)
1	Total income from operations (gross)	7.47	7.37	6.80	28.72	25.87
2	Total income from operations (net)	7.47	7.37	6.80	28.72	25.87
3	Net Profit for the period (before tax and exceptional items)	4.19	3.33	2.41	12.20	10.99
4	Net Profit for the period before tax (after exceptional items)	4.19	3.33	2.41	12.20	10.99
5	Net Profit for the period after tax (after exceptional items)	3.26	2.51	5.62	9.47	4.85
6	Total Comprehensive Income for the period (Comprising Profit for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax))	3.26	2.57	6.17	10.86	6.00
7	Equity Share Capital	512.24	512.24	512.24	512.24	512.24
8	Other Equity	-	-	-	88.24	78.76
9	Earnings Per Share (of Rs. 10/- each)					
	Basic :	0.06	0.05	0.12	0.21	0.12
	Diluted:	0.06	0.05	0.12	0.21	0.12

EXTRACT OF AUDITED STANDALONE FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER AND YEAR ENDED MARCH 31, 2024

Rs. in lakhs except per share data

S. No.	Particulars	STANDALONE				
		Quarter Ended		Year Ended	Year Ended	
		31-Mar-24 (Audited)	31-Dec-23 (Unaudited)	31-Mar-24 (Audited)	31-Mar-24 (Audited)	31-Mar-23 (Audited)
1	Total income from operations (gross)	7.47	7.37	6.80	28.72	25.87
2	Total income from operations (net)	7.47	7.37	6.80	28.72	25.87
3	Net Profit for the period (before tax and exceptional items)	3.70	3.27	1.86	10.82	9.83
4	Net Profit for the period before tax (after exceptional items)	3.70	3.27	1.86	10.82	9.83
5	Net Profit for the period after tax (after exceptional items)	2.77	2.45	1.40	8.09	3.69
6	Total Comprehensive Income for the period (Comprising Profit for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax))	2.77	2.45	1.40	8.09	3.69
7	Equity Share Capital (Face Value of Rs. 10/- each)	512.24	512.24	512.24	512.24	512.24
8	Other Equity	-	-	-	78.96	70.87
9	Earnings Per Share (of Rs. 10/- each)					
	Basic :	0.05	0.05	0.03	0.16	0.07
	Diluted:	0.05	0.05	0.03	0.16	0.07

Note: The above is an extract of the detailed format of Quarterly Financial results filed with Stock Exchange under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing obligations and other disclosure Requirements) Regulations 2015. The full format of the Quarterly results are available on the stock exchange websites i.e. www.mse.in and on Company website www.goldgeestate.in

For and on behalf of the Board
For Goldege Estate and Investment Limited
Sd/-
Jagdish Chand Agrawal
Chairman
DIN : 01893371
Place : New Delhi
Date: 30.05.2024

COSCO (INDIA) LIMITED

CIN : L25199DL1980PLC010173
Regd. Office : 2/8, Roop Nagar, Delhi-110 007
Website : www.cosco.in Email : mail@cosco.in
Tel. : 91-11-23843000 Fax : 91-11-23846000

EXTRACT OF STANDALONE AUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS FOR THE QUARTER AND YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH, 2024

(₹ in lakhs)

Sl. No.	Particulars	Quarter Ended			Year Ended	
		31.03.2024	31.12.2023	31.03.2023	31.03.2024	31.03.2023
1	Total Income from operations	4,947.14	4,066.23	4,147.68	17,749.68	15,318.31
2	Net Profit for the period before Tax	113.47	110.18	11.94	469.06	90.50
3	Net Profit for the period after tax	85.36	115.27	0.68	320.79	68.05
4	Total Comprehensive Income for the period [Comprising Profit for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax)]	87.46	116.02	3.67	325.14	71.04
5	Equity Share Capital	416.10	416.10	416.10	416.10	416.10
6	Other Equity	-	-	-	4,564.57	4,239.43
7	Earnings Per Share (of ₹10 each)					
(a)	Basic (₹)	2.05	2.77	0.02	7.71	1.64
(b)	Diluted (₹)	2.05	2.77	0.02	7.71	1.64

Notes :-

- The above is an extract of the detailed format of Quarterly Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchange under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing and Other Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly / Annual Financial Results are available on the Stock Exchange Websites (www.bseindia.com/corporates) and on the Company's website www.cosco.in.
- The above results have been reviewed by the Audit Committee and approved by the Board of Directors of the Company at their respective meeting held on May 30, 2024.

By Order of the Board
for Cosco (India) Limited
Devinder Kumar Jain
Managing Director and CEO
DIN : 00191539
Place : Delhi
Date : 30.05.2024

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Rashi Sharma D/o Sh. Navneet Sharma & Smt. Preeti Sharma R/o 3897/13, Kanhiya Nagar, Tri Nagar, Delhi-110035, hereby declare that Muskan and Rashi Sharma is one and the same person.
PD(466)C

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Appeals no more

The last phase of Lok Sabha polls gets over on June 1 after weeks-long campaign and slogans

The biggest electoral contest in the world will conclude with the seventh phase of voting on June 1. It has been a dynamic election season; the battleground vibrant with slogans, promises and appeals. The major coalitions, the NDA and INDIA, have each deployed strategic messaging to galvanise voter support. When it comes to sloganeering, the BJP-led NDA has been a hands-down winner, coming up with not one but several catchy phrases to woo the electorate. 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas' (Together with all, Development for all, Trust of all) has been a cornerstone of its campaign. 'Naya Bharat' (New India), aimed at portraying the vision for a progressive and self-reliant nation, was another NDA slogan. Along the same lines was 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' (Self-reliant India) which reflected the NDA's focus on boosting local industries and reducing dependency on foreign goods. But more interesting were its jumlas (catchy phrases) that were floated intermittently to give the NDA 'top recall value': 'Abki baar 400 paar' (this time, we will cross 400) and 'Modi ki guarantee'. The major takeaways from the NDA's election pitch were of course its 'Sankalp Patra', heavily focused on economic progress, showcasing initiatives like Make in India, Digital India and the push towards a \$5 trillion economy. The NDA alliance also highlighted its efforts in strengthening national security. The message is clear — a strong leadership to safeguard the nation.



Not to be outdone, the INDIA bloc also used several slogans to reach voters' hearts. Prominence was given to slogans critical of the Modi Government's unpopular policies and its actions to subvert democracy by sending Opposition leaders to jail. 'Jai jawan, Jai kisan, Jai samvidhan' (Hail the soldier, the farmer, the Constitution) drew heavily on this sentiment. 'Bharat Jodo' (Unite India), a call for unity across the nation's diverse fabric to counter divisive politics, was inspired by Rahul Gandhi's pan-India foot march. Yet another slogan from the INDIA stable was 'Nyay' (Justice), a promise to address disparities and ensure equitable growth. The INDIA alliance has positioned itself as the protector of social justice, focusing on uplifting marginalised communities, ensuring minority rights and addressing caste-based and religious discrimination. The INDIA bloc has promised to tackle issues like farmer suicides, inadequate MSP (Minimum Support Price) and the need for comprehensive agrarian reforms. Of course, 'Save democracy' has been its main theme. The NDA's pitch was more country-centric security, \$5 trillion economy and so forth but INDIA's pitch was more about people, their sufferings and plight due to economic hardships. INDIA's focus on social justice and inclusivity is designed to attract voters who feel marginalised. Their promises to address agrarian distress and safeguard democratic values are aimed at rural voters, farmers and the educated urban electorate. Who really touched people's hearts, we shall get to know on June 4.

Another key aspect is the campaigning gusto with the nominations by Rahul Gandhi at Rae Bareilly and family friend Kishori Lal Sharma at Amethi. It is being called Rae Bareilly syndrome. It has infused life to Indian alliance workers — AAP, Samajwadi Party and Congress almost everywhere. It has enthused the opposition parties, who now want to clinch the battle. This is in sharp contrast to BJP leaders' meetings, which are marked by empty chairs as also apologetic clarifications that they are not for changing the statute. But the '400 paar' slogan of the BJP is being equated with a design to change the sacred Constitution of BR Ambedkar. The opposition, INDIA, seemingly has become a trailblazer and the ruling NDA is busy clarifying its charges. Rally after rally of the NDA is countering the accusations of toying with the statute and trying to alter its basic principles. Selling of public sector assets to preferred private groups comes next. The rulers are saying that major PSUs like ISRO and HAL remain intact. They are, however, quiet on Indian Oil and Railways. There are emerging issues like the sudden nullification of OBC certificates issued till 2010 by the Calcutta High Court. It is a double-edged sword that targets the Trinamool Congress Government in West Bengal and the Central Government alike. Prices make the highest noise, followed by religion and Agniveer part-time soldiers supposedly compromising with the country's security.

PICTALK



Children playing in water to beat the heat during a hot summer day, in Ranchi

PTI

Believe in yourself, not in superstitions

Discovering happiness hinges on passion and diligence, not reliance on external predictors. Be your own lucky charm through hard work

On Sundays, I usually find myself glancing through the weekly forecasts in the newspapers. A favourable week ahead is enough to bring a smile to my lips. It is good fun for the moment. But it was not always so. A few decades ago, I was heading a major department in a Government production unit. Yet I was restless, not satisfied with the way my life was moving. Repeated visits to astrologers and their forecasts became the opium to soothe my frayed nerves. So much so that when I actually got another posting, I visited an astrologer for reassurance that the movement would be auspicious. As I moved into an entirely different role, I found that I loved the new job with the same zeal that I had displayed in my earlier workspaces. I realised a few years later that the key to my happiness was within me—a passion to immerse myself in the moment. I have not gone back to an astrologer since then. Years earlier, I was travel-



SANJAY CHANDRA

ling with my colleagues one night to catch a flight to Europe for a study tour. The driver braked the vehicle to an abrupt halt as a cat crossed the road. The driver was in a dilemma. It was not a good sign. He resolved the issue by reversing the car a few metres before continuing to ward off the ill effect. I was to remember the incident when I had to cut short my stay by a couple of days having caught stomach flu, probably consuming beer and other savouries during the Oktoberfest festivities in Germany. The feline in Delhi had no inkling of its role in my misfortune. I am often surprised at the measures taken by us, to

invoke the blessings, or even to ward off the evil, for an unknown future. Many of us have gone through the process of our mothers feeding us curd and sugar when leaving home for the examinations. The ritual did not help me with papers that I had not prepared well. I also remember my elders telling me not to call out a person leaving home to avoid ill luck, even if I had something important to communicate. This fear of the unknown is not limited to us only. Such superstitions abound even in the so called modern western world. We all have heard the myths of break a mirror and bad luck follows for 7 years, the curse of Friday the 13th, sneezes and blessings, fingers crossed, purse on the floor, money out of the door and countless others. Cricket has been a craze in our country ever since I can remember. IPL is a relatively recent phenomenon that has fueled the frenzy to unimaginable heights. Fans root for players, who are not even remotely connected with the State or city after

which the team is named. The tournament has also sprouted several home-grown charms to ensure victory. I am surprised to see people continuing to remain standing or sitting for the duration of the match, controlling the uncomfortable urge to empty bursting bladders, or staying at home even at the cost of cancelling urgent engagements, among many other quirky behaviours. A lucky charm would also work only if one acts, that too based on sound reasoning and an understanding of the risks involved. Even if one fails, it might not feel like the end of the world. Do it the other way round and it is a heady cocktail for disappointment. American actress and comedian Lucille Ball's words inspire me to set myself free and be my own lucky charm: "Luck to me is something else: Hard work and realising what is opportunity and what isn't." (The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)

Unveiling the enigma of an unusual election



SHIVAJI SARKAR

In this election, accusations of tampering with constitutional values take centre stage, punctuated by issues such as the annulment of OBC certificates by the Calcutta HC

It is one of the strangest elections. Nobody speaks out. Visibly there is no wave. Election commission warnings to defaulting speakers are in nuances. More than the prices and unemployment, saving the Constitution has become the prime concern. This is an onslaught on their rights, asserting the Dalits, OBCs, Scheduled tribes and other marginalised classes. An issue raised by the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi seems to reverberate. Swelling crowds at Phulpur and Lalganj in the suburbs and Allahabad city at Congress and Samajwadi Party speak a lot.

Another key aspect is the campaigning gusto with the nominations by Rahul Gandhi at Rae Bareilly and family friend Kishori Lal Sharma at Amethi. It is being called Rae Bareilly syndrome. It has infused life to Indian alliance workers — AAP, Samajwadi Party and Congress almost everywhere. It has enthused the opposition parties, who now want to clinch the battle.

This is in sharp contrast to BJP leaders' meetings, which are marked by empty chairs as also apologetic clarifications that they are not for changing the statute. But the '400 paar' slogan of the BJP is being equated with a design to change the sacred Constitution of BR Ambedkar. The opposition, INDIA, seemingly has become a trailblazer and the ruling NDA is busy clarifying its charges.

Rally after rally of the NDA is countering the accusations of toying with the statute and trying to alter its basic principles. Selling of public sector assets to preferred private groups comes next. The rulers are saying that major PSUs like ISRO and HAL remain intact. They are, however, quiet on Indian Oil and Railways. There are emerging issues like the sudden nullification of OBC certificates issued till 2010 by the Calcutta High Court. It is a double-edged sword that targets the Trinamool Congress Government in West Bengal and the Central Government alike. Prices make the highest noise, followed by religion and Agniveer part-time soldiers supposedly compromising with the country's security.



The opposition is being heard with rapt attention. They have raised hopes. The ruling party guarantees are being scoffed at but Ram temple and minority bashing still matter in a large section of the UP and neighbouring areas of the cow belt. The resurgence of youth at the opposition parties reminds many of the days of post-emergency rallies and apologetic clarifications of the then prime minister Indira Gandhi. She was also called the Janata Party, a khichri or motley crowd. Five kg of free ration is no longer an issue. People have taken it for granted that they would have free ration anyway whosoever is in power. But jobs have become a major issue. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's assurance of one lakh rupee a year for apprenticeship per unemployed is being lapped up so as Rs 1 lakh for every woman. "This money is for the family", Gandhi stresses.

