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## Mayday! Kids in 131 Delhi, Noida schools exposed to terror scare

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI/NOIDA

In a scare of unprecedented scale, panic gripped schools in the national Capital and adjoining Noida after 131 of them received identical bomb threats through emails on Wednesday morning, triggering mass evacuations and massive searches as panicked parents rushed to pick up their children. The anti-terror unit of the Delhi Police has started investigations into the bomb threat email sent to schools in the Delhi-NCR region, as the

initial probe hinted at a deeper conspiracy by a terror group during the Lok Sabha elections. A case has been registered under relevant sections of law for offences like conspiracy and threat by the Special Cell and a dedicated team formed to conduct the investigation, an official said. "The matter is related to national security. It needs a deeper probe," the official said. The schools received the threats on their official email IDs around 4 am. Bomb detection teams, bomb disposal squads and officials

of Delhi Fire Service were rushed to schools but nothing suspicious was found. Multiple private schools in Noida, Greater Noida, Ghaziabad and Gurugram also received the bomb threat but local police dismissed them as a hoax. As panicked parents crowded outside the schools, the Ministry of Home Affairs said the mails appeared to be a hoax. In a statement, the Union Home Ministry officials said, "There is no need to panic. Mails appear to be hoaxes. The Delhi Police and security agencies are



Children rushing out of a school in New Delhi area after the school received a bomb threat via email. Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

taking necessary steps as per protocol. The schools sent out messages and notices to the concerned parents, informing them to pick up kids at the earliest with kids using buses and vans being sent to their home.

"Dear Parent, this is to inform you that due to a message received in the school we are evacuating the children early today in their respective school buses and vans. The parents who pick up their ward from the school should reach the school by 10.30 am. at the school gate," read one such message sent to worried parents. The anti-terror cell of the Delhi Police will investigate the bomb threat. The case is being registered with the Special Cell and a dedicated team will be formed to conduct the investigation.

"The matter is related to national security. It needs a deeper probe," the official said. According to police, the threat was declared a hoax as "nothing objectionable" was found during searches. Bomb threats sent via email to schools in Delhi-NCR originated from Russia, as indicated by the IP address of the email, which was traced back to the domain "mail.ru". Investigating agencies said it is also possible that culprits may have masked their identity using the dark net. Such mails are often sent from a vpn that helps them mask

their real ip address as is the case in these "bomb threat" emails, said the sources. Although the email, said to be sent out by one accused, has been called a hoax, Delhi Police have stepped up security at all metro and railway stations, bus stands, and markets for precautionary measures. "We have stepped up security at every station. We have also alerted our staff to keep strict vigil on any suspicious activity," Deputy Commissioner of Police (railways) K P S Malhotra said. Continued on Page 8



## EC upgrades VVPAT security after SC nudge

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Wednesday issued revised protocol for handling and storage of symbol loading unit (SLU) of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slips against the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM). This comes in the backdrop of the latest order by the Supreme Court which said, "After the completion of symbol loading process, the symbol loading unit (SLU) should be sealed in containers. The SLU should be stored at least for a period of 45 days." The SLU uploads the name and symbol of the candidates contesting on a particular seat on VVPAT or paper trail machines. In a statement on Wednesday, the

poll authority said all State Chief Electoral Officers have been directed to create necessary infrastructure and provisions to implement the new protocols for handling and storage of the symbol loading units (SLUs). "As mandated by the Supreme Court, the revised protocols are applicable in all cases of completion of the symbol loading process in the VVPATs undertaken on or after May 1, 2024," the commission said. Currently, only the three components of the EVM - the ballot unit, control unit, and VVPAT - are stored for 45 days after the results. This is the first time that SLUs, used to load candidate symbols onto the

VVPATs, will also be available for examination along with the EVMs if a candidate challenges the results by filing an election petition in court. The EVM and VVPAT slips can be called by the court while hearing the plea.



The SLU is used to load the symbols of the candidates onto the VVPAT. It is a matchbox-sized device that is first connected to a laptop or personal computer, from which a symbol loading application is used to load a bitmap file containing the candidates' names, serial numbers, and symbols. The SLU is then connected to the VVPAT to transfer that file on to the paper audit machine. This is done under the supervision of a

district election officer. As per the SOP, during the commissioning period in Assembly Constituency/Segment, all Symbol Loading Unit(s) along with its accessories shall be in the custody of the Returning Officer/Assistant Returning Officer, as the case may be and shall be securely stored in locker/safe/cupboard etc. under lock and key in the Commissioning premises with proper security. RO/ARO shall be responsible for safe custody of Symbol Loading Unit(s) along with its accessories during the commissioning period. Each set of SLU along with its accessories used in a particular AC/AS shall be kept in a separate container. Not more than one set of

SLU along with its accessories should be kept in a container. "After sealing the SLU containers, the same shall be deposited with the District Election Officer concerned within 24 hours of the completion of commissioning. These containers shall be stored by the DEO in a separate strong room/secured room and shall be marked clearly on the door as SLU STORAGE ROOM". It is clarified that both the used SLUs and Reserve SLUs shall be stored in the SLU Storage Room. District Election Officer shall be responsible for their storage and security. The SLU Storage Room shall be under double lock system with all keys of each lock with two separate specified officers," it said. Continued on Page 8

## Cong takes another hit, two ex-MLAs quit party

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Just when the campaigning is peaking for the May 25 polls in national Capital, the Congress which is contesting on three of the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi as per arrangements with INDIA Bloc partner Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), faltered further as exodus continued on Wednesday. Two former MLAs and observers for the Lok Sabha seat — Naseeb Singh and Neeraj Basoya — resigned from the party citing their dissatisfaction with the party's decision to form an alliance with AAP and its choice to allot Lok Sabha tickets to Kanhaiya Kumar and Udit Raj.



### Amethi, Rae Bareilly nominees may be named today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress asserted on Wednesday that within 24 hours, the candidates for the Amethi and Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha constituencies would be announced by the party's Central Election Committee (CEC), which empowered Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge to finalise the candidates for Amethi and Rae Bareilly.

"My expectation is that in the next 24-30 hours, the Congress president will finalise and a decision taken by him will be announced," Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said in response to a question at AICC press conference. Speculation had been rife that Rahul Gandhi might contest the Lok Sabha polls from Amethi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra from Raebareilly, a seat that was previously held by her mother Sonia Gandhi. Both seats are considered bastions of the Gandhi family and the local units of the Congress have demanded that the two scions of the family contest from there. Congress has forged an alliance with the SP in Uttar Pradesh and is contesting 17 Lok Sabha seats in the State.

the alliance with AAP was bringing "great disrepute" and "embarrassment" to Delhi Congress workers on a daily basis. Continued on Page 8

## Prajwal ready to join probe; his family invokes truth, gods

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU/NEW DELHI

On a day when Karnataka Chief Minister K Siddaramaiah wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to cancel the diplomatic passport and take swift action against the Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna who is facing allegations of sexually abusing several women, the latter took to social media to announce that he will join the probe soon and said the truth will prevail.



Revanna's family conducted a havan at their Holenarasipura residence which is also home to his father JD(S) MLA and former Karnataka Minister HD Revanna. The MP, who left the country as soon as the election to his constituency ended, has also sought seven days' time to appear before the Special Investigation Team (SIT) formed by the Karnataka Government to enquire into the huge cache of about 3,000 explicit videos and photos allegedly pertaining to him, which have gone viral on social media. "As I am not in Bangalore to attend the enquiry, I have communicated to CID Bangalore through my advocate. Truth will prevail soon," Prajwal, grandson of former Prime Minister and JD(S) patriarch HD Deve Gowda, said in a Facebook post.



A case has been registered against MLA and former minister H D Revanna and his son Prajwal at Holenarasipura on a complaint lodged by their former cook and relative for allegedly sexually harassing her. She also alleged that

Prajwal made video calls to her daughter and spoke in an objectionable manner, which forced her to block him. The MP who is seeking re-election from Hassan on a JD(S) ticket, shared a letter by his lawyer Arun G to the Deputy Superintendent of Police of the SIT, in which he has sought seven days' time to appear before the official because he is abroad.

Further, in a letter to Modi, the Karnataka Government asked the PM to take other steps such as using diplomatic and police channels of the Government of India as well as international police agencies to ensure the swift return of the "absconding" Member of Parliament to face the full force of the law. Continued on Page 8

## PIOUS PRESIDENT



President Droupadi Murmu offers prayers at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya

## Hindu marriage is a sanskara, not a party: SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A Hindu marriage is not an event for 'song and dance', 'wining and dining' or a commercial transaction, the Supreme Court has observed and said it cannot be recognised in the 'absence of a valid ceremony' under the Hindu Marriage Act. A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Augustine George Masih said a Hindu marriage is a 'sanskara' and a sacrament which has to be accorded its status as an institution of great value in Indian society.



In its recent order passed in the matter of two trained commercial pilots, who sought a divorce decree without performing a valid Hindu marriage ceremony, the bench urged young men and women to "think deeply about the institution of marriage even before they enter

upon it and as to how sacred the said institution is, in Indian society". "A marriage is not an event for 'song and dance' and 'wining and dining' or an occasion to demand and exchange dowry and gifts by undue pressure leading to possible initiation of criminal proceedings

thereafter. A marriage is not a commercial transaction. It is a solemn foundational event celebrated so as to establish a relationship between a man and a woman who acquire the status of a husband and wife for an evolving family in future which is a basic unit

of Indian society," the bench said. Terming the marriage as sacred as it provides a lifelong, dignity-affirming, equal, consensual and healthy union of two individuals, the bench said a Hindu marriage facilitates procreation, consolidates the unit of family and solidifies the spirit of fraternity within various communities. "We deprecate the practice of young men and women seeking to acquire the status of being a husband and a wife to each other and therefore purportedly being married, in the absence of a valid marriage ceremony under the provisions of the (Hindu Marriage) Act such as in the instant case where the marriage between the parties was to take place later," the bench said. In its April 19 order, the bench said where a Hindu marriage is not performed in accordance with the

applicable rites or ceremonies such as 'saptapadi' (taking seven steps by the groom and the bride jointly before the sacred fire), the marriage will not be construed as a Hindu marriage. "We further observe that a Hindu marriage is a sacrament and has a sacred character. In the context of saptapadi in a Hindu marriage, according to Rig Veda, after completing the seventh step (saptapadi) the bridegroom says to his bride, "With seven steps we have become friends (sakha). May I attain to friendship with thee; may I not be separated from thy friendship." A wife is considered to be half of oneself (ardhangini) but to be accepted with an identity of her own and to be a co-equal partner in the marriage," it said. Continued on Page 8





President Droupadi Murmu worshipping at Hanuman Garhi, offering flowers to Jatayu and performing aarti at Sarayu river in Ayodhya during her visit to Ram Lalla's birthplace on Wednesday

## Ravidas Mehrotra, RK Chowdhary file papers

SHARMILA KRISHNA ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party candidates Ravidas Mehrotra and RK Chowdhary filed their nomination papers from Lucknow and Mohanlalgarh Lok Sabha constituencies respectively amidst the enthusiastic support of their party members on Wednesday. Twelve nomination papers were filed on Wednesday, nine for the Lucknow constituency, two for Mohanlalgarh Lok Sabha seat, and one for the Lucknow East assembly seat. Both SP candidates arrived in a cavalcade of cars along with party members wearing the trademark red caps and waving their party's flags. The party members raised slogans of "Victory to the Samajwadi Party" as the candidates walked down to the Collectorate where a large number of advocates present there also extended their support to the SP candidates. Launching a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Mehrotra, while addressing the media at the venue said, "Modi can only provide the guarantee of increase in unemployment and increase in inflation. In the name of electoral bonds, the Bharatiya Janata Party has only looted the general public. We

are not afraid of the cases filed by the Enforcement Directorate and raids carried out by the Income Tax Department. We have gone to jail several times and we have struggled with the issues of the public and hence the general public is supporting us." He said that Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, unlike him, did not tour the city while filing his nomination papers and was accompanied by outsiders during the exercise. "However I have taken a tour of Hazratganj, Lalbagh, Kaiserbagh, Nazirabad, Aminabad, Gwynne Road before coming to file my nomination and have got an overwhelming response from the public. We are the face of the public because we have fought for the public for the last 49 years. Rajnath Singh is claiming that he will win by five lakh votes and we will break his pride," he said. Mehrotra stated that Rajnath Singh is in power for the last ten years but he has never been with the people in the times of their needs. "He was not present during the last rites of two of his own MLAs who passed away recently, what can we expect him to do for the general public," he added. Ravidas Mehrotra said that when he had come to file his



Samajwadi Party leader Ravidas Mehrotra going to Collectorate to file his nomination paper from Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency on Wednesday. Pioneer

nomination papers in the 2022 Vidhan Sabha assembly election, Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak had fled from his constituency of Lucknow Central. The SP candidate promised that if he wins the election, a government school will be opened in every mohalla, every poor woman will get Rs 8,500 per month and one lakh rupee annually. "We will give employment to the youth and fill the 30 lakh vacant posts of the Government of India," he added. Mehrotra has disclosed movable assets worth Rs 62.1 lakh and immovable property worth Rs 56.3 lakh. RK Chowdhary said that the country was in a dire strait under the Bharatiya Janata Party government. "The farmer is worried, the youth is worried. The Constitution and reservation are in danger. The entire country is mismanaged and has to be managed properly," he said. Chowdhary said that he would work on electricity connections, water and roads in the

Mohanlalgarh constituency if elected. "The support of the people is evident from their presence in large numbers at my nomination exercise," he added. When asked if Kaushal Kishore has done some work in Mohanlalgarh, he said that the public alone could speak about this. He said that he had won elections several times but this time he felt that there was a wave in support of the Samajwadi Party. Chowdhary has disclosed movable property worth Rs 34.3 lakh and immovable property worth Rs 2.4 crore. Advocate Pankaj Singh from the Voters Party who practices in the Lucknow civil court filed his nomination for the Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency. Pankaj Singh, who fought the Vidhan Sabha election in 2022, said that he was unfazed by the fact that he was standing opposite Rajnath Singh. "If I win I will get the Advocate Protection Act implemented and will start a pension scheme for advocates. I will make education and health free for the citizens," he said. Sushil Kumar from the Bahujan Mukti Party also filed his nomination for the Mohanlalgarh Lok Sabha constituency. He has immovable property worth Rs

55,689. Avinash Chandra Jain, a businessman and an independent from Niralanagar, filed his nomination for the Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency. "The elections this time will be unique and it is my guarantee that I will reduce inflation after winning the election if the people give me a chance," he said. Jain said that he fought the election last time in 2019. Yugini Neelam, yet another candidate who came to file her nomination papers for the Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency, captured the attention of all present with her shimmering outfit and glossy make-up. She said that she was fighting the election for the first time. A former employee of the Irrigation department, she said that she left her government job to serve the people. Nandini Ranjan filed nomination papers for the Lucknow East assembly bypoll. Others who filed their nominations for the Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency included independent candidates Akhand Pratap Singh, Vivek Kumar Jha, Ishfaq Ali, Shalini Asthana from the Bharatiya Sarv Dharam Party, Manish Maurya from Bharatiya Nav Kranti Party and Neelam Sharma from Rashtriya Uday Party.

## EC taking steps to conduct free, fair elections: CEO

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa has said that the Election Commission of India's directives are being adhered to uphold law and order during the Lok Sabha elections. He said that various agencies – the Police, Income Tax, Excise and Narcotics – were taking concerted action. The state has deployed 438 inter-state and 1,827 check posts to ensure thorough scrutiny. Between March 16 and April 30, 2024, the police confiscated 535 licensed weapons from individuals with criminal records. Additionally, licences for 4,694 weapons were revoked and surrendered. Proactively preventing potential disturbances, the authorities have issued notices under the Criminal Procedure Code to restrict the movements of 26,27,735 individuals, with 22,36,435 individuals comply-

ing with the ban. The police have seized 8,317 unlicensed weapons, 8,384 cartridges, 2,900.32 kg of explosives, and 455 bombs. A total of 3,559 illegal weapon manufacturing centres were raided while 157 establishments were sealed. "With the announcement of election dates for Lok Sabha elections-2024 on March 16, 2024, efforts are being made in the entire state to conduct free, fair, peaceful, fear-free, inducement-free, inclusive and safe voting. Model code of conduct is in effect," the CEO said. He added, "On April 30, 2024, the police cancelled the licence of two weapons of criminal persons and deposited them. Taking preventive action under the CrPC, 25,514 people were banned. Besides, 167 unlicensed weapons and 127 cartridges were recovered and seized. Police raided 67 centres manufacturing illegal weapons of which 05 were sealed."