The top BJP leaders' assertion that "abhi to yah trailor hai" may be counter-productive considering the Supreme Court Stated Newsclick journalist Prabir Purakayastha's detention was illegal and released him. Gradually most news systems seem to be changing its delivery, a bid to share space with the surging opposition. Job reservation, though scoffed at by the BJP, has got a new lease of life with the Bihar caste



THERE ARE EMERGING ISSUES, LIKE THE SUDDEN NULLIFICATION OF OBC CERTIFICATES ISSUED UNTIL 2010 BY THE CALCUTTA HIGH COURT. IT IS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD THAT TARGETS THE TMC GOVERNMENT IN WEST BENGAL AND THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT ALIKE

census and the slogan "jiski jitni sankhya bhari, uski utni hissedari". Yes, reservation is to stay and Indians have to grapple with it. The BJP has been painted not in a bright colour on this score by the opposition. Despite the Calcutta High Court cancellation of all OBC certificates and a tough stance against TMC leader Mamata Banerjee, it will not be easy to nullify the reservation in an aspirational jobless country.

Another peculiar aspect is the regional variations of the poll. Congress or its alliance partners are the principal opposition in UP, MP, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Himachal, Maharashtra, Punjab and have even come out with some determination in Gujarat. Most southern States have secured tie-ups with the Congress.

BJP is fighting a straight battle in all those States as also in Bengal, Odisha, Assam, Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and many other smaller States. The poll is being keenly contested and results are difficult to guess, particularly with the EC revising the total extra votes polled by over 1.7 crore. The jerky expressions of BJP leaders, stressing on mangal sutra to Muslims instead of the achievements of the party have put it on the back foot with each day partly leaders dishing

out new figures on the lower side. This gives jitters to the party cadre. It is another story that the cadre is mostly missing. They are not seen moving robustly in constituencies and managing the booths. It is being said that the cadre has been told by the organisation to stay put and not seek to vote for anyone.

The cadre apathy is said to be reflected in its performance. More so the voters are getting alerted by its slogan "abhi to yah trailor hai", spoken by top BJP leaders often, may not suit the BJP. Quite a few YouTube news channels and skits like "Dadi Poti ke Khai" have viewership in lakhs. These are setting the basics for election narratives across the country in different languages.

How these are influencing the voters would be known as boxes open on June 4. BJP leaders' shrill deliveries and the brash expressions from public platforms are not taken kindly. Still predicting the elections is not easy. The Election Commission adding to 1.7 crore votes to the numbers cast after a few days may do wonders. The election this time with regional flavours of all kinds and quiet voters may even fox the exit poll stalwarts if it is free and fair. Nobody should wonder if the post-June 1 exit polls reflect a trend that could be different from the actual.

(The author is a senior journalist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RESTORING PURI'S ANCIENT TEMPLE

Madam — Apropos the news article, "ASI moves to restore 1400-year-old Shiva temple in Puri," published on May 29, this is my response. As a daily newspaper reader, the story of the Swapneswar Mahadev temple in Odisha's Puri district resonates deeply. The recent discovery and imminent restoration of this 1300-1400-year-old marvel is both exciting and a reminder of the rich historical tapestry of our nation.

The temple, showcasing the unique Kalingan architectural style, had been neglected for years, buried under vegetation and obscurity. The Archaeological Survey of India's (ASI) efforts to designate it as a "monument of national importance" will ensure that it receives the attention and resources needed for preservation. This initiative, supported by various ministers and INTACH, reflects a commendable commitment to preserving our cultural heritage. The intricate stonework and historical significance of the temple are a testament to the craftsmanship of the post-Gupta era. Protecting such monuments is crucial, not just for their architectural beauty but for the cultural and historical legacy they represent.

Roshan Nayak | Puri

INDIA NEEDS MORE DEFENCE FUNDS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "India needs substantial defence investment," published on May 29, this is my response. Reading the daily headlines reveals a complex landscape for India's defence strategy. The BJP's manifesto, promising a "Surakshit Bharat," emphasises achievements like the revocation of Article 370 and reductions in terrorism, yet recent attacks in J&K challenge these claims. Historical incidents, from the 2001 Parliament attack to the Pulwama tragedy, illustrate the persistent threat of terrorism.

The BJP touts surgical strikes as deterrents, but critics point to ongoing violence and the situation in Manipur as evidence of unmet challenges. The omission of China

Ensure fire safety, prevent tragedies



Apropos news, "Delhi asks establishments to ensure firefighting equipment functional and there are no obstacles on staircases," published on May 29, this is my response. The loss of newly born lives in the heart-wrenching fire incident in a neonatal hos-

pital in East Delhi is a huge, irreparable loss for the bereaved families. The round of allegations and counter-allegations has started on the fire incidents.

The administration and Delhi Government should examine every technical and legal aspect to determine accountability. The explosion of an oxygen cylinder and fire due to a short circuit in a Delhi hospital is a serious case of negligence in safety parameters. The Central or State Government will have to make concrete arrangements to ensure that incidents of arson are not repeated anywhere. Fire safety-related infrastructure facilities should occasionally be audited and inspected without favour and waiver. Right now, the well-known phrase befits on Delhi Government that the decadent and unpopular Nero "fiddled while Rome burned."

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

and Pakistan from the manifesto is concerning, especially given the unresolved tensions in Ladakh. Moreover, defence spending remains insufficient. Despite rising GDP, the allocation has dropped to under 2 per cent, far below what's needed to match China's military capability. With global trends showing increased defence investments, India must re-evaluate its priorities to effectively address its twin threats and ensure robust national security.

Pratiksha Sharma | Ujjain

END CASTE HATRED IN INDIA

Madam — Apropos the article "Nurture dreams with open eyes and determination," published on May 29, this is my response. Sanjay Chandra rightly highlighted the importance of supporting others in their journey towards realising their aspirations. But to achieve fraternity among Indians, caste hatred is a major obstacle. The latest National Crime Records Bureau data show the crimes against Dalits increased from 50,744 in 2021 to 57,428 in 2022. The graph has been going up since 2013. There were 15,368 crimes against Scheduled

Caste persons in 2022 in Uttar Pradesh, while MP ranked first in crimes against Scheduled Tribes from 2020 to 2022.

However, the ugly apathy towards Dalits by the upper-caste members of the same religion is not just confined to these two States but all over India. In some schools in Tamil Nadu, students wear colour-coded wristbands to show their caste identity! This is a threat to the ideals of equality and fraternity. Even a machine cannot work if there is a conflict among its parts, let alone a State or a society. In his famous poem *Apamanita* (Insulted), Tagore said, "Whom you push down will pull you down." We cannot turn a blind eye to hatred, abuse, torture and exploitation towards our Dalit brothers and sisters. Political will and stringent punishment must be in place to prevent atrocities against Dalits. Also, Dalits should get proportional representation in every sector to counter caste-based nepotism.

Sujit De | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

TURNING A BOLD NEW LEAF IN FOREIGN POLICY

India's geopolitical strategy is poised for transformation



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

In a week from now, a new central Government would be in place, picking up from where the last Government had left. If the BJP comes back to power for a third time, India's foreign policy push would be towards enhancing its stature globally. In a couple of interviews with various media, PM Modi has stressed a confident India now actually mediating on critical global affairs, than the earlier practise of being an observer. In most of the interviews, he mentions the role India played or continues to play, behind the scenes in the Ukraine situation, a sensitive topic. India has a historical relationship with Russia, which has never attempted to alter the relationship, however, Russia has of late started getting into a tighter embrace with China, cooperating on several critical projects including hydrocarbons and technology partnerships.

Meanwhile, India has grown closer to the US and has been rightly projected as a key ally for the Indo-Pacific region. PM Modi has also highlighted that his third term would ensure, that the Indian PM would be the senior most among democratically elected leaders, serving as he would post a decade of tectonic shifts in geo-political affairs. He hinted that a more confident India has to act more responsibly with its allies while expanding the network, especially with an aggressive China in the neighbourhood. It was no coincidence that external affairs minister S Jaishankar while delivering a key note on the Nikkei Future of Asia forum mentioned "The world is undergoing a flux - driven by geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-technological developments. In the last four decades, economic and political rebalancing accelerated by globalisation has been driving us towards multipolarity.



Today, the global order is visibly under stress, with Asia and the Indo-Pacific very much part of this transformation. But it is not just change we are seeing; there is also much greater risk-taking. It is visible in the conflict in Ukraine, in violence in the Middle East and the disregard for international law and agreements in Asia and the Indo-Pacific. This has economic facets, perhaps even more concerning. The supply chain challenge, over-concentrations stemming from globalisation and the use of economic coercion by States have put a premium on resilience and redundancy. Equally important is the technology challenge that has created a new level of inter-penetration and inter-dependence." Mr Jaishankar underscored India's future foreign policy roadmap with a firm focus on neighbours in the East, West and the Indian Ocean. He also highlighted the centrality of the Indo-Pacific in India's progress. Cross-border road infrastructure and integrated port facilities have found traction in India's external policy in the recent past.

The Iran-based Chabahar port, whose long-term maintenance contract India secured a few weeks back, providing access to crucial landlocked Central Asian countries and beyond is a recent example. External Affairs minister highlighted in his speech the pace at which road and rail networks are getting built in India, even when one of the largest democratic exercises in the world, India elections are underway. He said "The transformation of India is critical to strengthening multipolarity in Asia itself, a pre-requisite for a multipolar world. India's growing weight will ensure that the overall balance in the world order remains in favour of freedom, openness, transparency and a rules-based order. Equally, its greater sense of responsibility and more contributions are also making a difference. Indian naval ships are currently operating in the Red Sea to protect maritime shipping. India has been a First Responder for natural disasters across the Indian Ocean, sometimes even beyond." Without speculating for next week, it would be safe to assume a huge diplomatic outreach, awaits the new Government.

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

RBI dividend aids Government finances



UTTAM GUPTA

The RBI's dividend transfer provides a substantial fiscal cushion to the cash-strapped Government, but it must be prudent in fiscal management and resource allocation



In the amendment to the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act through the Finance Bill 2018-19 (the amendment was based on the recommendations of Dr N K Singh's committee mandated to review the FRBM Act (2003)), the Modi - the Government had pledged to achieve fiscal deficit or FD (excess of total expenditure over total receipts) of 3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) by the FY 2020-21. Following the Corona pandemic that played havoc with the economy leading to plunging revenue and ballooning expenditure during 2020-21 and the resultant zooming of FD to 9.1 per cent, it changed this fiscal glide path.

In her budget speech for FY 2021-22, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the Government's decision to achieve FD of 4.5 per cent by FY 2025-26. From 9.1 percent during 2020-21, the FD descended to 6.7 percent during 2021-22; 6.4 percent during 2022-23 and 5.8 percent during 2023-24. For 2024-25, in the interim budget presented by her on February 1, 2024, she has set the target at 5.1 per cent. If the Government can achieve this target, then 4.5 per cent for 2025-26 should be within easy reach. Against this backdrop, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has come up with a bonanza for the Centre. The RBI Board has approved a record dividend transfer of Rs 210,000 crore to the Centre for its (read: RBI) FY 2023-24. This will be reflected in the accounts of the central Government for the FY 2024-25. This amount is 2.4 times the dividend transfer of about Rs 87,400 crore made by the RBI for its FY 2022-23 and available for use by the Centre during 2023-24.

Even when compared to the provision of about Rs 80,000 crore made by Sitharaman in the interim budget for 2024-25, the dividend amount available from the RBI i.e. Rs 210,000 crore for use by the central Government during the year will be over two-and-a-half times. This gives a cushion of Rs 130,000 crore (210,000-80,000). This translates to about 0.4 per cent of the GDP.

While this should give substantial leeway

to the Government in managing its fiscal situation and ensuring easy compliance with the 5.1 per cent target, there is no room for complacency.

First, it shouldn't forget that the new glide path of 4.5 per cent for 2025-26 is way behind the original FD target of 3 per cent for 2020-21 as per the FRBM (Amendment) Act 2018. The Corona pandemic of 2020 was once in a lifetime event. Its impact was transitory and it won't be logical to use it as a basis for altering the medium-term fiscal trajectory. This is all the more when from 2021-22 onward, the economic situation was more or less back to normal.

The Government ought to be aiming at an FD target of 3 per cent by 2025-26 and going by this benchmark, it has still a long way to go. Second, we need to assess things from the RBI perspective. Unlike a public sector bank (PSB) or any other public sector undertaking (PSU), the RBI is not a commercial enterprise hence, is not expected to pay any dividend. Instead, it is a "full service" central bank.

Apart from managing the currency and payment systems and keeping inflation/prices in check, it is also mandated with managing the borrowings of the Union Government and State Governments; and supervising or regulating banks and non-banking finance companies (NBFCs). While carrying out these functions or operations, it generates a surplus. Typically, the RBI's income comes from the returns it earns on its foreign currency assets (FCA) — which could be in the form of bonds and treasury bills of other central banks or top-rated securities and deposits with other central banks. It also earns interest on its holdings of local rupee-denominated Government bonds or securities and while lending to banks for very

short tenures, such as overnight. Its expenditure is mainly on the printing of currency notes and staff, besides the commission it gives to banks for undertaking transactions on behalf of the Government across the country and to primary dealers, including banks, for underwriting some of these borrowings. The excess of income over expenditure is the "surplus".

After making provision for bad and doubtful debts, depreciation in assets, contributions to staff and superannuation fund, etc. and for all matters provided for under the RBI Act (1934), the balance of surplus is paid to the Union Government by Section 47 (Allocation of Surplus Profits) of the Act. Apart from this routine stuff, the financial crisis in the early 90s, when India's foreign exchange reserves had plummeted to a level barely enough to buy two weeks of imports, brought to the fore a dire need to prepare the RBI for dealing with "unexpected" and "unforeseen" events by enhancing its capacity to absorb financial shocks, ensure financial stability and provide confidence to the markets. So, it started transferring part of the surplus to a 'Contingency Fund'. This was in line with the recommendation of a committee to build contingency reserves (CR) of 12 per cent of its balance sheet.