## Priyanka to campaign in Fatehpur Sikri on Friday

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the suspense over the candidature of Gandhiscions Rahul Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra from Congress bastions Amethi and Rae Bareilly respectively still continuing, Priyanka is all set to join the party's campaign for the lone Fatehpur Sikri Lok Sabha seat that the party is contesting in Uttar Pradesh in the third phase of the ongoing parliamentary elections. Ten Lok Sabha constituencies of Uttar Pradesh are set to go to polls in the third phase on May 7. The Congress has got just one of these seats with its alliance partner Samajwadi Party contesting the remaining nine seats. The third phase polls in UP are going to be the biggest litmus test for the Samajwadi Party-Congress alliance as majority of these constituencies are in the Yadav heartland. SP chief Akhilesh Yadav's wife Dimple Yadav is trying to retain the

Mainpuri seat while Shivpal Singh Yadav's son Aditya Yadav is trying to wrest the Budaun seat from Bharatiya Janata Party. For the Congress, Ramnath Sikarwar is making all efforts to win the Fatehpur Sikri seat and bring some happiness in the party camp. Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who has made just one appearance so far in this election in Uttar Pradesh by taking out a roadshow in Saharanpur for party candidate Imran Masood, will once again join the campaign trail for the party by taking out another similar roadshow and hold a rally in Fatehpur Sikri to seek votes for Sikarwar. Sikarwar is a Thakur and the Rajput community is not happy with the Bharatiya Janata Party this time, so Priyanka will try to attract this vote bank, especially as Sikarwar is the lone Rajput contesting from western UP. Priyanka will reach Agra on coming Friday afternoon and

straight away visit Fatehpur Sikri area to take out a roadshow in favour of the party candidate. Sikarwar is engaged in a triangular fight with Bharatiya Janata Party's sitting MP Rajkumar Chahar and Bahujan Samaj Party candidate Ram Niwas Sharma. The fight for Sikarwar has become interesting in Fatehpur Sikri as the sitting BJP MP is facing a party rebel after sitting MLA of the party, Rajkumar Choudhary filed his papers as an independent candidate. Choudhary had sought BJP ticket for his son Rameshwar Choudhary from Fatehpur Sikri and after it was denied, he entered the fray as an independent making the fight difficult for Chahar as both belong to Jat community having sizable votes in the area. The Brahmin candidate fielded by the BSP also poses trouble for Chahar as the community is also seen as the traditional vote bank of the BJP.

## Cong using fear, rumour and now deepfake for propaganda: Thakur

PTI ■ LUCKNOW/AYODHYA

Union minister Anurag Thakur on Wednesday said the Congress was using all types of tricks — fear, confusion, rumour and now deepfake — for its propaganda. He refuted the Congress' charge that democracy was under threat or that reservations will be taken away by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government. "It was during the Congress regime that democracy was finished by imposing Emergency," Thakur told PTI Videos at Lucknow airport. The minister is in Uttar Pradesh to attend several programmes, including filing of nominations by party leaders. "Congress is using fear, confusion, rumour, deepfake and all kinds of tricks. The way foreign powers try to destabilise any country, the Congress is using all kinds of tricks for its propaganda," he said. The BJP has lodged a complaint with the Election Commission against the Congress alleging that it circulated the "deepfake and morphed" video of Union Home Minister Amit Shah to derail the poll process, and demanded strict action against the party. "They (Congress) have been lying constantly. They say reservation will be finished, democracy will be finished. The Modi government ruled for 10 years, there was no talk



of reservation. It will never end in the Modi regime. We have given the rights to SC, ST and OBC. On the other hand, the Congress has snatched their rights," Thakur said. Reservation is under threat in Congress-ruled states, such as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana, he said. "Congress humiliated Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar. It was in the Modi regime that Constitution Day was celebrated and 'Panch Teerth' were made. Our slogan is 'sabka saath sabka vikas,' he said. Thakur said Uttar Pradesh will create a new record and play an important role in achieving the "400 paar" target in this year's Lok Sabha elections. "Be it in 2014 or 2019, UP played a role. We

have to take the achievements of the Modi government to every household," he said. The minister also said that Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi may have joined hands again but the two 'shehzadas' "will not be able to do much". He also questioned the Congress for allegedly not acting against MP Prajwal Revanna, the grandson of former prime minister H D Deve Gowda who was on Tuesday suspended by the JD(S) over an alleged sex scandal. "Strict action should be initiated irrespective of his (Revanna) family or political party. I want to ask Rahul Gandhi and Congress President Mallikarjun Karge, who belongs to Karnataka and where his government is in power, why an action was not taken to arrest him (Revanna)," Thakur said. The BJP leader paid obeisance to Ram Lalla at the Ram temple in Ayodhya. "I prayed for 'Ek bharat shreshth bharat' for a developed country," Thakur said. On being asked if Rahul Gandhi will also be paying a visit to the Ram temple, Thakur said, "I want to say that those who questioned the existence of Lord Ram and did not attend the consecration ceremony, ultimately you have to come to the feet of Lord Ram." "Those who brought Lord Ram, people will bring them back to power," he said.

## Akhilesh defends Khurshid's niece over 'vote jehad'

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday defended his party leader Maria Alam, booked for her "vote jehad" remark, saying that her intention was to ask people to vote in large numbers. Seeking votes on Monday for INDIA bloc candidate Naval Kishore Shakra from Farrukhabad seat, Alam, who is also the niece of Congress leader Salman Khurshid, had made an appeal for "vote jehad", terming it as necessary in the current situation for the minority community to drive away the BJP government. The Uttar Pradesh Police on Tuesday booked Khurshid, who was present in the poll meeting, and Alam for her call for a "vote jehad". SP chief Yadav said, "Sometimes powerful words are used to entuse people to vote in elections." "The meaning of it (Alam's call), I think, was not for which action has been initiated. The intention was that votes polled in maximum numbers, that all people cast their votes," Yadav stressed.

## Akhilesh's challenge: 'Modi ki guarantee' vs Mulayam's legacy

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Even as the Samajwadi Party is part of the INDIA bloc of the opposition parties, party president Akhilesh Yadav is single-handedly shouldering the campaign in all 67 Lok Sabha seats his party is contesting in Uttar Pradesh. For the SP the stakes are high as besides Akhilesh Yadav, his wife and three cousins are also contesting the elections. The stakes are high for the husband and wife duo as retaining Mainpuri for Dimple Yadav and wrestling Kannauj from the Bharatiya Janata Party for Akhilesh Yadav, are big tasks. In the past, party founder Mulayam Singh Yadav had won from both Mainpuri and Kannauj constituencies. Though Akhilesh Yadav had taken control of the party in January 2017, it is now that he is stepping

into his late father's shoes so the results of the two constituencies will be closely tracked by both friends and foes. In 2019, Dimple had lost from Kannauj, but later she won the Mainpuri seat held by Mulayam Singh Yadav, in a bypoll in November 2022. The bypoll was caused by the death of Mulayam Singh Yadav in October 2022. Polling in Mainpuri will be held in the third phase of elections on May 7 and in Kannauj on May 13 in the fourth phase. After talking to a cross section of voters in Mainpuri, it emerges that the Yadavs seem steadfast with the SP, but non-Yadav Other Backward Classes have drifted away from the SP. Non-Yadav OBCs had supported Mulayam Singh Yadav. Mulayam had won Mainpuri five times – 1996, 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019. Dimple's win by 2.88 lakh votes in the December 2022 bypoll was huge, but

was seen as largely a factor of sympathy vote, with the couple plus Akhilesh's uncle Shivpal Singh Yadav appealing for votes in Mulayam's name. In Mainpuri Lok Sabha constituency, while Yadavs number around 4.5 lakh, the Shakyas are second at 3.25 lakh, followed by Lodh Rajputs at 2.15 lakh. The Dalits number around 60,000, with the rest around 3.35 lakh voters being upper caste Thakurs and Brahmins. So, it all depends on how the OBC vote gets split. Bahujan Samaj Party, much to the chagrin of the SP, has fielded Shiv Prasad Yadav, who is expected to cut into the SP's Yadav vote bank. Shiv Prasad Yadav runs a school and a dairy business and has been trying his luck against the Mulayam family in elections in the past. BSP chief Mayawati on Wednesday



addressed a big election meeting in Mainpuri. The Bharatiya Janata Party has never won the Mainpuri Lok Sabha seat. BJP is banking on the support of the non-Yadav OBCs and hopes to rope in a majority of the votes of the Shakra community. Disrespect of tall Lodh leader and former UP chief minister Kalyan Singh also finds resonance in Mainpuri among the Lodh community. The BJP leaders are telling the voters in Lodh dominated villages that when Babuji (Kaylan Singh) died, Akhilesh did not go to his house to pay tribute, but when a mafia, Mukhtar Ansari, died, he and the SP leaders visited Ghazipur. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who addressed an election meeting in Mainpuri, also raised this issue while underlining how he and other BJP leaders had visited Saifai to pay

tributes to Mulayam after his death. He called it an example of the SP's "bhed-bhao" (discrimination), suggesting the party was "biased" towards Muslims. For the common people SP candidate Dimple Yadav is still viewed as an accidental politician. She is largely on her own this time, with Akhilesh tackling his own campaign in Kannauj, Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday along with uncle Shivpal Yadav addressed several meetings in various assembly segments falling in Mainpuri Lok Sabha constituency. Mulayam Singh Yadav remains the calling card for the SP. Akhilesh Yadav, Shivpal Yadav and Dimple Yadav and all leaders addressing the meetings invoke the memory of Mulayam Singh Yadav and work done by him for the development of the constituency and uplift of the common people.







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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Scare visits schools

A bomb threat directed at nearly 100 schools in Delhi-NCR serves as a wake-up call for all of us

Amid an unanticipated cloud of fear, nearly 100 schools in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) sent students home early Wednesday upon receiving a bomb threat via email. The police conducted thorough searches, but found nothing suspicious. The scare has sent shockwaves through the community, leaving parents, educators and students grappling with a harrowing reality: The threat of terror is no longer a distant concern but a chilling presence in our midst. The sanctity of schools, once regarded as a safe haven for learning and growth, has been compromised. As we confront this sobering reality, it is imperative that we do not succumb to despair but unite in resilience and resolve. Foremost, we must commend the swift response of school authorities and law enforcement agencies in addressing these threats. Their coordinated efforts have undoubtedly helped reassure people. More importantly, our intelligence agencies need to put their act together; they are the ones who should have seen it coming.



We do not have enough specific information to process at the moment and no clue about the intention or the identity of the perpetrator(s); we don't know if it was a real threat or just a mischievous element playing mind games, but such threats cannot be taken lightly, especially when human lives are at risk. The threat emails, reportedly emanating from a Russian IP address, were well-planned and coordinated. Shooting in the US schools is rather rampant; Indian schools are much safer and should stay that way. All we have to do is be vigilant.

Also, this small win should not lull us into complacency. We must remain vigilant and proactive in fortifying

the security infrastructure of our educational institutions. Beyond bolstering physical security, we must also invest in fostering a culture of vigilance and preparedness within our school communities. Educators play a pivotal role in equipping students with the knowledge and skills to recognise and respond to potential threats. Empowering students with safety protocols and encouraging open dialogue can go a long way in mitigating the impact of terror-induced anxiety. It is equally important that we address the root causes of such terror acts. Socio-economic disparities, marginalisation and ideological extremism often serve as fertile breeding grounds for radicalisation. By addressing these underlying issues through comprehensive social policies and inclusive education, we can strive towards building a more resilient and harmonious society. It is equally important to remain calm and not panic. In times of crisis, it is easy to succumb to fear and division. However, we must remember that our strength lies in our unity and resilience. Now more than ever, we must stand in solidarity with one another, refusing to be cowed by the forces of terror. Together, we can create a future where every child can pursue their education without fear and where schools are not battlegrounds but beacons of hope and enlightenment.

## PICTALK



Participants during a State-level bullock cart race at Thegur, in Chikkamagaluru

# Democracy, economics and governance

The confluence of elections, electioneering and the economy demands meticulous examination and rethinking to make the system work flawlessly



BK JHA

As India goes ahead with its 18th General Elections, the nation finds itself at a crossroads of democracy, economics and governance. The elections, spanning 44 days from April 19 to June 1, are poised to be the lengthiest in Indian history, reflecting both the enormity of the task at hand and the significance of the decisions to be made. Against the backdrop of a burgeoning economy, evolving political landscapes and pressing social challenges, the intersection of elections, electioneering and the economy warrants scrutiny. The magnitude of election expenditures provides a glimpse into the economic dynamics surrounding the electoral process. According to the Centre for Media Studies (CMS), the anticipated expenditure for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections is staggering, surpassing Rs 1.35 lakh crore. This figure, more than double the amount spent in 2019, indicates to the monumental scale of electoral spending in the world's largest democracy.

With a projected voter base of 96.6 crore, the per-voter spending is estimated at around Rs 1,400, signifying both the financial investment and the democratic imperative of ensuring widespread participation. However, it's worth noting that the Election Commission's expenditure is expected to constitute only a fraction of the total outlay, pointing towards the diverse economic activities spurred by the electoral process.

The Election Commission tirelessly strives to facilitate universal suffrage across the nation. Recognising the pivotal role of public figures in shaping civic consciousness, the Commission enlisted the famed actor Rajkumar Rao as its 'national icon' to galvanise youth engagement and voter turnout as the country approaches the general elections. Rao's portrayal of a dedicated poll officer in the acclaimed film 'Newton', a poignant exploration of electoral challenges in a Naxal-affected region, resonated deeply with young voters. However, despite the cinematic depiction of electoral fervour, the anticipated



'Newton effect' has yet to materialise in voting patterns in two phases so far. Nonetheless, the indomitable spirit of election officers persists, as they traverse treacherous terrain and surmount logistical obstacles to ensure the integrity of the electoral process.

Electioneering acts as a catalyst for various sectors of the economy, fostering growth and employment opportunities across the spectrum. From hospitality and transportation to textiles and advertising, the ripple effects of political campaigns are palpable. As political parties vie for voter attention, rallies, events and promotional activities proliferate, injecting vitality into local economies and stimulating demand for goods and services. Moreover, the advent of digital campaigning has revolutionised the electoral landscape, with professional agencies employed to enhance brand visibility and engagement. The economic dividends of such strategies are evident, as digital platforms emerge as potent tools for political communication and mobilisation.

Amidst the fervour of electoral competition, political manifestos serve as blueprints for



ELECTIONEERING ACTS AS A CATALYST FOR VARIOUS SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY, FOSTERING GROWTH AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS THE SPECTRUM

governance, delineating policy priorities and economic agendas. The contrasting visions articulated by major political parties underscore the divergent approaches to addressing pressing socio-economic challenges.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), buoyed by its track record and incumbent status, advocates for policy continuity and fiscal consolidation. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi's emphasis on infrastructure development and economic reforms, a BJP-majority Government is poised to prioritise private investment and fiscal prudence, thereby fostering economic stability and growth. Conversely, the Indian National Congress or INDI Block champions a progressive agenda focused on job creation, social welfare and agrarian reforms. Proposals such as Government-led employment initiatives, minimum support price guarantees and education loan waivers underpin the Alliance's commitment to inclusive growth and equitable development.

While political rhetoric often dominates electoral discourse, the economic imperatives transcending partisan lines merit attention. Issues such as

water scarcity, climate change and unemployment pose formidable challenges to India's socio-economic fabric, necessitating concerted action beyond the electoral cycle. The water crisis in cities like Bengaluru serves as a poignant reminder of the urgent need for sustainable resource management and climate resilience. Yet, the conspicuous absence of these issues from political manifestos is very disheartening. There is an urgent need for non-partisan dialogue and policy discourse on environmental sustainability and socio-economic resilience. As India embarks on its electoral journey, the confluence of elections, electioneering and the economy offers both opportunities and challenges. While the democratic process catalyses economic activity and political discourse, the imperatives of inclusive and sustainable development transcend electoral cycles. By transcending electoral exigencies and embracing a shared vision of progress, India can realise its aspirations for a vibrant democracy and a prosperous future for all.