In 2013, a panel led by Y H Malegam, then a member, of the RBI board, also reiterated the need for building CRs. Subsequently, in its annual report for 2015-16, the central bank alluded to a "draft economic capital/provisioning framework to assess its risk-buffer requirements in a structured and systematic manner." Meanwhile, in 2018, the RBI set up a Committee on Economic Capital Framework (ECF) under Dr Bimal Jalan. The Committee recommended that the RBI should maintain a minimum

contingency risk buffer (CRB) of 5.5 - 6.5 per cent of its balance sheet as risk buffer. The ECF was to remain in force for five years. The RBI adopted the ECF on August 26, 2019. During accounting years 2018-19 to 2021-22, it determined the surplus transferred to the Union Government taking the CRB at the lower end of the range i.e. 5.5 percent of its balance sheet. For arriving at the transferrable surplus during 2022-23, the CRB was increased to 6 per cent. However, for calculating the amount for 2023-24, it has used the higher end of the band prescribed by the Committee i.e. 6.5 per cent. The surge in dividend transfers for 2023-24 over 2022-23 despite the increase in CRB is due to the substantial increase in the RBI's interest income from foreign securities as well as exchange gain from foreign exchange transactions (according to the State Bank of India (SBI), these two factors accounted for 60 - 70 per cent of the increase in income of the RBI from Rs 235,000 crore during 2022-23 to around Rs 375,000 - 400,000 crore during 2023-24). This in turn was due to a sharp hike in interest rates by the US Fed and central banks of other developed countries; the hikes were prompted by the dire need to bring down high inflation in those countries. But the situation may not be sustained as the US Fed prepares to move the interest rate 'south' from the latter half of 2024 and other central banks follow suit. Even if it doesn't happen so soon and RBI repeats its performance during 2025-26, it would do well to retain more surplus with itself in the CRB. As a matter of prudent policy, the Centre should avoid riding piggyback on the RBI for managing its FD.

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



UNLIKE A PUBLIC SECTOR BANK (PSB) OR ANY OTHER PUBLIC SECTOR UNDERTAKING (PSU), THE RBI IS NOT A COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE AND HENCE, IS NOT EXPECTED TO PAY ANY DIVIDEND. INSTEAD, IT IS A 'FULL SERVICE' CENTRAL BANK

EU roots for a shift from free trade to fair trade on global stage

EU's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (EUCSDDD) sparks a global trade paradigm shift

Free Trade Agreements or Sustainable Trade Agreements? The EU's Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (EUCSDDD) raises this crucial question of choices, challenging the norms of international commerce in vogue for the last few decades. Imagine a world where every product purchased carries a hidden story—a tale of the well-being of the farmers and their families, environments preserved and corporate integrity maintained. The European Union's proposed Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (UCSD) is a landmark piece of legislation towards that direction. It compels European companies to identify and mitigate environmental and human rights risks throughout



SHATADRU CHATTOPADHAYAY

their supply chains. It also underscores living wages and incomes as human rights, insists on responsible management of supplier relationships and emphasises the necessity of meaningful stakeholder engagement to enhance transparency and accountability in human rights and environmental practices. However, the EUCSDDD's impact could extend far beyond Europe's

borders. It has the potential to become a catalyst for a global race to the top, pushing democracies around the world to adopt stricter sustainability standards. India stands at a crossroads, poised to not just adapt to these standards but also lead the way in demonstrating how integral sustainable trade is to the ethos of modern democracies.

Democracy: The Bedrock of Sustainable Trade

Democracy and sustainable trade are not merely compatible; they are inextricably linked. The interconnection between democracy and sustainable trade is rooted in the principles of equity, participation and long-term accountability. Democratic systems, by their nature, promote inclusive decision-making and public

accountability, which are essential for sustainable trade practices. For instance, democracies are more likely to implement and enforce regulations that ensure trade does not lead to environmental degradation or exploitation of workers, which are key aspects of sustainable trade (Hickel, 2020). Closer home, scholars like Amartya Sen have shown through his works that sustainability legislation ensures that economic decisions consider the environmental and social impact on future generations, a core tenet of responsible governance.

Moreover, sustainable trade often requires international cooperation and agreements that are robust and equitable. Democracies are better positioned to engage in such agree-

ments because they are based on principles of transparency and public participation. This openness allows for more effective and fair negotiations that consider the diverse needs and impacts on all stakeholders involved, from local communities to international partners. Reputed international scholars like Hickel (2020) and Rockström and Klum (2015) suggest that this democratic approach supports a form of globalisation that is not only about free trade but also about fair trade, where the benefits and responsibilities of trade are widely and fairly distributed. This is crucial for achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as it ensures that trade supports broader societal well-being and envi-

ronmental sustainability rather than contributing to inequality and ecological degradation. **Impact on Global Trade** Some critics fear the EUCSDDD could encourage trade toward countries with laxer regulations, creating a race to the bottom rather than the top. However, the European Union has emerged in the past five decades as a powerful force in shaping the global conversation around sustainable international trade. The EU's early environmental regulations, like clean air and water directives, weren't just about protecting its citizens. By making stricter environmental standards a prerequisite for access to its vast market, the EU created a ripple effect. Companies worldwide adapted to comply and other countries followed

suit, leading to a global shift towards cleaner practices and a higher bar for environmental responsibility. Other landmark legislation like the Conflict Minerals Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2017/821), which aims to eradicate conflict minerals from supply chains, demonstrates the bloc's commitment to ethical trade practices. This, in turn, has spurred international discussions and collaborations on human rights and responsible sourcing practices throughout global supply chains.

Navigating the EUCSDDD: The India-EU bilateral trade in goods is valued at ₹115.3 billion in 2022 and services contribute an additional ₹39.9 billion; the EU stands as India's second-largest trading partner (EPRS, 2024). The UCSD pre-

sents a unique opportunity for India to solidify its position as a responsible player on the global trade stage.

While initial concerns exist regarding potential cost increases for Indian businesses complying with the directive's standards, there's a significant upside. Aligning with the EUCSDDD can elevate India's image as a sustainable and ethical sourcing hub, attracting more European investment and boosting exports of responsibly produced goods. This, in turn, strengthens India's negotiating position in the ongoing Free Trade Agreement talks with the European Union.

(Shatadru is the founding Managing Director of Solidaridad in Asia; views are personal)

HK court convicts 14 pro-democracy activists in the city's biggest national security case

AP ■ HONG KONG

A Hong Kong court on Thursday convicted 14 pro-democracy activists in the city's biggest national security case under a law imposed by Beijing that has all but wiped out public dissent. Those who were found guilty included former lawmakers Leung Kwok-hung, Lam Cheuk-ting, Helena Wong and Raymond Chan. But the three judges approved by the government to oversee the case acquitted former district councilors Lee Yue-shun and Lawrence Lau. Those convicted could face life in prison. They were among 47 democracy advocates who were prosecuted in 2021 for their involvement in an unofficial primary election. Prosecutors had accused them of attempting to paralyse Hong Kong's government and topple the city's leader by securing the legislative majority necessary to indiscriminately veto budgets. Observers said their subversion case illustrates how the security law is being used to crush the political opposition following huge anti-government protests in 2019. But the Beijing and Hong Kong governments insist the law has helped bring back stability to the city and that judicial independence is being protected. When Britain handed Hong Kong back to China in 1997, Beijing promised to retain the city's Western-style civil liberties for 50 years. However, since the introduction of the 2020 law, Hong

Kong authorities have severely limited free speech and assembly under the rubric of maintaining national security. Many activists were arrested, silenced or forced into self-

including Leung Kwok-hung and Claudia Mo. Thirty-one of them, including Tai, Wong and Mo, pleaded guilty to the charge of conspiracy to commit subversion.

Dozens of residents lined up outside the police-guarded court building before 6 a.m. to secure a seat in the public gallery. Some supporters who were among the first in the line

is a kind of company. "I want to give some support for my friend and the faces I saw in news reports," he said, who is in his 30s. SL Chiu, who only gave his ini-

We haven't given up. We are still with you all," he said. On Wednesday night, Lee Yue-shun, one of the accused, said on Facebook that Thursday was like a special graduation ceremony for him, though graduation is usually about sharing happiness with families and friends.

"This perhaps best reflects the common helplessness of our generation," he said. The July 2020 primary was meant to shortlist pro-democracy candidates who would then run in the official election. It drew an unexpectedly high turnout of 610,000 voters, representing over 13 per cent of the city's registered electorate. The pro-democracy camp at that time hoped they could secure a legislative majority, which would allow them to press for the 2019 protest demands, including greater police accountability and democratic elections for the city leader. But the government postponed the legislative election that would have followed the primary, citing public health risks during the coronavirus pandemic. The electoral laws were later overhauled, drastically reducing the public's ability to vote and increasing the number of pro-Beijing lawmakers making decisions for the city in the legislature. Beijing also had criticised the vote as a challenge to the security law, which criminalises secession, subversion and collusion with foreign forces to intervene in the city's affairs as well as terrorism.



Lawrence Lau, a former pro-democracy district councilor, waves hand to media as he leaves the West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts in Hong Kong on Thursday. Fourteen pro-democracy activists were convicted in Hong Kong's biggest national security case on Thursday by a court that said their plan to effect change through an unofficial primary election would have undermined the government's authority and created a constitutional crisis. AP

exile. Dozens of civil society groups disbanded. The prosecution of the primary case involves pro-democracy activists across the spectrum. They include legal scholar Benny Tai, former student leader Joshua Wong and a dozen former lawmakers

They have a better chance at shorter jail terms and will be sentenced at a later date. The 16 others, including Leung, who pleaded not guilty and underwent a non-jury trial, were hearing their verdicts in the two-day case that started on Thursday.

came as early as Wednesday evening. Social worker Stanley Chang, a friend of one of the 16 defendants, said he arrived the site at 4 am because he feared he could not get a seat. Chang said there were very few things supporters could do for them and that attending the hearing

participated in the secession attempt or protests, and some police officers involved in the crackdown on an illegal independence referendum held by Puigdemont's government. The passing of the amnesty law, however, does not immediately clear up the legal mess of the separatists. The law is likely to face legal challenges and will be reviewed by higher courts. It also must be applied by courts on a case-by-case basis. There are experts who question its constitutionality since they say it would create inequality between Spanish citizens by favoring some over others. Since taking power in 2018, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has focused on reducing tensions in northeast Catalonia and he argues that the amnesty is key to culminating that process.

Verdict criticised by govts, activists

AP ■ HONG KONG

The conviction of 14 pro-democracy activists Thursday in Hong Kong drew condemnation from human rights groups and expressions of concern from foreign governments.

China, which authored the 2020 national security law that activists were prosecuted under, backed Hong Kong authorities. The former British colony is part of China but has its own governing and judicial system. In all, 47 people were charged in what was the largest case brought since the promulgation of the national security law. Of those, 31 had earlier pleaded guilty and two others were acquitted on Thursday.

THE EUROPEAN UNION: The conviction "marks a further deterioration of fundamental freedoms and democratic participation in Hong Kong," the European Union's foreign affairs office said. It added that the defendants "are being penalized for peaceful political activity that should be legitimate in any political system that respects basic democratic principles."

The case calls into question Hong Kong's commitment to openness and pluralism, the cornerstones of the city's attractiveness as an international commercial and financial center, the office said.

AUSTRALIA: Foreign Minister Penny Wong said Australia is deeply concerned by the verdicts, including for

Australian citizen Gordon Ng. "We have consistently expressed strong objections to China on the systemic erosion of Hong Kong's rights and freedoms, and we will continue to do so," she said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

CHINA: Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said the central government firmly supports the law enforcement and judicial authorities of the Hong Kong special administrative region in punishing all kinds of acts that undermine national security. She expressed China's opposition to other countries that "smear and undermine" Hong Kong's rule of law. "No one should engage in illegal activities and try to escape justice under the pretext of democracy," she said.

HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS: Sarah Brooks of Amnesty International called the convictions the "most ruthless illustration yet of how Hong Kong's National Security Law is weaponized to silence dissent." She said the convictions send a chilling message to anyone who opposes the actions of the government. Maya Wang, the acting China director at Human Rights Watch, said the conviction shows "utter contempt" for both democratic political processes and the rule of law. "Democracy is not a crime, regardless of what the Chinese government and its handpicked Hong Kong court may say," she said.

Pak does not adhere to 'no first use' of N-weapons policy: ex-Army official

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan does not follow the "no first use" policy on nuclear weapons and the country's deterrence capabilities can respond to all threats from the enemy, a former senior military officer has said, as he clarified Islamabad's stance on the use of atomic weapons. Lt Gen (ret'd) Khalid Ahmed Kidwai, Adviser to the National Command Authority, was speaking at a seminar held at the Centre for International Strategic Studies (CISS) on Wednesday to commemorate Yousaf Raza Gillani's 26th anniversary of Pakistan's nuclear tests in 1998. The Dawn newspaper reported that Kidwai, who has served as the director general of the Strategic Plans Division (SPD), said: "Pakistan does not have a No

First Use policy, and I'll repeat that for emphasis. Pakistan does not have a No First Use policy." The NFU refers to a country's stance and is regarded as an assurance that its nuclear arsenal is meant for deterrence, not fighting a nuclear war. Islamabad has traditionally maintained ambiguity regarding its NFU policy. "The Indian gung-ho leadership may like to think about it there should never ever be a doubt in anyone's mind, friend or foe, that Pakistan's operationally ready nuclear capability enables every Pakistani leader the liberty, the dignity and the courage to look straight into the Indian eye and never blink," Kidwai said. Kidwai said the full spectrum deterrence capabilities available to the Pakistani military

were the combination of the conventional and most modern technology-based weapons capable of responding to all threats from the enemy, state-run Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) news agency reported. He added that the full spectrum deterrence helped in restoring the strategic balance of power that enforced peace in the region. "In the past few decades, the robust nuclear capability of Pakistan has enforced peace in the region," APP quoted Kidwai as saying. Pakistan conducted six nuclear tests on May 28, 1998, inside a deeply dug tunnel in the remote Chaghi mountain of Balochistan province, as a tit-for-tat response to India's nuclear tests in the same month at the Indian Army's Pokhran Test Range.

Catalonia's separatists to get Spain amnesty

AP ■ MADRID

Spain's Parliament voted Thursday to give final approval to a controversial amnesty law for hundreds of Catalan separatists involved in the illegal and unsuccessful 2017 secession bid. The legislation was backed by Spain's left-wing coalition government, two Catalan separatist parties, and other smaller parties. It passes by a vote of 177-172 in the lower house with the conservative Popular Party and far-right Vox opposing it. The amnesty could benefit former Catalan regional president Carles Puigdemont, who is a fugitive from Spanish law in Belgium after fleeing his country following the failed Oct. 2017 breakaway bid that he led. It should also help out hundreds more, including former government officials in Barcelona, average citizens who

participated in the secession attempt or protests, and some police officers involved in the crackdown on an illegal independence referendum held by Puigdemont's government. The passing of the amnesty law, however, does not immediately clear up the legal mess of the separatists. The law is likely to face legal challenges and will be reviewed by higher courts. It also must be applied by courts on a case-by-case basis. There are experts who question its constitutionality since they say it would create inequality between Spanish citizens by favoring some over others. Since taking power in 2018, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has focused on reducing tensions in northeast Catalonia and he argues that the amnesty is key to culminating that process.