(The author is Delhi-based senior journalist. Views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### DOMESTIC TRAGEDY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Man gets life imprisonment for murdering teenage Indian wife in London," published on April 30, this is my response. The news of Sahil Sharma's sentencing for the murder of his wife, Mehak Sharma, is a heartbreaking reminder of the devastating consequences of domestic violence. The brutal act not only robbed Mehak's family of a beloved daughter but also shattered their sense of security and left them grappling with irreparable grief. The fact that the tragedy unfolded within the confines of their own home, supposedly a place of safety, adds another layer of horror to the ordeal. Mehak's mother's poignant statement encapsulates the profound anguish and emptiness left in the wake of such a senseless loss. While the legal proceedings may offer some semblance of justice, they can never fully assuage the pain inflicted upon the victim's loved ones. It serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need for greater awareness, support and intervention in cases of domestic violence to prevent similar tragedies in the future.

Aadhya Chawla | Chandigarh

### GLOBAL IMPACT OF BHARAT

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Covid handling changed world's perception of India: EAM," published on April 30, this is my response. India's growth trajectory under the spotlight! External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar reflects on India's changing perception abroad, citing COVID management and Chandrayaan-3 as game-changers. He highlights how decisions made domestically resonate globally, showcasing India's significance on the world stage. From bringing citizens home during crises to enhancing the value of the Indian passport, India's actions garner international attention. Jaishankar underlines India's technological prowess and socio-economic

### Technological deception



Apropos the news article, "Telangana CM summoned in Shah fake video case," published on April 30, this is my response. In today's complex political landscape, technology's role in shaping narratives is undeniable. The recent controversy surrounding doctored videos

of key political figures underscores the urgency of addressing misinformation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's acknowledgement of this issue highlights the importance of responsible information sharing in the digital age. However, the entanglement of political parties in this web of deceit further exacerbates the situation. The involvement of law enforcement, as seen with the Delhi Police's actions, signals a crucial step towards accountability. Yet, the broader implications of such manipulation on societal harmony cannot be overstated. Platforms like 'X' and social media giants must cooperate fully in identifying and curbing the spread of fake content. Ultimately, restoring trust in our democratic processes necessitates collective vigilance and decisive action against those seeking to sow discord through technological deception.

Arya Sundaram | Chennai

advancements, attracting global interest in investment and exploration. The narrative shifts from India being a concern to being a source of support, showcasing its resilience and diplomatic agility. With a focus on domestic performance, Jaishankar emphasises infrastructure development and socio-political systems, which captivate foreign fascination. India's journey from a developing nation to a global player exemplifies its potential and allure on the international stage, echoing the sentiment that Bharat indeed matters.

Kabir Oberoi | Mumbai

### DIVINE SYMBOLISM UNVEILED

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Astroturf | Mother calls for full alert against evil forces," published on April 28, this is my response. The intricate symbolism of the goddess's accessories reveals profound insights into the cosmic order and human existence. The conch shell, echoing the primal sound of creation, signifies the source energy that initiates and sustains all life.

Meanwhile, the lotus flower, emerging from murky waters unstained, embodies purity and detachment amid creation's diversity. The goddess's eight weapons, contrasted with her two creative symbols, underscore the perpetual struggle against malevolent forces. This juxtaposition reflects the omnipresence and potency of negativity, urging constant vigilance and defensive action. Demons, depicted in surreal forms, serve as metaphors for internal and external threats, reminding us of the deceptive allure and insidious nature of evil. In essence, the divine imagery prompts contemplation on the balance between constructive creativity and vigilant defence in navigating life's complexities. It emphasises the importance of spiritual awareness and moral integrity in combating adversities while upholding the cosmic order.

Devansh Khatri | Jaipur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Post-poll path for infra financing!

Modi 3.0 plans to bolster infrastructure creation post-election by expanding the infrastructure financing ecosystem

In the interim budget for FY25, infrastructure outlay was increased by 11.1 per cent to 11.11 lakh crore, including Rs 2.78 lakh crore for the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) and Rs 2.55 lakh crore for the Railway Ministry. Post-poll, the plan for a full-fledged budget for FY25 will look to raise Rs 25000 crore of finance through green bonds - higher than Rs 20000 crore raised through green bonds in FY24.

That going ahead private investment will be a big driver of infrastructure development, is evident from the National Investment & Infrastructure Fund (NIIIF) plan to raise USD 1 billion for its second Private Markets Fund (PMF). The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is likely to invest nearly USD 125 million. NIIIF manages over USD4.9 billion of equity capital commitments across its four funds - Master Fund, PMF, Strategic Opportunities Fund and India-Japan Fund. The MoRTH is looking to



raise a whopping Rs 60,000 crore in FY 25 through monetisation of Toll Operate Transfer (TOT) highways and NHAI InvIT. In FY 24, Rs 38334 crore was raised from ToT, InvIT and project-based financing. It is significant to mention that under the National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP), an ambitious target of raising Rs 1.08 lakh crore has been fixed for FY25. The share of privately funded highways in the overall award of projects in FY25 is expected to meet the Government's target of 10 per cent. NHAI has drawn up a plan to develop 53 listed highways worth Rs 1.2 trillion through BOT. The

years. This will free up NHAI's resources for development in the highways sector.

The energy sector is getting a big green private investment boost. REC Limited, a leader in the power sector in India has availed a SACE-covered green loan for JPY 60.536 billion to finance eligible green projects. In the power sector, besides the airport, Adani Enterprises is firming up its plans to plough USD 1 billion into these businesses. It is in advanced talks with several investors in the US and Europe to raise USD 1 billion for its Solar Panel business and Mumbai Airport. The company, which is enhancing its focus on green energy, raised USD 750 million through bonds in 2022. The investors and Indian corporates engaged in infrastructure development are banking on political and policy continuity for the fructification of the ambitious plan for infra financing push.

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



VINOD BAHL



## FIRST COLUMN

## SPIRITUAL EDUCATION CAN TRANSFORM SOCIETY

It's high time to introduce spiritual learning to save our future generations



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

All of us daily read, in newspapers, about one or the other major problem causing grave suffering to a large segment of society or mankind as a whole. These problems are classified as economic, social, political, racial, administrative, etc. and attempts are made to find solutions to them from the respective areas of human knowledge. The unjust treatment of industrial or farm labour, unfair treatment of under-privileged, bride-burning, ill-treatment of women, inhuman treatment because of racial prejudices or casteism, bonded labour and abject poverty are only some problems on the long list, the top of which is the problem of armament race that threatens the very existence of humankind. Economic and social reforms, diplomatic negotiations, political declarations and legal enactments are only some of the measures that have been adopted to solve these and other problems over the years. Even such an august body as the U.N. also has addressed itself to some of these problems through its various organs. Though all these various efforts have borne some fruit, the problems at the core remain unsolved and there has been no satisfactory and lasting solution to resolve them. The question, therefore, remains: "What are these problems due to and how can these be solved or eliminated?"

A thorough analysis would lead us to the conclusion that all these problems are directly and indirectly caused by the absence or lack of goodwill or good motives. People generally lay emphasis on creative intelligence, scientific development, courage and life full of pleasures but, it is usually forgotten that, if there is no good motive, science and intelligence may be used to promote means of mutual destruction, courage may be employed for killing and pleasures may be gained in evil ways. Hardly is it realised that if there were goodwill towards all, there would be no armament race, no racial prejudice, no bride-burning, no exploitation, no poverty and no injustice to the labour class, for goodwill is the very antithesis of all these.



Without goodwill, conferences end in bickerings, assemblies achieve nothing, resolutions are considered mere scraps of paper, economic remedies cannot prove effective and legal acts or social reforms cannot bring the desired change. The second factor essential to solve the problems of mankind is to consider the inherent worth of human personality. We must realise that every human individual is to be revered and is not to be treated as a means for the gratification of the desires of another. No one has to be degraded, for another person's benefit, to the level of material goods and chattels or machines and tools or dolls and playthings but has to be regarded as a person. If this principle of giving respect to every being is applied in our daily lives, there would be no slavery, no bonded labour, no exploitation of the working class, no poverty, no bride-burning and no ill-treatment of one by the other based on the difference in race, religion or caste.

The ultimate and lasting solution of problems lies, without doubt, in education that develops these two qualities in men and women and such an education cannot but be moral and spiritual. Trillions and Billions are spent every year by various Governments and non-Governmental agencies on solving social, economic, political, administrative and other problems without achieving the goal of ending exploitation of all sorts and thus ending class conflict, conflict, family conflict and other kinds of conflicts. This is mainly because we only talk of conflict resolution without real and practical moral and spiritual education. It's high time that the Governments and the people in power realise this and seriously do something about it & save our future generations from devastation.

(The writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist, views are personal)

## Plug leakages in fertiliser subsidy

The real reason behind the leakage is control of the MRP at an artificially low level. Dubious players have a huge incentive to divert and rake in the moolah



UTTAM GUPTA



As part of the 100-day agenda of Modi 3.0, the Government intends to administer fertiliser subsidies more effectively and cut down on leakages and diversions to build on the success of neem-coated urea. It intends to conduct a pilot in a few districts on a modified version of the direct benefit transfer (DBT) that seeks to establish a linkage between the land holding of a farmer and nutrient consumption. A proposal in this regard mooted in 2020 is being resurrected. To make urea - a widely used fertiliser that supplies primary nutrient nitrogen or 'N' and constitutes nearly half of India's total fertiliser consumption - affordable to farmers, the Union Government controls its maximum retail price (MRP) at a low level unrelated to the cost of production/import and distribution, which is much higher. The excess cost over MRP is reimbursed to the manufacturer/importer as a subsidy which varies from unit to unit depending on its cost. The MRP of urea is kept unchanged (today's price is more or less the same as in 2022) even as all cost escalations are absorbed by raising the subsidy. In the case of fertilisers supplying phosphate or 'P' and potash or 'K' which constitute the other half (call them non-urea fertilisers), there is a 'uniform' subsidy on a per nutrient basis for all manufacturers under the Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) Scheme. They are free to fix MRP but need to reduce it to the extent of subsidy. Even as the subsidy remains unchanged, rising costs mean ever-increasing MRPs. The Department of Agriculture and Cooperation (DoAC) - in consultation with states - assesses the requirement of fertilisers for each cropping season - kharif (April to September) and rabi (October to March).

The Department of Fertilisers (DoF) prepares an agreed supply plan to cover all the urea requirements from domestic production and import. The states allocate all of the urea arrivals and track disbursement up to the district level.

The DoF has developed a mobile and a web application - a mobile Fertiliser Monitoring System (m-FMS) that provides information



AT A FUNDAMENTAL LEVEL, LEAKAGES ARE INHERENT IN THE WAY THE ADMINISTRATION OF FERTILISER SUBSIDIES IS DESIGNED. THE GOVERNMENT ASKS MANUFACTURERS TO SELL FERTILISER AT A LOW PRICE — A PRICE IT THINKS FARMERS CAN AFFORD

on stock, sale and receipt of fertilisers till the last retail point. The total expenditure on fertiliser subsidy - on both urea and non-urea fertilisers put together - is around Rs 200,000 crore annually. Now, when the Government talks of leakage and diversion, we are reminded of the Economic Survey 2015-16 which said as much as 24 per cent of the subsidy is spent on inefficient producers, 41 per cent is diverted to non-agricultural uses including smuggling to neighbouring countries and 24 per cent is consumed by larger, presumably richer farmers. That leaves a tiny 11 per cent going to small and marginal farmers who constitute the vast majority i.e. nearly 86 per cent of the total number of farmers.

At a fundamental level, leakages are inherent in the way the administration of fertiliser subsidies is designed. The Government asks manufacturers to sell fertiliser at a low price - a price it thinks farmers can afford. Having sold at this price, the latter claims from the former an amount equal to the excess of the cost of supply over it as a subsidy. The subsidy could have been given to the farmer directly say, by depositing the money in her bank account. But, for decades, successive Governments have preferred to route it through manufacturers.

Having to deal with a handful of manufacturers instead of crores of farmers (that would have been the case if the subsidy were to be given to them directly), they have found this arrangement convenient. But, there is a big negative to it. Since the subsidy is embodied in the MRP (albeit low), the subsidised fertiliser product must reach the farmer and be used only for growing the crop. If it doesn't reach, then the benefit of subsidy is enjoyed by the person who grabs it.

After leaving the factory or the port (in case of imported stuff), fertiliser

travel a long distance moving by rails/roads to reach storage points in the district and further movement to retail outlets for sale to the farmers.

In the initial years of the fertiliser pricing and subsidy scheme (it was introduced in 1977 for urea and 1980 for other fertilisers), manufacturers were given the bulk of the subsidy on the 'dispatch' of the material from the factory. In due course, the Government shifted to disbursing 95 per cent of the subsidy to urea producers and 85 per cent to producers of non-urea 'on receipt of material at a district's railhead point/approved godown' (balance 5 per cent/15 per cent was paid on confirmation of sales to farmers by states).

In March 2018, the Government made disbursement of subsidies to manufacturers conditional upon actual sales to farmers and these getting registered on point-of-sale (PoS) machines. But, this by itself offers no guarantee as a diversion can still happen at the retail level all the more because anybody - including non-farmers - can buy any quantity through PoS machines. All that he needs to do is to furnish his unique identity or Aadhaar number.

Meanwhile, in 2015, the Government issued an order mandating all manufacturers/importers to neem-coat all of the urea supplies. The logic was simple. Upon neem coating, it is rendered unfit for use in chemical industries; hence the manufacturers/dealers will have no incentive to divert. But, this would happen only when coating is done. This is where the rub lies. Policing of a mammoth quantity across the length and breadth of the country is well-nigh impossible.

Now, apart from barring non-farmers from purchasing subsidised fertilisers, the Government wants to

link the purchase of fertilisers with the size of the land the farmer owns. The motive behind this is to make sure that her purchase is capped at the quantum required for growing the crop only; and that she doesn't get away with excess and make money from selling at a much higher price (albeit for industrial use). The farmers' land/crop data will be loaded on her biometric card. When she goes to the retailer to purchase her requirement for the season, the PoS machine will register the number of fertiliser bags that correspond to the data embedded in the card.

The retailer will deliver this number, not what she demands orally. The idea has massive appeal. But, making it work poses a daunting challenge.

The Government will need to have data - on land holding, crops grown, nutrient status of the soil etc on over 140 million farm households. Apart from ensuring 'full coverage', it will have to focus on the 'accuracy' of the data as well the 'accuracy' of the calculation as any incorrect figure or miscalculation could result in either shortfall or excess delivery of bags. Further, this data has to be updated on real-time basis to account for the impact of changes in the weather/rainfall on fertiliser requirements. This apart, the Government is missing the woods for the tree.

The real reason behind leakage is control of the MRP at an artificially low level. When urea sells at one-tenth the cost of supplying it, dubious players have a huge incentive to divert and rake in a moolah. They will do every bit to circumvent the rules resulting in the misuse of subsidies. The way forward is to end control on fertiliser prices and let the subsidy be given 'directly' to the farmers using DBT mode.

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

## The idea of rotating PMs is as ridiculous as it is impractical

INDIA bloc leaders face sharp criticism for it and are cautioned against the perilous consequences of such a move

Leaders of INDI Alliance who are struggling to save secularism, pluralism and the Constitution from the shackles of Fascist, Communalist and BJP should bear in mind that Indians are not village idiots. The move to have a new Prime Minister every year for the five-year tenure of the next Lok Sabha is a sure recipe for disaster. One is at a loss for words to explain what would happen to this country in the eventuality of M K Stalin, Supriya Sule, Mamata Banerjee, Mallikarjun Kharge/Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav and Tejaswi Yadav become Prime Minister even for one day. The post of Indian Prime Minister is not something that could be played around as per the whims and fancies of politi-



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

cians who do not have any links with the grassroots-level electorate of the country. Indira Gandhi, who ruled the country for almost 15 years was a creation of the media and she had an edge over others because she was a woman. There was a more competent woman at that time and her name was Tarkeshwari Sinha. The modern Indian history, altered and tampered with by Left historians may not have

much information about the lady, a postgraduate in economics from the London School of Economics who rose through the Congress cadre and became the deputy finance minister of the country during the tenure of Jawaharlal Nehru. Sinha had no political godfathers and it was almost certain that she would have reached the top position if she had not earned the wrath of the Royal Family of New Delhi. Even Indira Gandhi was not free from basic human natures like jealousy and inferiority complex. Sinha was the glamour girl of yesteryears and was at home in Hindi and Queen's English. With the passing away of Nehru, Sinha was left all alone and there was no one to prop up the lady who stood for free

enterprises while the Nehruvians were pontificating mixed economy and socialism and crony capitalism. Many leaders in the undivided Congress party were the right persons for the top job. Over the decades, the Congress disintegrated and degenerated and the likes of Devkant Barooah and Arjun Singh emerged as power brokers and wheeler-dealers. We had Pranab Mukherjee, a politician and gentleman, whose erudition and leadership qualities were heads and shoulders above others. But top leadership never trusted or liked Mukherjee, Madhava Rao Scindia, Rajesh Pilot or Jeetendra Prasad who were all right people for the right job. Congress became weaker by the day and the