Indian agent pleads guilty in students fraud case in Canada

PTI ■ OTTAWA

An Indian immigration agent at the centre of a scam to cheat students from India by issuing fake college admission to procure Canadian visas has been sentenced to three years in jail after he pleaded guilty before a court in Vancouver to immigration offences, according to a media report. Brijesh Mishra, 37, was arrested after a Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) investigation tied him to dozens of fraudulent acceptance letters for Canadian colleges and universities that were provided to prospective international students from India between 2016 and 2020. Dressed in a red jumpsuit, Mishra on Wednesday stood inside a Vancouver courtroom and apologised for a slew of Canadian immigration offences.

Mishra pleaded guilty to three charges related to Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, including misrepresentation and communicating false information, CBC News reported. "I'm sorry," he told the courtroom. "I cannot change the past, but I can make sure I do not do it again in the future." Mishra was arrested in Surrey, British Columbia, in June 2023. He entered Canada on a tourist visa, which had expired at the time of his arrest. Crown and defence lawyers issued a joint sentencing submission asking for three years in prison, to which the judge agreed was sufficient. Mishra's time in custody since his 2023 arrest counts as time served, meaning he will serve an additional 19 months. "I would say he did show genuine remorse," CBC News quoted Gagan Nahal, Mishra's

defence lawyer, as saying. "The pleas that were entered today were clearly a demonstration of his remorse because he did have a right to run a trial in this." Nahal said 12 victims came forward during the CBSA's investigation. After serving his sentence in Canada, Mishra is expected to be deported to India where he faces further criminal charges, including a human smuggling offence. The maximum penalty for that offence is death. No victims or their family members were present in the courtroom. Federal Crown Prosecutor Molly Greene declined to comment on the case. In an agreed statement of facts between the crown and the defence, Greene outlined a common pattern based on victim testimony.



Former President Donald Trump speaks to the media as the jury deliberates in this trial at Manhattan Criminal Court on Wednesday in New York. AP/PTI

Jurors in Trump hush money trial end day 1 of deliberations

AP ■ NEW YORK

The jury in Donald Trump's hush money trial ended its first day of deliberations without a verdict on Wednesday but asked to rehear testimony from key witnesses about the alleged hush money scheme at the heart of the history-making case. The 12-person jury was sent home around 4 pm after about 4 1/2 hours of deliberations. The process is to resume on Thursday, when jurors are expected to rehear the requested testimony and at least part of the judge's legal instructions meant to guide them on the law. The notes sent to the judge with

the requests were the first burst of communication with the court after the panel of seven men and five women was sent to a private room just before 11:30 am to begin weighing a verdict. "It is not my responsibility to judge the evidence here. It is yours," Judge Juan M. Merchan told jurors before dispatching them to begin deliberations, reminding them of their vow during the selection process to judge the case fairly and impartially. It's unclear how long the deliberations will last. A guilty verdict would deliver a stunning legal reckoning for the presumptive Republican presidential nominee as he seeks to

reclaim the White House while an acquittal would represent a major win for Trump and embolden him on the campaign trail. Since verdicts must be unanimous, it's also possible that the case ends in a mistrial if the jury cannot reach a consensus after days of deliberations. Trump struck a pessimistic tone after leaving the courtroom following the reading of jury instructions, repeating his assertions of a "very unfair trial" and saying: "Mother Teresa could not beat those charges, but we'll see. We'll see how we do." He remained inside the courtroom during deliberations, where he posted on his social

media network complaints about the trial and quoted legal and political commentators who view the case in his favour. In one all-capital-letters post, he proclaimed that he didn't even "know what the charges are in this rigged case", even though he was present in the courtroom as the judge detailed them to jurors. He did not testify in his own defense, something the judge told jurors they could not take into account. Trump is charged with 34 counts of falsifying business records at his company in connection with an alleged scheme to hide potentially embarrassing stories about him during

his 2016 Republican presidential campaign. The charge, a felony, arises from reimbursements paid to then-Trump lawyer Michael Cohen after he made a USD 130,000 hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels to silence her claims that she and Trump had sex in 2006. Trump is accused of misrepresenting Cohen's reimbursements as legal expenses to hide that they were tied to a hush money payment. Trump has pleaded not guilty and contends the Cohen payments were for legitimate legal services. He has also denied the alleged extramarital sexual encounter with Daniels.

Iran opens registration for June presidential election

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran opened a five-day registration period Thursday for hopefuls wanting to run in the June 28 presidential election to replace the late Ebrahim Raisi, who was killed in a helicopter crash earlier this month with seven others. The election comes as Iran grapples with the aftermath of the May 19 crash, as well as heightened tensions between Tehran and the United States, and protests including those over the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini that have swept the country. While Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 85, maintains final say over all matters of state, presidents in the

past have bent the Islamic Republic of Iran toward greater interaction or increased hostility with the West. The five-day period will see those between the ages of 40 to 75 with at least a master's degree register as potential candidates. All candidates ultimately must be approved by Iran's 12-member Guardian Council, a panel of clerics and jurists ultimately overseen by Khamenei. That panel has never accepted a woman, for instance, nor anyone calling for radical change within the country's governance. Ahmad Vahidi, Iran's interior minister, opened the registration period. The Interior Ministry, in charge of the country's police, run Iranian elec-

tions with no substantial international observation. "These elections, like the parliamentary elections, will be held in complete safety and health, with good competition and wide participation of all dear people," Vahidi said. Raisi, a protégé of Khamenei, won Iran's 2021 presidential election after the Guardian Council disqualified all of the candidates with the best chance to potentially challenge him. That Iran saw the lowest turnout in its history for a presidential election. This year's parliamentary vote saw an even-lower turnout amid widespread boycott calls. That likely was a sign of voters' discontent with both a hard-line cleric sanctioned by

the US in part over his involvement in mass executions in 1988, and Iran's Shiite theocracy over four decades after its 1979 Islamic Revolution. Who will run — and potentially be accepted — remains in question. The country's acting president, Mohammad Mokhber, a previously behind-the-scenes bureaucrat, could be a front-runner, because he's already been seen meeting with Khamenei. Also discussed as possible aspirants are former hard-line President Mohammad Ahmadinejad and former reformist President Mohammad Khatami — but whether they'd be allowed to run is another question.

The five-day registration period will close on Tuesday. The Guardian Council is expected to issue its final list of candidates within 10 days afterwards. That will allow for a shortened two-week campaign before the vote in late June. The new president will take office while the country now enriches uranium at nearly weapons-grade levels and hampers international inspections. Iran has armed Russia in its war on Ukraine, as well as launched a drone and missile attack on Israel amid the war in Gaza. Tehran also has continued arming proxy groups in the Middle East, like Yemen's Houthi rebels and Lebanon's Hezbollah militia.

Ship carrying grain to Iran attacked by Houthi rebels

AP ■ DUBAI

A Greek-owned, Marshall Islands-flagged bulk carrier that came under attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels earlier this week had a cargo of grain bound for Iran, the group's main benefactor, authorities said Thursday. The attack on the Laax comes as the Houthis continue their attacks on shipping throughout the Red Sea corridor, part of a campaign they say aims at pressuring Israel and the West over the war in Gaza. However, as shipping through that artery has dropped during the months of attacks, the rebels have struck vessels associ-

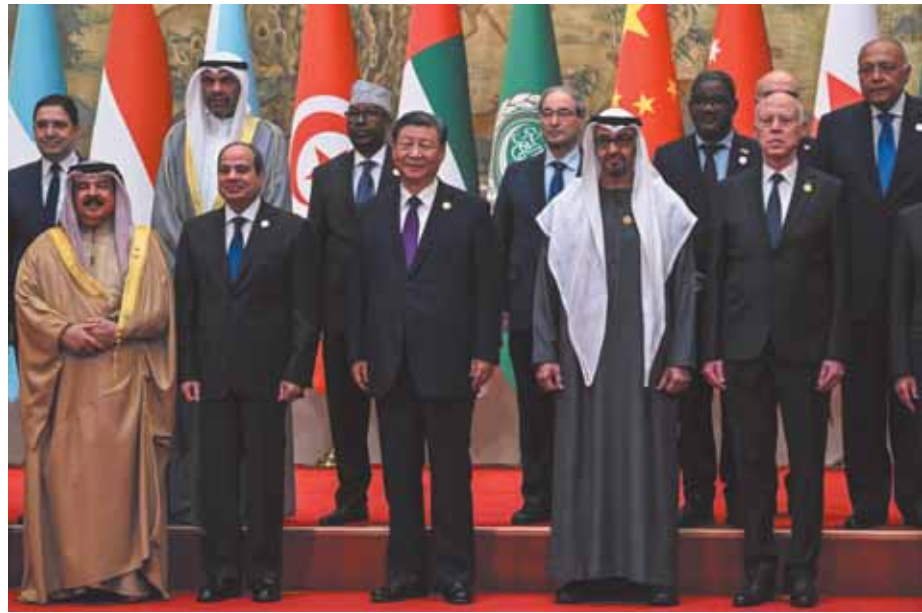
ated with Iran, as well as Tehran's economic lifelines of China and Russia. Initially after the attack, the Laax had listed its destination as Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates. On Thursday, however, its listed destination instead appeared to be Bandar Khomeini, Iran. A statement released by French naval forces based in the UAE that patrol the Middle East also identified the vessel's grain shipment as being bound for Iran. It said that a team from Djibouti had inspected the damage caused by the attack, which it said involved both drones and missiles, and found no remaining dangerous explosives onboard

the ship. Images released by the French navy showed damage both at the waterline of the vessel, as well as on its deck. Tuesday's attack saw five missiles hit the Laax during the hours-long assault, the private security firm LSS-SAPU told The Associated Press. LSS-SAPU, which earlier helped evacuate mariners from the Houthi-attacked Rubyymar that later sunk, said there had been no prior warning by radio from the Houthis. LSS-SAPU had three armed security guards onboard the Laax at the time of the attack. Among the ship's crew were 13 Filipinos and one Ukrainian.

China hosts Arab leaders at summit focused on trade and Israel-Hamas war

AP ■ TAIPEI (TAIWAN)

Chinese President Xi Jinping called for an international peace conference focused on the Israel-Hamas war and promised more humanitarian aid as he opened a summit with leaders of Arab states Thursday in Beijing.



(From left in front row) Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, China's President Xi Jinping, Emirati President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Tunisia's President Kais Saied pose for a family photo ahead of the opening ceremony of the 10th Ministerial Meeting of China-Arab States Cooperation Forum at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing on Thursday.

“As war is raging causing tremendous suffering, justice can’t be absent and the two-state solution can’t be shaken,” Xi said in a speech opening the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum.

He called on Arab states to deepen cooperation in areas such as trade, clean energy, space exploration and health care. The summit attended by heads of state from Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Tunisia among others was set to focus on China’s expanding trade ties and on security concerns related to the Israel-Hamas war.

occupied territories. It has not criticized the initial Hamas attack on Oct. 7 — which killed about 1,200 people — while the United States and others have called it an act of terrorism. However, China does have growing economic ties with Israel.

Exeter. “It wants to continue the momentum established in recent years with Gulf states and expand its investments, particularly in trade, technology (5G networks), and other cyber initiatives.” Additionally, China wants to present itself as an alternative to the West and a more credible partner to the region, one that doesn’t interfere in the nations’ domestic affairs nor exert pressure, Papageorgiou

said. Present at the forum is Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sisi, who met Xi on Wednesday. The two leaders signed a series of cooperation agreements in areas such as infrastructure, technology and food imports meant to further their countries’ ties. China has invested billions of dollars in Egyptian state projects, including a Suez Canal economic zone and a new

administrative capital east of Cairo. Investments between Egypt and China amounted to around \$14 billion in 2023, compared to \$16.6 billion in 2022, according to Egypt’s statistics agency. Also at the forum are Tunisia’s President Kais Saied, Emirati President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Bahrain King Hamad. The China-Arab States Cooperation Forum was established in 2004 as a formal dialogue mechanism between China and Arab states. China is Tunisia’s fourth-largest trading partner after Germany, Italy and France. Beijing has financed hospitals and sports complexes in Tunisia, and its companies have been contracted to build strategic infrastructure such as bridges and deep-water Mediterranean ports.

The UAE also has expansive, growing economic ties with China and has faced US criticism for an alleged Chinese military facility being built in Abu Dhabi. Besides China’s expansive trade ties in the Middle East, it has increasingly sought to play a diplomatically role in the region. Last year, Beijing helped broker an agreement that saw Saudi Arabia and Iran reestablish ties after seven years of tension in a role previously reserved for longtime global heavyweights like the US and Russia.

2 Israeli soldiers killed in West Bank car-ramming attack

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The Israeli military said Thursday that two soldiers were killed in a car-ramming attack in the occupied West Bank. Violence in the West Bank has surged throughout the war in Gaza as Israel raids Palestinian towns in the territory to crack down on militancy, with incursions resulting in the deaths of more than 500 Palestinians. In the Gaza Strip, Palestinians in the border city of Rafah reported heavy fighting Wednesday, and Israel’s military said it seized control of

the entire length of Gaza’s border with Egypt. Fighting in Rafah has already spurred more than 1 million Palestinians to flee, most of whom had already been displaced in the war between Israel and Hamas. They now seek refuge in makeshift tent camps and other war-ravaged areas, where they lack shelter, food, water and other essentials for survival, the United Nations says. Chinese President Xi Jinping promised more humanitarian aid for people in Gaza as he opened a summit with leaders of Arab states Thursday in

Beijing. Israeli bombardments and ground offensives in Gaza have killed more than 36,000 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry, which doesn’t distinguish between combatants and civilians. Israel launched its war in Gaza after Hamas’ October 7 attack in which militants stormed into southern Israel, killed some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducted about 250. Israel says around 100 hostages are still captive in Gaza, along with the bodies of around 30 more.

Battered pier adds to Gaza food crisis

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A string of security, logistical and weather problems has battered the plan to deliver desperately needed humanitarian aid to Gaza through a US military-built pier. Broken apart by strong winds and heavy seas just over a week after it became operational, the project faces criticism that it hasn’t lived up to its initial billing or its USD 320 million price tag. US officials say, however, that the steel causeway connected to the beach in Gaza and the floating pier are being repaired and reassembled at a port in southern Israel, then will be reinstalled and working again next week.

While early Pentagon estimates suggested the pier could deliver up to 150 truckloads of aid a day when in full operation, that has yet to happen. Bad weather has hampered progress getting aid into Gaza from the pier, while the Israeli offensive in the southern city of Rafah has made it difficult, if not impossible at times, to get aid into the region by land routes. Aid groups have had mixed reactions — both welcoming any amount of aid for starving Palestinians besieged by the nearly eight-month-old Israel-Hamas war and decrying the pier as a distraction that took pressure off Israel to open more border crossings, which are far more

productive. It’s “a side-show,” said Bob Kitchen, a top official of the International Rescue Committee. The Biden administration has said from the start that the pier wasn’t meant to be a total solution and that any amount of aid helps. “Nobody said at the outset that it was going to be a panacea for all the humanitarian assistance problems that still exist in Gaza,” national security spokesman John Kirby said Wednesday. “I think sometimes there’s an expectation of the US military — because they’re so good — that everything that they touch is just going to turn to gold in an instant.”

Chinese man allegedly running ‘world’s largest-ever’ cybercrime botnet arrested

AP ■ WASHINGTON

An international law enforcement team has arrested a Chinese national and disrupted a major botnet that officials said he ran for nearly a decade, amassing at least USD 99 million in profits by reselling access to criminals who used it for identity theft, child exploitation, and financial fraud, including pandemic relief scams. The US Department of Justice quoted FBI Director Christopher Wray as saying on Wednesday that the “911 S5” botnet — a network of malware-infected computers in nearly 200 countries — was likely the world’s largest.

director for cyber operations, Brett Leatherman, said in a LinkedIn post. Authorities also seized USD 29 million in cryptocurrency, Leatherman said. Cybercriminals used Wang’s network of zombie residential computers to steal “billions of dollars from financial institutions, credit card issuers and account holders, and federal lending programs since 2014”, according to an indictment filed in Texas’ eastern district. The administrator, Wang, sold access to the 19 million Windows computers he hijacked — more than 613,000 in the United States — to criminals who “used that access to commit a staggering array of crimes that victimised children, threatened people’s safety and defrauded financial institutions and federal lending programmes”, US Attorney General Merrick Garland said in announcing the takedown.

He said criminals who purchased access to the zombie network from Wang were responsible for more than USD 5.9 billion in estimated losses due to fraud against relief programs. Officials estimated 560,000 fraudulent unemployment insurance claims originated from compromised IP addresses. Wang allegedly managed the botnet through 150 dedicated servers, half of them leased from US-based online service providers. The indictment says Wang used his illicit gains to purchase 21 properties in the United States, China, Singapore, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates and St. Kitts and Nevis, where it said he obtained citizenship through investment. In its news release, the Justice Department thanked police and other authorities in Singapore and Thailand for their assistance.

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A court in Pakistan on Thursday acquitted jailed former prime minister Imran Khan in two cases related to May 9 violence, citing “insufficient evidence” against him. The supporters of Khan, the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, vandalised public property, including sensitive army installations last year following his arrest in an alleged corruption case. The petition challenging the two cases lodged at Shehzad Town police station against the PTI founder was approved by Judicial Magistrate Umar Shabbir of the District and Sessions Court of Islamabad. While acquitting Khan, 71, the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, the court said in its verdict: “Because of insufficient evidence presented by the prosecution, the PTI founder has been acquitted.” On May 15, Khan was acquitted in two cases linked to the May 9 vandalism. His acquittal orders were issued by Judicial Magistrate Sahib Bilal, who approved the former prime minister’s plea challenging the cases. Both those cases against Khan were filed in Khanna police station in Islamabad. The cases were registered against the PTI founder for the long march and violation of Article 144.

Trends in SA polls show ANC losing ground

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

The ruling African National Congress received around 43 per cent of the ballots cast in the general election while the opposition Democratic Alliance garnered 26 per cent, according to the latest trends as counting progressed at 23,000 voting stations across South Africa on Thursday. However, the final result of Wednesday’s election would be available only on Sunday, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) has said. Analysts emphasised that it was still too early to confirm whether this would be a trend to support widespread predictions that the African National Congress (ANC) would lose the majority it has held since Nelson Mandela became the country’s first democratically elected president 30 years ago after the

end of the apartheid regime. The ANC stood at around 43 per cent of the ballots cast after about 14 per cent of the voting stations shared their results with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) by 11 am (14:30 IST) on Thursday. The opposition Democratic Alliance had 26 per cent of the votes and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) was in third place with around 8 per cent. This year’s elections are the most hotly contested, with 52 parties, including the opposition Democratic Alliance and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) apart from the scores of independent candidates, the latter for the first time, vying for the 400 seats in the National Assembly and varying numbers of seats for the nine provincial governments.

In one of the provinces, the KwaZulu-Natal province (KZN), the ANC has less than half the seats compared to the newly-formed Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) party, which has garnered 42 per cent votes by 11 am. MK is led by ousted former president Jacob Zuma and KZN is Zuma’s home province, where he has large support from the majority ethnic Zulu voters. He was debarred by the Constitutional Court from being a Member of Parliament because of a previous criminal conviction for contempt of court. Zuma was sentenced after he walked out of a hearing of the Commission of Inquiry into State Capture. However, Zuma’s face still appeared on the ballot papers on Wednesday because the IEC said it was too late to reprint the millions of them.

North Korea fires missile barrage toward its eastern waters

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea on Thursday fired a barrage of suspected ballistic missiles toward its eastern sea, according to South Korea’s military, days after its attempt to launch a military reconnaissance satellite ended in failure but still drew strong condemnation from its rivals. South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said it detected the North firing around 10 projectiles that appeared to be short-range ballistic missiles from an area near its capital, Pyongyang. It said the suspected missiles flew around 350 kilometers (217 miles) before landing in waters off the North’s eastern coast. It said the South Korean military has increased surveillance and vigilance and is closely sharing information with the United States and Japan. Japan’s coast guard issued a maritime safety advisory over the North Korean launches and urged ships to exercise caution if they find any fallen

objects. Japan’s Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told reporters that the suspected missiles were believed to have landed in waters outside of Japan’s exclusive economic zone and there were no immediate reports of damages. He said Tokyo “strongly condemns” the launches, which are in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions against the North. Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have increased in recent months as the pace of both North Korea’s weapons testing and South Korea’s combined military exercises with the United States and Japan have intensified in a cycle of tit-for-tat. Thursday’s launches came after North Korea flew hundreds of trash-carrying balloons toward the South since Tuesday night in retaliation against South Korean activists flying anti-North Korean propaganda leaflets across the border. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un had warned of unspecified “overwhelming actions” against



South Korea after it staged an aerial exercise involving 20 fighter jets near the inter-Korean border hours before North Korea attempted to launch its second military reconnaissance satellite. The rocket exploded shortly after liftoff, but Kim has urged his military scientists to overcome the failure and continue developing space-based recon-

naissance capabilities, which he described as crucial for monitoring US and South Korean military activities and enhancing the threat of his nuclear-capable missiles. Also on Thursday, North Korea hit back at international condemnation of its failed satellite launch, which drew strong rebukes from the United Nations and other countries as it involves technologies used for developing intercontinental range ballistic missiles. The North had successfully launched its first military spy satellite in November, but Monday’s failure posed a possible setback to Kim’s plans to launch three more military spy satellites in 2024. “We will never tolerate any moves of the hostile forces to violate the inviolable sphere under the exercise of sovereignty nor step back from having access to the space reconnaissance capability which should be done surely no matter what others may say,” North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Son Gyong said in a statement published on state media. Kim Son Gyong’s statement came as response to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’ condemnation of Monday’s launch, which he called a violation of Security Council resolutions that prohibit the North from conducting any launches involving ballistic missile technology.

‘India to get another five years of stability after PM Modi’s re-election’

AP ■ TAIPEI (TAIWAN)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his 10 years of rule has focused on development, an influential Indian-American author has said, hoping that a third term for him would give India another five years of stability and provide him an opportunity to address some of the major challenges facing the country. “India can courageously counter all this (challenges being faced from outside the country). The reason India can counter all this is because of the Modi government. Despite all the things that people claim, argue and criticise, the fact is that they’ve delivered

development. A lot more development is needed but they have delivered.” Princeton-based Indian-American author Rajiv Malhotra told PTI in an interview. A prolific writer, Malhotra over the last few decades has authored several books in opposition to the Western academic study of Indian culture and society. “Snake in the Ganga: Breaking India 2.0” is his latest book. Referring to the Indian media reports, Malhotra said it looks like Modi is coming back to power for the third term. Malhotra said that during his two terms, the Modi government had carried out development that benefited all sections of society.

“You can show statistically that every segment of society from poor to minorities, and so on have benefited. When you can show it numerically that now they have roads, clean water, better health facilities, food, and education. So then people have to say this government has delivered whereas the previous government was making all the slogans of fighting poverty etc., and not delivering,” he said. “Ultimately, poor people need economic development and that has been a successful central agenda of this government,” Malhotra said, arguing that Modi in his third term should focus on several key challenges, including intervention from outside powers in India’s inter-

national affairs. He suggested creating a national think-tank, carrying certain constitutional amendments that give equal rights and benefits to all Indians irrespective of caste, religion and ethnicity. Malhotra, who heads the Infinity Foundation in the US, agreed with the recent statement of External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar that external forces had tried to influence the results and nature of Indian elections. “First of all, let me just say that while I like Jaishankar’s ability, his audacity and his quick response. That’s all good. Previously they were apologetic. But I will say I have a criticism that he is not able to anticipate. He can react. He is unable to

anticipate where it’s coming from, where the vulnerabilities are, where the next attack is coming, who the bad guys are, and who the ones doing it are,” he said. “They haven’t done a diagnostic. They haven’t done deep enough research. Because of that, they are running around wondering where the next attack will come. You cannot survive long-term when the other side is deciding when, how and where to attack you and then you will respond. I think in the field of physical attacks, and terrorist attacks, India has become pretty good. The intelligence agencies can stop the attacks or anticipate and respond before they happen in many cases,” he said.

राष्ट्रीय प्रौद्योगिकी संस्थान, कुरुक्षेत्र
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
 (UNDER THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, GOVT. OF INDIA)
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RBI balance sheet rises 11 per cent to ₹70.47 lakh crore in FY24

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The size of Reserve Bank's balance sheet increased by 11.08 per cent to Rs 70.47 lakh crore as on March 2024, leading to the highest-ever dividend payout to the government, according to the central bank's annual report. In actual terms, the increase was Rs 7,02,946.97 crore over Rs 63.45 lakh crore as on March 2023.

The central bank's net income stood at Rs 2.11 lakh crore at end-March 2024 after making a provision of Rs 42,819.91 crore, significantly down from Rs 1,30,875.75 crore in the preceding fiscal. The amount made towards provisioning is transferred to Contingency Fund (CF). The net income during 2022-23 was Rs 87,420 crore. Like 2022-23, no provision was made towards Asset Development Fund (ADF) during the year under review. The balance sheet of the Reserve Bank reflects activities carried out in pursuance of its various functions including issuance of currency as well as monetary policy and reserve management objectives. Last week, the RBI had approved the highest-ever dividend payout of Rs 2.11 lakh crore to the central government for 2023-24. The dividend or surplus transfer by the RBI to the Centre was



Rs 87,416 crore for the fiscal 2022-23. The previous high was Rs 1.76 lakh crore in 2018-19. According to the RBI's Annual Report for 2023-24, the increase on assets side in the balance sheet was due to rise in foreign investments, gold, and loans and advances by 13.90 per cent, 18.26 per cent and 30.05 per cent, respectively. On liabilities side, expansion was due to increase in notes issued, deposits and other liabilities by 3.88 per cent, 27.00 per cent and 92.57 per cent, respectively. The RBI further said domestic assets constituted 23.31 per cent while foreign currency assets, gold (including gold deposit and gold held in India) and loans and advances to financial

institutions outside India constituted 76.69 per cent of total assets as on March 31, 2024, as against 26.08 per cent and 73.92 per cent, respectively, as on March 31, 2023. The Reserve Bank holds 822.10 metric tonnes of gold, of which 308.03 metric tonnes are held as backing for notes issued as on March 31, 2024. The value of gold held as asset of Issue Department increased by 16.94 per cent from Rs 1,40,765.60 crore as on March 31, 2023 to Rs 1,64,604.91 crore as on March 31, 2024. RBI said this increase in the value of gold during the year is on account of addition of 6.94 metric tonnes of gold, increase in price of gold and depreciation of Indian rupee against US dollar.

Internet based trading: Sebi reduces approval time to seven days for brokers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi on Thursday significantly reduced the time taken by stock exchanges for granting approval to stock brokers for internet-based trading to seven days from the current 30 days. The move is aimed at facilitating ease of doing business. Under the rule, the broker is required to apply to the respective stock exchange for a formal permission to provide internet-based trading service.



Further, the stock exchange, which was required to communicate its decision to the member within 30

calendar days, will now have to do so within 7 days, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in its circular. The internet trading can take place through order routing systems, which will route client orders to exchange trading systems for execution. Thus a client sitting in any part of the country can trade using the internet as a medium through brokers' internet trading systems. Additionally, the regulator has abolished the existing requirement of periodic confirmation of internet-based trading (IBT) statistics by stock brokers before they are published by stock exchanges.

Instead, exchanges would publish IBT statistics on the basis of details of IBT terminals provided by stock brokers. Further, exchanges, in this regard, can obtain information/declaration about IBT terminals from stock brokers as deemed fit by them. The decision has been taken after Sebi received requests pertaining to internet-based trading from the Industry Standard Forum (ISF) of stock brokers. The new guidelines will be applicable with immediate effect, Sebi said.