Grand Old Party ended up as a doormat for the likes of the DMK, RJD, AAP and even a letterhead organisation by the name of MDMK and its leader Vayyapuri Gopala Samy (Vaiko). Before the 1990s, Congress used to dictate terms to the above-mentioned outfits regarding the seats it would allocate to them. Now it is the other way round. Lalu Prasad Yadav and his family would decide the number of seats to be contested by the GOP from Bihar while the Samajwadi Party leaders would have the last word in the seats to be contested by it. The roadshow held by Rahul Gandhi at Wayanad as a precursor to his filing nomination was a harbinger of the annihilation of the Congress Party. Rahul Gandhi, the

great-grandson of Jawaharlal Nehru who described the Muslim League as a dead horse in 1952, was forced not to display the party flag throughout the rally or even when he filed the nomination papers. That was the price dictated by the Sultans of Malappuram and the scion of Congress Party had no other option other than accepting their condition. One is reminded of the great Malayalam novel Oru Deshathinte Katha (The Story of a Locale) written in 1971 by S K Pottekkat. This autobiographical novel was honoured with the Jnanapeetha Award in 1982 and remains one of the ten best novels written in Malayalam. This novel tells the story of Sreedharan and the village Athiraniyappadam where

he grew up. One of the characters in this great work is Kunhikkelu Melan, a scion of the Kelancherry Family, the locale's biggest and most powerful clan. This family-owned thousands of hectares of land, many hills, mountains and even forests. Kunhikkelu Melan, born with a silver spoon in his mouth squandered the entire property for wine and women. When he was left with nothing other than the castle of Kelancherry, he started selling the doors and windows of the ancestral home to meet the expenses for his sundowners. "Doors and windows are installed to save the house from robbers and dacoits. If there is nothing valuable in the house, what is the use of doors and windows," Melan told the villagers when he was asked

why he was selling off the chattels.

India needs a good, sincere and honest leader and we are willing to accept dictatorship to a certain level. Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump, who enjoyed limitless power did not end up as despots. Richard Nixon, Margaret Thatcher, Charles De Gaulle, Francois Mitterrand and even Fidel Castro were loved by our Opposition leaders despite the aversion of these leaders to democracy and secularism. A politician should aspire for power. There is nothing abnormal in it. But he should have the ability and capability to occupy that position.

(The writer is special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)









# Vinicius Júnior leads Real Madrid to 2-2 draw at Bayern Munich

AP ■ MUNICH

Vinicius Júnior scored twice for Real Madrid to draw 2-2 at Bayern Munich in the first leg of their Champions League semifinal. Bayern dominated but Madrid survived, and the contest is still wide open ahead of the return leg in Madrid on May 8.

With the focus on England stars Harry Kane and Jude Bellingham, as well as Toni Kroos' return to his former team, Vinicius emerged as the decisive figure on a night when his bright green boots were often a blur.

The Brazil forward opened the scoring against the run of play in the 24th minute and equalized with a coolly taken penalty in the 83rd after Leroy Sané and Kane had scored for Bayern.

"I think it's a good result," said Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti, who led Bayern to the Bundesliga title in 2017. "It gives us faith and confidence

for the second leg. It's completely open."

Kane's goal, another penalty, was the England forward's 43rd goal in 43 games for Bayern this season.

"It felt like the goals were scored when the other team was better," Kroos said. "We're pretty sure that we'll advance at home."

Bayern had appealed to fans to wear red to the game and the visitors must have felt they were playing in a red cauldron as they were greeted by deafening whistles from the majority of the 75,000 in the stadium.

Fans in the "Südkurve" paid respect to deceased club great Franz Beckenbauer with a huge red-and-white choreography before kickoff. A giant banner sent a message to the players as they were warming up: "To honor the Kaiser Franz, give everything to reach the final!"

The winners of the two-leg semifinal will play either Borussia Dortmund or Paris



Saint-Germain in the final in London on June 1.

"Real Madrid does this to teams, so we should not be too disappointed," Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel said. "I think we will be able to create chances in the Bernabéu. This is one of the most difficult places to win, yes, but it's a challenge. That's the beauty of it."

Bayern totally dominated the opening stages on Tuesday. Sané had an effort saved by Andriy Lunin in the first minute and the hosts went on to miss a slew of chances.

"We didn't have enough intensity, especially in the first half," Ancelotti said.

Nearly 20 minutes elapsed before Madrid enjoyed a period with the ball.

Then Kroos spotted Vinicius' run and played a perfect through ball for the Brazilian to sweep the visitors' first real chance past Manuel Neuer in the Bayern goal.

Bayern lost its early zest as the visitors saw more of the ball.

Tuchel gesticulated wildly at his players to push forward, then threw his arms up in exasperation.

Kane went closest with a free kick before the break, awarded for a foul by Nacho on Jamal Musiala, who gingerly rubbed his bandaged left leg. The Germany forward had only just recovered from a knee problem.

Sané equalized in the 53rd when he ran at the Madrid defense and cut inside Ferland Mendy before firing a fierce strike just inside the near post. Kane made it 2-1 four minutes later with a penalty awarded after Lucas Vázquez bundled over Musiala.

But it wasn't the last penalty as Kim Min-jae - who was beaten on Vinicius' first goal - brought down Rodrygo. Vinicius duly equalized from the spot.

"It was a back-and-forth game," Bayern midfielder Konrad Laimer said. "But yeah, it's Real Madrid, you can't let anything happen against this team."

## Nadal plans to play in Rome after a positive week in likely his last Madrid Open



AP ■ MADRID

Rafael Nadal left Madrid feeling better about his fitness than he did when he arrived, and is now planning to play in Rome while continuing his preparations for the French Open.

Nadal lost in straight sets to the 31st-ranked Jiri Lehecka in the fourth round at Madrid on Tuesday. But the Spaniard was feeling good about his progress following his latest injury layoff. Nadal called it a

"positive week" in every way, and said his body held up well.

"I was able to play four matches, a couple of tough matches," Nadal said. "So very positive, winning three matches, playing four matches at the high level of tennis. I enjoyed a lot playing at home. I leave here with very positive energy."

Nadal arrived in Madrid pessimistic about his physical condition, and he wasn't even sure if he would be able to play. He said he only did it because it was

an emotional tournament for him.

The 37-year-old Nadal is playing in his final year on tour. He had already bid farewell to Barcelona, where he lost in the second round. The 22-time Grand Slam champion hadn't played a tournament since Brisbane in January.

"Today is unforgettable day in terms of saying goodbye, Madrid," he said.

"But my career keeps going, and I have my personal goals that I have got in the next couple of weeks, and I want to explore if I have any chance to achieve that." Nadal said Rome, where he won 10 titles and where the tournament starts May 8, was also emotional for him.

"That's another very special tournament in my career," he said. "I dreamed to play all these tournaments that I had success one more time. I missed Monte Carlo unfortunately, that is one of the most special for me, but Rome is one of these ones that I enjoyed a lot playing there."

In Madrid, Nadal defeated American teenager Darwin Blanch in the first round and 11th-ranked Alex de Minaur in the second, both in straight sets. He needed three sets to edge Pedro Cachin in the third round. "I want to play well there (in Rome). I want to be competitive," he said.

"I want to give myself a chance to play good tennis, and I'm gonna keep working hard to try to make that happen."

Playing at the French Open, which begins May 26, is one of Nadal's main goals during his farewell season.

## Top seeded Bopanna, Ebden pair knocked out of Madrid Masters

PTI ■ MADRID

Top-seeded Indo-Australian pair of Rohan Bopanna and Mathew Ebden bowed out of the ATP Mutua Madrid Open after a shocking first-round loss to the unheralded duo of Sebastian Korda and Jordan Thompson here.