Rupee rebounds to settle 9 paise higher at 83.31 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee recovered 9 paise to settle at 83.31 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday on the back of softening American currency as well as crude oil prices in the overseas market. Forex traders said, however, a massive selling in the domestic equity markets, outflow of foreign fund and increased month-end demand of greenback by oil marketing companies weighed on the Indian currency. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.42 and oscillated between the intra-day high of 83.26 and lowest



level of 83.44 during the session. It finally settled at 83.31 (provisional), registering a gain of 9 paise from its previous closing level. The rupee plunged 22 paise to close at 83.40 against the US dollar on Wednesday, a day after losing 5 paise on Tuesday. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.12

per cent lower at 104.90. Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the rupee, which fell in the first half of the day on weak domestic markets and FII outflows, appreciated on softening of the US dollar as the US treasury yields eased after rising over the past three days. "Overall strength in the US dollar amid hawkish tone of the US Federal Reserve officials may further pressure the rupee. However, any further easing of US treasury yields or any intervention by the RBI may support rupee at lower levels," he said, adding, "USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.10 to Rs 83.70."

Capital needs to remain high for corporates: Moody's

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Moody's Ratings on Thursday said capital requirements will remain high for Indian corporates as they go in for capacity expansion and inorganic growth spending. Moody's estimates that 16 of the 23 rated companies will require USD 70-100 billion of funding annually in the next two years for growth spending, refinancing requirements and shareholder payments. While improving domestic liquidity and companies' internal cash flows can cover a large portion of their capital needs, offshore funding will remain an important funding channel, it said. "Capacity expansion, inorganic growth spending,

refinancing and working capital needs, along with shareholder payments, will keep capital requirements high for nonfinancial corporates in India," Moody's Ratings said in a statement. It said capital spending by non-financial corporates will remain high as they expand their capacities to cater to the strong consumption growth expected in the country, at a time when their capacity utilisation is already high. Expectations of strong consumption growth are driven by India's growing population, rising disposable incomes and favourable demographic trends, including a young population and rising urbanisation, Moody's said.

Number of frauds in banking sector rises in FY24, amount declines 47 per cent



PTI ■ MUMBAI

The number of frauds in the banking sector went up to 36,075 in 2023-24 year-on-year, but the amount involved reduced by 46.7 per cent to Rs 13,930 crore, according to the Reserve Bank's annual report released on Thursday. The RBI report also said that with an aim to curb frauds and enhance the payment experience further, the introduction of real-time payee name validation before the actual fund transfer will be explored in compliance with newly enacted 'The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023'. During 2023-24, the amount involved in frauds was Rs 13,930 crore, down from Rs 26,127 crore a year ago. The number of frauds increased to 36,075 during 2023-24 from 13,564 in the preceding financial year. An assessment of bank group-wise fraud cases over the last three years indicates that while private sector banks reported maximum number of frauds, public sector banks

continued to contribute maximum to the fraud amount, said the Annual Report for 2023-24. "Frauds have occurred predominantly in the category of digital payments (card/internet), in terms of number. In terms of value, frauds have been reported primarily in the loan portfolio (advances category)," the report said. While small value card/internet frauds contributed maximum to the number of frauds reported by the private sector banks, the frauds in public sector banks were mainly in loan portfolio. Further, an analysis of the vintage of frauds reported during 2022-23 and 2023-24 shows a significant time-lag between the date of occurrence of a fraud and its detection. "The amount involved in frauds that occurred in previous financial years formed 94 per cent of the frauds reported in 2022-23 in terms of value," the report said. Similarly, 89.2 per cent of the frauds reported in 2023-24 by value occurred in previous financial years.

Stock markets fall for 5th day; Sensex plunges 617 points

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty declined nearly 1 per cent on Thursday, continuing their falling streak for the fifth day running due to profit booking amid monthly expiry in the derivatives segment. The 30-share BSE Sensex plunged by 617.30 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 73,885.60. The barometer hit the day's low of 73,668.73 due to selling in blue-chips. The NSE Nifty dropped by 216.05 points or 0.95 per cent to close at 22,488.65.



Benchmark indices closed at lifetime high levels on May 23 which triggered profit-taking amid growing nervousness among investors ahead of the results of the Lok Sabha polls on June 4. Since then, Nifty and Sensex have declined

around 2 per cent in the five straight sessions. "The benchmark index is taking cues from the US market as treasury yields continue to climb following the stickiness of global inflation, delaying the central bank's interest rates cut policy," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said. From the Sensex pack, Tata Steel, Titan, Tech Mahindra, Wipro, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, Nestle India, Tata Motors and JSW Steel were the biggest laggards. ICICI Bank, Axis Bank,

HDFC Bank, State Bank of India and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the gainers. "Meanwhile, the broader market continued the weak trend, led by profit booking, due to feeble closing of monthly expiry owing to lack of interest to hold short-term positions, as exit poll is slated in the weekend," Nair said. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Shanghai settled lower. European markets were trading with gains, while US markets ended in the negative territory on Wednesday. Foreign Institutional

Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 5,841.84 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. The last phase of polling is scheduled for June 1. The results of the ongoing general elections will be declared on June 4. Global oil benchmark Brent Crude fell 0.41 per cent to USD 83.19 a barrel. On Wednesday, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 667.55 points or 0.89 per cent to settle at 74,502.90. The NSE Nifty dropped 183.45 points or 0.80 per cent to close at 22,704.70.

Navi Mumbai Marriott Hotel opens

Mumbai: MRG Group, the Bengaluru-based hospitality and real estate powerhouse known for its Goldfinch Hotels & Resorts brand, announced the grand opening of the Navi Mumbai Marriott Hotel. Strategically located in the vibrant heart of Navi Mumbai, this new establishment aims to cater to both business travellers and vacationers with unparalleled convenience and accessibility. Situated along the Thane Belapur Road, the hotel is just 26 km from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport. PNS

Hiring of women for leadership roles rises to 23.2 per cent in early 2024, says report

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Hiring of women for leadership roles has increased to 23.2 per cent across sectors in early 2024, even though employers are yet to achieve gender parity in top management, a report said on Thursday. Women leadership hires have shown significant growth over the years to 23.2 per cent in early 2024, increasing from 18.8 per cent in 2016 to peaking at 25.2 per cent in 2021, according to a joint report by professional networking platform LinkedIn and public policy consulting firm the Quantum Hub - 'Women in Leadership in Corporate India'.



The report has utilised insights from LinkedIn's Economic Graph data, based on self-reported data available on the LinkedIn platform from across sectors. LinkedIn economic graph data showed that there has been an overall increase in women employees across the workforce, rising from 23.9 per cent in 2016 to 26.8 per cent in 2024. The percentage of women in

senior leadership roles increased from 16.6 per cent in 2016 to 18.7 per cent in 2023, but it has dipped slightly to 18.3 per cent in 2024, which might correct by the end of the year. "LinkedIn Economic Graph data shows that despite progress, women still face obstacles in reaching leadership roles due to bias, societal norms, and structural barriers. However, recent focus on 'women-led development' has led to concerted efforts by both policymakers and business leaders to tackle these challenges," LinkedIn India Board Member, Country Head: Legal and Government Affairs, Aditi Jha added.

At ₹100 crore, OYO posts FY24 as maiden profitable fiscal: Founder

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Travel tech platform OYO reported financial year 2023-24 as the maiden profitable fiscal with a net earning of nearly Rs 100 crore, founder Ritesh Agarwal said on Thursday. In a post on social media platform X, Agarwal said he sees growth ahead "not just in India" but also in OYO's other key markets of Nordics, South East Asia, the US and UK. "While a delighted customer or a hotel partner brings the biggest smile on my face, our first cut financials of FY24 have me humbled as well," Agarwal shared. "We had our maiden net profitable financial year at

nearly Rs 100 crore. This was our eighth consecutive quarter of a positive EBITDA and we also have a cash balance of around Rs 1,000 crore," he added. He further highlighted that global credit rating firm Fitch has also taken note of OYO's improved performance and strong cash flows, upgrading its credit rating. "I see growth ahead not just in India with emerging travel trends such as premiumization, spiritual travel, business travel and conferences, destination weddings but also in our other key markets of Nordics, South East Asia, US and UK. FY25 will clearly be even more exciting," the OYO

founder stated. He added that these are provisional numbers, but the audited financials will likely be close to these. Earlier this week, Fitch Ratings announced it has upgraded the rating of OYO parent firm Oravel Stays, citing the hospitality company's improved financial profile. Fitch upgraded Oravel Stay's long-term foreign and local currency issuer default ratings to 'B' from 'B-' with a 'Stable' outlook, according to a statement. It also upgraded the rating on the company's USD 660-million senior secured term loan facility due 2026 to 'B' from 'B-'.

Paytm stock jumps 5 per cent, hits upper circuit limit for second straight session

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of One97 Communications, which owns the brand Paytm, on Thursday jumped 5 per cent to hit its upper circuit limit for the second straight session amid reports of Adani and Paytm were in talks to acquire a stake in the fintech company. However, One97 Communications Ltd on Wednesday said it is not in talks to sell a stake to the Adani Group, while the Gujarat-based conglomerate has also termed such reports as "false and untrue." The stock climbed 4.99 per cent each to Rs 377.40 and 377.50 -- its upper circuit limit -- on the NSE and BSE, respectively. Paytm founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma owns 9.1 per cent of Paytm in his personal capacity and another 10.3 per cent through Resilient Asset



Management, a foreign entity, as of end-March. Since shutting its banking unit after falling foul to regulations, Paytm has lost about half of its market value and there has been consistent speculation about it being a potential takeover target. In February, it was reported to be in talks with billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Jio Financial Services but both entities had denied the same. Paytm recently reported a

widening of loss in the fourth quarter of the financial year 2023-24 to Rs 550 crore, following the ban imposed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on transactions related to its payments bank. The RBI barred Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) from accepting deposits, credit transactions or top-ups in any customer accounts, wallets, and FASTags, keeping in view the interest of customers, including merchants from March 15 onwards. The company during the reported quarter wrote off Rs 227 crore investment for a 39 per cent stake in PPBL, following future uncertainties associated with the bank's business operations including the uncertainty of any other regulatory development etc.

UAE looking to expand scope of trade under CEPA with India: Official

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

The United Arab Emirates is looking to expand the scope of trade and services covered under the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with India to further accelerate bilateral trading volume, she said. Emphasising the importance of India as the largest trading partner for the Emirates, she said, "We are absolutely looking at agri-commodity potential and working on adding other sectors including critical minerals under CEPA." Feryal also underlined the growing importance of other Free Trade Agreements and trade corridors, including the potential of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. She sees more and more countries working on bilateral free trade agreements and regionalization of trading among countries.

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She presented a DMCC report, "The Future of Trade", in Singapore today, in which the UAE-India CEPA trade growth was highlighted. "These have undeniable trade benefits, reducing tariff and trade barriers while increasing inter-regional market access." As a case in point, countries

in the Gulf Cooperation Council such as the UAE have expanded bilateral ties, particularly with Asian nations - India, Indonesia, Israel, Turkey and Cambodia. Currently, there are 26 FTAs in progress, according to the report. Countries like the UAE and ASEAN member states are

poised to benefit from their geopolitical neutrality and diverse trade relationships, said the report. "Governments should foster partnerships and trade agreements with these powers to facilitate increased trade flows and investment opportunities," the report suggested. "By leveraging their strategic geographic locations and trade-friendly policies, they can serve as key hubs for regional trade and economic integration," the report stated. On regionalisation, the report sees new centres of gravity forming in Asia - around ASEAN, China and India - as well as North America. "This is bolstered by relatively new multilateral agreements with commitments to reduce tariffs, create a common market and boost regional trade," said the report.

Treesa, Gayatri upset world number 2 Baek, Lee; Sindhu goes down to Marin

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

PV Sindhu suffered yet another setback against Carolina Marin, but the rising Indian women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand stunned world number two Baek Ha Na and Lee So Hee of South Korea to enter the quarterfinals at Singapore Open here on Thursday.

Double Olympic medallist Sindhu blew away 18-15 lead in the decider to go down to familiar rival Marin in a thrilling 21-13 11-21 20-22 women's singles last-16 match. It was Sindhu's sixth loss on the trot against her arch-rival dating back from 2018.

But the Commonwealth Games bronze medallist duo of Treesa and Gayatri kept the Indian flag flying by eliminating Baek and Lee 21-9 14-21 21-15 in close to one-hour battle.

This was world number 30 Indian duo's maiden win from three meetings against the world number two Korean pair.

The Baek-Lee duo was error prone as Treesa and Gayatri held a commanding 18-9 lead before taking the opening game without much fuss. But the Indians allowed the



South Koreans to bounce back, committing unforced errors in the second game as the match went to the deciding third game.

The rival pairs exchanged some powerful smashes and were locked 8-all before the Indian duo took a slender two-point lead at the final mid game break.

They continued to play with aggression and reeled off six points on succession to make it 16-9 and seal a memorable win.

In the men's singles, world No.

10 HS Prannoy, seeded eighth, lost to Kenta Nishimoto, ranked 11th in the world, of Japan 13-21, 21-14, 15-21 in a 45-minute match.

This was the Indian's fourth defeat against the Japanese from six matches.

In the women's singles, Sindhu, fresh from her runner-up finish at the Malaysia Masters last week, took the opening game against her Rio Olympics final nemesis, but the Spaniard bounced back to win in a one-hour, eight-minute battle of the BWF World Tour Super 750

meet. Having saved one match point, Sindhu committed a sloppy misjudgement of the shuttle on the backline to prolong her wait to five years and 11 months.

Sindhu had last beaten Marin in the quarterfinals of the Malaysia Open on June 29, 2018 since then the Indian has endured six losses on the trot.

Facing each other for the first time in seven months after their heated Denmark Open semifinal clash, the double Olympic medallist Indian dominated the opening game

against an error-prone Marin. With a powerful body smash, Sindhu took a massive 11-6 lead and maintained her authority to extend it to 15-8. The third-seeded Marin tried to come back but Sindhu held her ways and sealed it comfortably.

But the Spaniard world No 3 bounced back strongly in a lopsided second game wherein she won six points on the trot and cruised to 17-7 lead to force a decider.

Maintaining her lead, Sindhu nosed 11-9 ahead in the final mid-game interval as she unleashed a powerful body smash to make it 14-10.

Sindhu exhibited a brilliant drop shot as she went two points shy of an elusive win against Marin making it 19-17. But the Indian lost her composure as she found the net, allowing Marin to bounce back and get a match point at 19-20.

Marin, however, shot it wide as the game hung in balance at 20-18 before the Spaniard got another match point with her fiery smash.

But this time, Marin had the last laugh with Sindhu erring on her judgment on back court. This was Marin's 12th career win from 17 matches against the Indian.

Praggnanandhaa claims maiden classical win over Carlsen

PTI ■ STAVANGER (NORWAY)

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa crushed world number one Magnus Carlsen for the first time in Classical format to emerge as the sole leader in the Norway chess tournament here.

Having beating him a few times in online and faster versions of the game and after losing to him in the finale of the last World Cup, Praggnanandhaa finally got past the home favourite in what would be known as a clear classical triumph.

Following the third-round win, the 18-year-old Indian now leads the men's section with 5.5 points in all, half a point clear of USA's Fabiano Caruana who scored his first victory in classical against reigning world champion Ding Liren of China.

Carlsen, on three points, looks like a distant third for now in the updated standings but with each classical win worth three points, this might not hold for too long.

Hikaru Nakamura of United States, Firouzja Alireza of France and Liren are all joint fourth currently on 2.5 points in the six-player double round-robin contest.

"I wish Magnus would take similar risks against us old folks," said Nakamura on Carlsen's choice of playing a risky battle against Praggnanandhaa.

Classical chess, also known as slow chess, allows players significant amount of time to make their moves, usually at least one hour.

Carlsen and Praggnanandhaa had drawn their previous three encounters in this format.

In the women's event, Praggnanandhaa's elder sister R Vaishali maintained her sole lead after getting past Anna Muzychuk of Norway in the Armageddon game after drawing the Classical.



Vaishali inched up to 5.5 points too and enjoys a full-point lead over women's world champion Wenjun Ju of China who is sole second by a half point margin over compatriot Tingjie Lei.

Muzychuk, Pia Cramling of Sweden and Koneru Humpy share the fourth spot here on three points each.

It was a Sicilian Kann, an opening that does not find many favours in the elite chess circles, wherein Praggnanandhaa got an advantage through better space control right from the beginning.

The middle game saw Magnus' king stuck in the centre and the Indian super-talent capitalised with some deft manoeuvres after the minor pieces were off the board.

Eventually, the King's vulnerability came to question as Praggnanandhaa posed some dangerous checkmate threats. The game lasted just 37 moves.

Caruana outclassed Liren out of an Italian opening game.

Launching the offensive on

the king side the American, who had lost the first two rounds under Armageddon, he sacrificed two minor pieces for a rook to rip apart black's King side and another exchange sacrifice soon sealed the game in his favour.

In the other game of the day, Nakamura proved superior as white against Alireza in the USD 1,60,000 prize money event.

In the women's section, Vaishali ensured that her lead remained intact after a draw in Armageddon as black against Muzychuk.

Seven rounds still remain in both sections of the event.

Results

Men: R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 5.5) beat Magnus Carlsen (Nor, 3) 3-0; Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 5) beat Ding Liren (Chn, 2.5) 3-0; Hikaru Nakamura (Usa, 2.5) beat Firouzja Alireza (Fra, 2.5) 1.5-1.

Women: Anna Muzychuk (Ukr, 3) lost to R Vaishali (Ind, 5.5) 1-1.5; Koneru Humpy (Ind, 3) beat Tingjie Lei (Chn, 4) 1-1.5; Pia Cramling (Swe, 3) lost to Wenjun Ju (Chn, 1-1.5).

Sachin, Sanjeet win in Boxing World qualifiers to close in on Paris Olympics berth

PTI ■ BANGKOK

India's Sachin Siwach (57kg) and Sanjeet Kumar (92kg) advanced another step towards Paris Olympic qualification as they registered convincing victories over their respective opponents to advance to the next round of the Boxing World Qualifiers here on Thursday.

Sachin started the proceedings for India with a clinical 5-0 win against Olympian Batuhan Ciftci of Turkey in the pre-quarterfinal round and Sanjeet then saw

off the challenge from Luis Sanchez of Venezuela with an identical margin in the round of 32.

In the 57kg category only three boxers will make cut for the Paris Olympics. Sachin, therefore, needs to win two more bouts to make the cut while Sanjeet, who got a bye in the round of 64, will have a similar target as all four semi-finalists will qualify in his weight category.

Up against an experienced boxer, Sachin came out all guns blazing in round 1 and that strategy worked wonders for the Indian as he took



control of the bout very quickly.

He earned a unanimous verdict even in round 2 and though Ciftci attempted a

comeback in the third and final round, the Indian was too comfortable in the end.

The 92kg bout between Sanjeet and Sanchez followed

a similar pattern as the 2021 Asian Championship gold medallist did not allow his Venezuelan opponent to get a look in, in round 1.

Sanchez did show some spark in round 2 and 3 but the experienced Sanjeet kept himself at bay and landed his punches on counter attacks to win easily. Later in the day, 2022 Commonwealth Games gold medallist Amit Panghal will face Mauricio Ruiz of Mexico in a 51kg second round contest while Jaismine will be up against Mahsati Hamzayeva of Azerbaijan in women's 57kg category.

Men secure shootout win over Germany, women draw against Orange Rood

PTI ■ BREDA (NETHERLANDS)

India concluded their junior hockey teams' tour of Europe with a gritty shootout win over Germany by the men's side, while the women were held to a 2-2 draw by Orange Rood club here.

The men's team won 3-1 on penalties after a 1-1 stalemate in the regulation time in their match at the Bredase Hockey Vereniging Push here on Wednesday.

Gurjot Singh, Dilraj Singh, and Manmeet Singh scored one each in the shoot-out after Mukesh Toppo struck off a rebound from a penalty corner in the 33rd minute.

The Indian Colts held their lead in regulation time until Germany equalised four minutes into the fourth quarter, adding excitement to the game.

Despite both teams' efforts to take the lead, the score remained unchanged, leading to a penalty shootout.

This was the men's team's second win from five matches of the tour, having beaten Belgium 4-2 (2-2) on penalties in their opening



game at Antwerp on May 20. They also suffered three losses -- against Belgium (2-3), Bredase Hockey Vereniging Push (4-5) and Germany (2-3).

The women's team registered two wins, two losses and a solitary draw against Orange Rood on Wednesday.

They played a quiet first quarter against Oranje Rood and Sanjana Horo (18') broke the deadlock for India.

Oranje Rood responded well, earning two penalty corners but the Indian defence held

firm, ending the first half 1-0.

Oranje Rood took the initiative in the third quarter and earned three penalty corners and scored twice to take a 2-1 lead.

But India levelled the score in the last quarter when Anisha Sahu (58') scored in the final moments.

The visitors earlier defeated Bredase Hockey Vereniging Push (2-0), Belgium 4-2 (2-2), and conceded defeats against Belgium 2-3, Germany (0-1), 4-6, 1 draw (Orange Rood 2-2).

AP ■ FORT LAUDERDALE (FLORIDA)

Lionel Messi scored yet again. It was the lone real highlight for Inter Miami, as its 10-match Major League Soccer winning streak was ended by an Atlanta United side that got its first league win in nearly two months.

Saba Lobjanidze scored once in each half, Jamal Thiare helped put the game away with a goal in the 73rd minute and Atlanta United snapped a nine-match MLS winless streak with a 3-1 victory on Wednesday night.

Atlanta United was 0-5-4 in MLS play since beating Chicago 3-0 on March 31. But it never trailed on Wednesday, with Lobjanidze scoring late in the first half to put his side on top and adding the second in the 59th minute. After Messi's score, Atlanta United kept all 10 field players in the defensive end whenever the hosts had deep possession in the final 30 minutes.

Messi got his 11th goal of the MLS season, tying Luis Suarez for the team lead. Inter

Miami (10-3-4, 34 points) kept a one-point lead atop the Eastern Conference and the overall MLS standings over Cincinnati (10-3-3, 33 points). Cincinnati lost to Nashville on Wednesday night, missing a chance to take the top spot.

"We were missing a gear," Inter Miami coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino said through an interpreter.

Inter Miami entered Wednesday with a 7-0-3 mark in its last 10 MLS matches. It is now 10-0-4 when allowing two goals or less in MLS play this season - and 0-3-0 when surrendering three goals or more.

"I'd say it was a night where the team went backwards from other matches," Martino said.

So, Wednesday was a dud. The first half of the season, though, has gone largely to plan.

With 34 points through exactly half the MLS schedule - matching its total from all of the 2023 season, when Messi joined around the midway point and helped the team win Leagues Cup but couldn't



get it into the playoffs - Inter Miami is on pace for 68 points this season.

Mathematically, yes, that's correct.

Realistically, well, probably not so much.

The plan, for now, calls for Messi to play at least some minutes when Inter Miami plays host to St. Louis on Saturday. After that, Messi will be trading Inter Miami's pink kit for the blue of Argentina - playing for country instead of club for a bit.

Copa America - the 16-team tournament which runs from

June 20 through July 14 - is looming, with Messi set to play for defending champion Argentina and Suarez a possibility to play for Uruguay. They may miss MLS matches when Inter Miami plays at Philadelphia (June 15), vs. Columbus (June 19), at Nashville (June 29), at Charlotte (July 3) and at Cincinnati (July 6). Following the Copa America final, Miami also has home matches against Toronto (July 17) and Chicago (July 20).

Unlike most leagues, MLS schedules games during some

FIFA fixture periods, when release of players to national teams is mandatory. And after Copa, it would seem likely that Inter Miami may lose some players again when national teams call for the Paris Olympics.

Messi had some opportunities in the early going, including a diving header about four minutes into the match off a chip into the middle of the box by Jordi Alba. Messi, fending off some contact, sent the ball into the turf and the carom spun over the crossbar; he gave Alba a thumbs-up for the idea as he picked himself up from the grass with a smile.

And in the 21st minute, Messi sent a chip toward the left post - just over a leaping Robert Taylor, who would have had plenty of net to aim for had he been able to attempt the header.

His goal in the 63rd minute was a typical Messi masterpiece, threading a ball between two defenders and just inside the right post, barely out of the reach of a diving Atlanta goalie Josh Cohen.

Celebrations in Greece as Olympiakos beats Fiorentina 1-0 for first European title

AP ■ ATHENS (GREECE)

Setting off wild celebrations in Athens, Olympiakos won Greece's first European club title by beating Fiorentina 1-0 with a goal in extra time of the Europa Conference League final on Wednesday.

Ayoub El Kaabi provided the dramatic ending, diving to nudge in a last-gasp goal in the second period of extra time, with fans erupting in celebration after a lengthy wait for a VAR check for offside.

"Praise be to God, we promised our supporters we'd do this today and we did it," El Kaabi said.

The Morocco striker - who finished as the competition's top scorer - struck in the 116th

minute of the match and dropped to his knees as he waited to see if the goal would stand after he had met a cross from Santiago Hezze.

The goal decided a game that had looked destined for a penalty shootout following an energetic but largely risk-free encounter at AEK Arena, and condemned Fiorentina and its coach Vincenzo Italiano to a second straight defeat in the final of the Europa Conference League after losing last year to West Ham.

"We created chances and had the opportunity to lift the cup but unfortunately it didn't happen - I'm sorry," Italiano said. "In Europe it's not an easy thing to get this far and lose."

Olympiakos coach Jose Luis



Mendilibar secured a second straight European title after winning the Europa League

with Sevilla last season. "It's an honor to have made all these people happy, I feel

immense joy and happiness to have made people feel this way and I dedicate it to them,"

Mendilibar said. "We have achieved something that our club has never achieved before. We will celebrate it and celebrate it the way we should. Then we will start working on what comes next." Tens of thousands of Olympiakos fans joined boisterous celebrations across the Greek capital after attending outdoor viewing parties. Youths held up lit flares in the port city of Piraeus, near Athens, where the team is based.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis described Olympiakos as "a true legend," adding in an online post: "Olympiakos has won the Europa Conference League and made history! A

sensational night for the club itself, but also for Greek football as a whole."

The third-tier European club competition took place amid a massive security operation, with some 5,000 police officers forming concentric cordons around a northern area of the capital - amid Europe-wide security concerns this summer for major sporting events including the Paris Olympics and European soccer championship in Germany.

The final was briefly marred by scuffles between Fiorentina fans inside the stadium and riot police next to them.

Although the visitors dominated the early stages of the final, Fiorentina goalkeeper Pietro Terracciano kept his

team in the game with two impressive fingertip saves to block on-target shots from Daniel Podence in the fourth minute and Stevan Jovetic in the sixth minute of extra time.

El Kaabi, who scored a total of 11 goals in the competition, had been largely sidelined in the match by Fiorentina's unyielding four-man defense.

Olympiakos players celebrated with 15,000 fans after the game, some holding their young children as golden confetti was fired into the air around the awards podium.

"It's the best emotion I've felt so far in my career," defender Panagiotis Retsois said. "I've had a lot of ups-and-downs but I'm very, very happy to be here."

Ponting picks IPL top performers Bumrah, Head to dominate T20 World Cup

PTI ■ DUBAI

Former Australia captain Ricky Ponting has picked Indian Premier League (IPL) top performers Jasprit Bumrah and Travis Head to excel among the bowlers and batters respectively in the T20 World Cup starting June 2.

India's pace spearhead Bumrah stood tall among the bowlers with 20 wickets in 13 matches for Mumbai Indians despite the five-time winners enduring their worst-ever campaign in 17 editions of the IPL, while Australian Head struck 567 runs in 15 matches. Despite MI's all-round struggles, Bumrah shone brightly with his supreme control with the ball, maintaining an envious economy rate of a mere 6.48 in a tournament wherein each of the top 10 bowlers went for at least eight runs per over.

"My leading wicket-taker for the tournament will be Jasprit Bumrah. I just think an outstanding performer, contributor for a number of years now. He's just come off an outstanding IPL" Ponting was quoted as saying in 'The ICC Review'.



"What he can do with the new ball, he swings the new ball, he has the seam up. But at the end, his economy rate at the end of the IPL was less than seven runs an over. "He takes wickets. He does bowl a lot of the hard overs too. When you bowl the hard overs in T20 cricket, it gives you a chance to pick up a lot of wickets along

the way. So, I'm going with him," said Ponting, who coaches Delhi Capitals in the IPL. Even though Head finished fourth in the list of those with most runs in this IPL, it was the manner he got them which impressed the most. Head's strike rate remained in excess of 200 for a large part of the IPL, with the

left-handed batter eventually finishing at 567 runs in 15 matches at 191.55, average of 40.50, and featuring one century and four fifties.

"My prediction for the leading run-scorer will be Travis Head. I just think everything he's done, whether it be red-ball or white-ball in the last couple of years, has been of the highest quality. I think he's playing fearless cricket at the moment," said the legendary batter.

Despite his exploits with the bat, Head had a disappointing finish to the IPL as he was dismissed for three ducks in his last four outings.

"His IPL had its ups and downs, but when it's been good, it's been very good. It has won games of cricket for his team," said Ponting of his compatriot. "It'll be exactly the same for Australia. He might not be the most consistent on the way through this tournament, but he'll be right up there with the leading run scorers. As I've said, if he spends any amount of time at the wicket for Australia, he'll win more games than ever."

The T20 World Cup will be held in the West Indies and the USA from June 2 to 29.

WEARING INDIA JERSEY IS DIFFERENT FEELING, HOPE TO MAKE IT COUNT: RISHABH PANT

PTI ■ NEW YORK

It would be 527 days since his life-threatening accident when Rishabh Pant dons the India jersey on June 5 at the Nassau County ground for the opening T20 World Cup match against Ireland and he can't wait for it.

On March 23 this year, Pant wore the blue of Delhi Capitals while making an emotional comeback after the horrific car crash in 2022 but he is more eager to wear a different shade of blue -- the 'India Blue' to be specific.

"Getting back on the field with an Indian jersey on is a different feeling altogether. This is something I missed a lot... Hopefully I (can) make it count and make it better from here," Pant told BCCI.TV on the sidelines of India's first net session ahead of the warm-up

game against Bangladesh on June 1.

Pant, who underwent an intense 15-month rehabilitation at the National Cricket Academy, had teammate Suryakumar Yadav for company during this interaction and recalled the time how his presence helped him cope with the loneliness of his injury management programme in the NCA.

"Seeing the team here and meeting them again, spending time, having fun with them, having a conversation with them, I really enjoyed," a beaming Pant said.

Having scored 446 runs in 13 IPL games, Pant is slowly getting back into the groove. The leaner and fitter Pant looked in nice touch at the India nets at the Cantiague Park on the outskirts of New York City.

Pant also spoke about the prospects of cricket gaining popularity in the USA going forward. He felt the T20 World Cup could be the start of an eventful chapter.

"We are used to playing in certain countries but this is a different prospect. It has opened up a different channel for sport because I feel cricket is growing around the world and... Getting the exposure here would be nice for cricket as well as USA cricket," he said. He spoke about the drop-in pitches that will be used during the tournament and also the bright sunshine that he and the rest of the team is getting used to.

"New pitches are there. I'm just getting used to the conditions. The sun is a little bit brighter here, so just getting used to the conditions over here. Let's see how it goes," Pant concluded.

Story of Uganda's inspirational rising stars

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

An estimated 60 per cent of Ugandan capital Kampala's population lives in slums and fast bowler Juma Miyagi is a cult figure in these impoverished areas.

These usually football-loving people would be keenly following him and the Ugandan cricket team's debut at the ICC T20 World Cup, trying to live a sporting dream through his exploits. Miyagi grew up in the slums of Naguru, located on the outskirts of Kampala, and two years after representing Uganda at the U-19 level in the Caribbean, the 21-year-old will be shouldering the

senior team's bowling attack at the ICC showpiece that kicks off on June 1.

Uganda qualified for their maiden cricket World Cup last November. Miyagi, who has 34 wickets in 21 T20 Internationals, grew up in the slums and continues to live there with his family to date. The same is the case for other T20 World Cup squad members including Simon Ssesazi and travelling reserve Innocent Mwebaze. They have grown up in areas which lack clean water, sewage systems and have little or no access to health care in poorly constructed pigeonholes that pass for rooms.

Their fellow slum dwellers

From slums of Kampala to T20 World Cup



look up to them as all three of them have given hope to the struggling community. Their story of hardship even moved Uganda's Indian head coach Abhay Sharma, who took charge of the team ahead

of the ICC event beginning on Saturday.

Sharma is not completely unaware of slums as India has one of Asia's biggest slums in Dharavi, Mumbai but being in Kampala was eye-opening

even for him.

Having spent some time with the players on and off the field, Sharma's respect for the players has increased multi-fold.

"Some of the players come from very humble backgrounds and it is inspiring to see them play for the national team.

"I didn't expect them to live in such conditions before I arrived. Their respect for coaches is also immense. The players think we can change their lives," he told PTI from Trinidad, where the team is based at the moment ahead of its World Cup opener against Afghanistan in Guyana on June 3.

Leading run-getters and batters with best strike rates

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With cricket's slam-bang version set for its ninth World Cup, PTI gives a rundown on the leading run-getters and the ones with best strike rates in the T20 showpiece.

LEADING RUN GETTERS

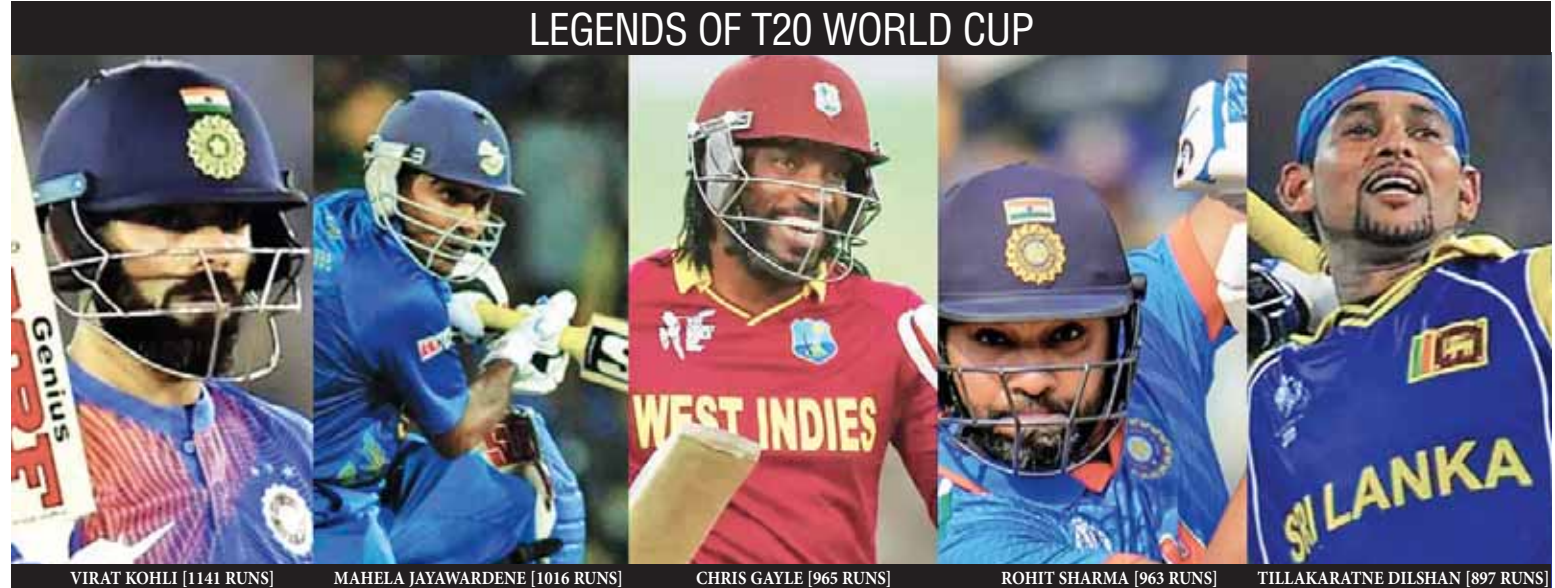
Virat Kohli [1141 runs]: Who else at No. 1 but the King himself? The talismanic Indian batter has been an absolute beast in the marquee event, scoring over a thousand runs across five editions. His ability to thrive under pressure and deliver match-winning performances has cemented his reputation as one of the finest batters in T20 cricket.

He holds the record for most runs in a single edition of the tournament — 319 in 2014. He was also sensational in the 2016 edition, scoring 296 runs. **Mahela Jayawardene [1016 runs]:** The now retired Jayawardene's performances in T20 World Cups have been

instrumental in former champions Sri Lanka's success in the tournament. He was a consistent scorer across the five editions he played.

Chris Gayle [965 runs]: One of the most prolific and entertaining hitters in cricket history, Gayle is widely regarded as one of the most destructive batters, particularly in T20s. No longer competing for the West Indies, his performances in T20 World Cups have been nothing short of spectacular, making him a fan favourite and an important player for the West Indies when they won their maiden title in 2012.

Rohit Sharma [963 runs]: The current India skipper has been a key player for his team in the T20 World Cups, especially after taking on the opening position. His ability to score big runs and provide stability at the top of the order has been crucial for India's success in the tournament. He has played all editions,



scoring 963 runs, including 91 runs at a strike rate on 127.88. **Tillakaratne Dilshan [897 runs]:** The leading run-scorer in the 2009 edition with 317 runs from seven matches, the

retired Dilshan, with his aggressive batting style and ability to provide quick starts at the top of the order, was a vital cog in the Sri Lankan team's lineup across six

HIGHEST STRIKE RATES

Jos Buttler [144.48]: Regarded as one of the most dynamic and destructive batters, Buttler's greatest

strength lies in his ability to score rapidly and that is why he has the best strike rate in the T20 World Cup history that fetched him 799 runs in 27 matches.

AB de Villiers [143.40]: The now retired South African has had an outstanding strike rate in T20 World Cups. His ability to score quickly and decisively made him one of the most

feared batters. De Villiers collected 717 runs in 29 innings with the help of 51 fours and 30 sixes.

Chris Gayle [142.75]: Gayle's unparalleled level of fearlessness and confidence helped him to an amazing 142.75 strike rate in the T20 World Cups. The Jamaican always backed himself to take on any bowler. Gayle is the only player to have scored two centuries in the event, both of which were match-winning efforts.

Mahela Jayawardene [134.74]: Jayawardene had an impressive average of 39.07 and a strike rate of 134.74, a fine reflection of his ability to score quickly while maintaining consistency.

David Warner [133.22]: Warner's aggressive approach will once again be crucial for Australia. His ability to score runs quickly and efficiently has made him one of the most exciting and effective batters in T20 World Cups.

Indian women's hockey team gets rousing welcome in London

PTI ■ LONDON

The High Commission of India here gave a rousing welcome to the country's women's national hockey team as dignitaries sang paeans to the players for their achievements in the sport after overcoming obstacles on the road to success.

The women's team, along with the senior India men's squad, is in the United Kingdom for the FIH Pro League fixtures starting this weekend. The Indian men's and women's sides are scheduled to play their counterparts from Germany here on Saturday.

"Each one of them represents every part of India and every region and community of India. Their stories are the most wonderful stories of what is possible in India," said Indian High Commissioner to the UK Vikram Doraiswami, in his address at the reception.

The reception was held at the India House on Wednesday evening. "Each one of these girls is a story of sacrifice and struggle by their parents, and also a story of triumph and of spirit."

"These young ladies inspire every one of us today because what they have

achieved tells us that there is no ceiling to human ambition, there is no ceiling in a country like India - where anything and everything can be possible," Doraiswami added.

The team, led by captain Salima Tete and coach Harendra Singh, were greeted by cheering supporters as community leaders and sports fans gathered at a special reception in their honour.

Their first fixture will take place when they play Germany in London on Saturday and members of the Indian diaspora were encouraged to turn out in large numbers to support the team. The Indian teams are coming to the UK after playing some difficult Pro League matches in Belgium against sides such as Argentina, Ireland and the hosts.

The Indian envoy, himself a hockey player, reflected upon how playing England on their home soil will bring back some memories for the women's team after narrowly losing to them in the last Olympics' playoff. "We really look forward to being able to come and support you and to tell everybody what great stuff is happening in Indian hockey and what great stuff Indian women are doing in changing India. "Every goal that you score, every



game that you play and every day that you train and get better, India becomes a better country. And for that thank you very, very much," he said.

The Australian High Commissioner to the UK, Stephen Smith, was among the special guests at the event, and he said India "taught" Australia how to improve their hockey and become a heavyweight in the sport.

"The reason that Australia has become so good at hockey is because the Indians taught us everything," said Smith in his address.

"In Australia, as in every continent in the world, there is a large Indian diaspora and in the 1950s and 1960s that Indian diaspora taught Australians how to play hockey. It is the case that we adjusted to the artificial turf game, and what I call the

horizontal game, better or more quickly than India.

"But that doesn't mean that India is not a hockey playing country to be admired, both in the men's game and in the women's game," he added.

The Deputy High Commissioner of India to the UK, Sujit Ghosh, indulged in light-hearted conversations with some of the players and their coach and discovered the many hidden talents of the team.

In his address in Hindi, coach Harendra said, "India taught the whole world how to play hockey... If there is a vishwa guru in hockey, then that's India."

"Yes, there are ups and downs in this journey, but I am extremely proud to see what our women's team has achieved in the last few years." He added, "Winning or losing aside, whenever our team is on the pitch there is a certain fear among the opponents. This reflects the changing landscape of our country as a whole, where women have a large share in the rise of India today."

Over the next couple of weeks, the Indian teams will play their matches at the Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London.

FC Goa, midfielder Brandon Fernandes set to part ways

PTI ■ MARGAO

Indian Super League side FC Goa on Thursday said midfielder Brandon Fernandes will leave the club after his contract ends this summer.

The 29-year-old Fernandes, who joined FC Goa in 2017, netted 17 goals in 130 outings for the club. He helped the Gaurs win the Indian Super Cup in 2019, the ISL League Shield in 2019-20 and the Durand Cup in 2021.

Fernandes also holds the record for most assists in the club's history (31).

Having begun his youth career in 2002, Fernandes played for Goa United and Salgaocar FC and made his senior debut with ASD Cape Town in 2013. Fernandes made his senior debut in India in 2015 with Sporting Goa FC, which was followed by his debut in ISL for Mumbai City FC in 2015-16. He also represented Mohun Bagan (in 2016 on loan) and Churchill Brothers (2017) before joining FC Goa.



FC Goa CEO Ravi Puskar said in a statement released on the club's website, "He became ingrained into the fabric of the club and was one of the pillars upon which sporting success was built in the seasons he was with us."

Puskar said the club will be open to have Fernandes back in their fold in any capacity.

"While he leaves us today, Brandon will always be welcomed back to FC Goa in whatever capacity he may choose with open arms." Fernandes, who has also played 25 matches for India since 2019, helped the national side win the SAFF Championship in 2021. He is expected to join Mumbai City FC for the next season.