Bopanna and Ebden, who are the reigning Australian Open men's doubles champions, went down 7-6 (4) 7-5 in a contest that lasted one hour and 17 minutes.

Squaring off for the first time, the American-Australian duo matched Bopanna and Ebden shot for shot.

Korda and Thompson displayed a strong service game and saved the lone break point they conceded in the opening set.

To their credit, Bopanna and Ebden also did not allow Korda and Thompson to convert the three break points they ended up conceding. However, Korda and Thompson managed to gain the upper-hand by clinching the set in a tie-breaker.

Korda and Thompson gained



confidence and managed to break Bopanna and Ebden once from the four chances that came their way.

The top seeds, in contrast, could not exert any such pressure, resulting in an early exit from the tournament being played on clay.

The rare setback notwithstanding, Bopanna and Ebden have enjoyed a good run on the circuit, winning the Indian Wells

Masters last year which made the 43-year-old Indian the oldest ever ATP Masters 1000 champion.

The duo made the men's doubles semi-finals at Wimbledon and the final of the US Open in the same season.

Earlier this year, the Bopanna also became the oldest world number one in doubles thanks to the Australian Open triumph.

## Four Indian boxers march into semi finals

PTI ■ ASTANA (KAZAKHSTAN)

Indian pugilists Aryan, Priyanshu and Sahil marched into the semi-finals with confident wins at the ASBC Asian U-22 & Youth Boxing Championships here on Wednesday.

Aryan gave India a perfect start with a 5-0 unanimous decision win against Uzbekistan's Juraev Shakarboy in the 51kg category. His win was followed by a good show by Yashwardhan (63.5kg), who made a remarkable comeback after going down in the first round to grab a 4-1 victory over Iran's Mirahmadi Babaheidari.

Priyanshu (71kg) and Sahil (80kg), on the other hand, didn't break sweat as they wrapped the bout with referee stop the contest (RSC) decision against Chinese Taipei's Wu Yu En and Turkmenistan's Yklymov Abdyrahma respectively.

Meanwhile, Jatin ended his campaign in the 57kg category with a 1-4 loss against Uzbekistan's A Nodirbek.

The youth semi-finals will be played on Friday.

Aryan (92kg), Nisha (52kg), Akansha Phalasal (70kg) and Rudrika (75kg) will be in action later tonight in their respective youth quarter-finals bouts.

Late on Tuesday, Jugnoo (86kg), Tammana (50kg) and Preeti (54kg) claimed victories to enter the U-22 semi-finals.

On Thursday, eight U-22 pugilists will take the ring for their quarter-finals bouts -- M Jadumani Singh (51kg), Ashish (54kg), Nikhil (57kg), Ajay Kumar (63.5kg), Ankush (71kg) and Dhruv Singh (80kg) in the men's category and Guddi (48kg) and Poonam (57kg) in the women's section.

The tournament has seen participation from over 390 boxers from more than 24 countries, fighting for medals across 25 weight categories. The finals for the youth and U-22 category will be played on May 6 and 7 respectively.

## Red Bull chief technical officer Adrian Newey to step down from F1 team

AP ■ MILTON KEYNES, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE (ENGLAND)

Adrian Newey, the designer pivotal in Red Bull's dominance of Formula One, will step down early next year, the team said Wednesday. The 65-year-old Newey will end his near two-decade career with Red Bull in the "first quarter of 2025."

"For almost two decades it has been my great honour to have played a key role in Red Bull Racing's progress from upstart newcomer to multiple title-winning team," he said.

"However, I feel now is an opportune moment to hand that baton over to others and to seek new challenges for myself."

Newey joined Red Bull in 2006 and helped the team win seven drivers' titles - including the last three seasons for defending champion Max Verstappen - and six constructors' titles.

Red Bull said its chief technical officer would be stepping back from F1 design and focus on its first hypercar, the RB17. "All of our greatest moments from the past 20 years have come with Adrian's hand on the technical tiller," Red Bull team principal Christian Horner said.

"For me, when Adrian joined Red Bull, he was already a superstar designer. Two decades and 13 championships later he leaves as a true



legend. He is also my friend and someone I will be eternally grateful to for everything he brought to our partnership."

News of Newey's departure could spark a bidding war for his services. As Newey is free to join another team when he leaves Red Bull, it paves the way for him to have an impact on the 2026 car for whichever team he joins. The next major change in regulations is due in 2026 and having Newey on board would give his next employers a significant advantage.

Newey's departure comes in the wake of Horner being accused of "inappropriate behaviour" by a female employee. Horner was exonerated by Red Bull's parent company GmbH and has always denied the claims.

## Archer Dhiraj aims for team qualification at Paris Olympics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Dhiraj Bommadevara, the only Indian archer to qualify for the individual event of the Paris Olympics, says locking a quota in the team events at the quadrennial extravaganza is next on their radar.

The 22-year-old recurve archer qualified for the Summer Games in the men's individual event owing to his silver medal at the Asian Qualifying Tournament in Bangkok last year.

"We are trying hard to convert the individual quota into a team quota, so we are working consistently towards it, planning for it and taking part in as many tournaments as possible," Dhiraj was quoted as saying in a SAI release.

"Our first priority is to get the team quota. We will go to Paris 2024 with a simple mindset



just to give our best. The rest is not in our hands. No expectation on results. We have to be prepared for everything and perform accordingly."

The Indian men's recurve team has been in good form. Last week, the trio of Dhiraj, Tarundeep Rai and Pravin Jadhav had stunned reigning Olympic champions South Korea to land a historic World Cup gold medal after 14 years. The World Cup in Antalya,

Turkey in June is the final qualifying event for the Paris Olympics.

However, if the Indian men's team is unable to make the cut there, it is still in prime position to qualify for the Olympics owing to the rankings. The top-two ranked team in the world get direct entry for the Games. India are ranked second so far behind Korea.

Dhiraj was also a part of the silver-winning men's team at the Asian Games last year. Despite doing well at in World Cups, World Championship and other marquee events, Indian archers have yet to get their hands on an elusive medal at the Olympics.

"We are trying to achieve better versions of our past. We're not comparing with any other nation. Our priority is only to get better and improve from lessons learnt. Talking about the impact of the compound team's performances he said, "Our compound team is the best in the world. Its performance helps us push ourselves. Both the compound bow and the recurve bow competitions are equally tough."

"How Jyothi (Surekha) didi handles her pressure in various categories - individual, mixed or team event - is really commendable and inspiring," he added.

## Man United makes more executive changes as Jim Ratcliffe new era takes shape

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester United announced more changes to its executive structure as the new era under co-owner Jim Ratcliffe continues to take shape.

Interim CEO Patrick Stewart and chief financial officer Cliff Baty will step down at the end of the season by mutual consent, the club said.

Jean-Claude Blanc, CEO of Ratcliffe's INEOS Sport, will take over as chief executive until former Manchester City executive Omar Berrada takes on the role on July 13.

Baty will be replaced by former INEOS Sport chief financial



officer Roger Bell.

"I would like to personally thank both Patrick and Cliff for their support in helping us get to know the club and making us feel welcome and I respect their decisions to now

move on as we establish a new management team for the club," said Ratcliffe, who is one of Britain's richest people.

The billionaire owner of petrochemicals giant INEOS bought a 25% stake in United in February, and his investment has already seen a host of major changes at the storied club.

Former CEO Richard Arnold stepped down in November and football director John Murtough left earlier this month. Ratcliffe's investment, which will eventually rise to a 27.7% stake, has seen him assume control of United's soccer operations.

INEOS director of sport Dave Brailsford and Blanc have joined the board of the soccer club. As well as the appointment of Berrada, former City academy director Jason Wilcox has been hired as technical director.

## Chennaiyin FC extends contract of goalkeeper Samik Mitra until 2027

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Indian super League side Chennaiyin FC has extended goalkeeper Samik Mitra's contract till end of 2027 season, the club announced on Wednesday.

Mitra joined the Marina Machans from Indian Arrows in 2020 and has played a total of 22 matches for the team in all competitions, keeping clean sheets in three games.

The 23-year-old goalkeeper from Siliguri has become a force to be reckoned with between the posts and has played a crucial role in the team's success on many occasions. With immense potential, head coach Owen Coyle expressed confidence in Mitra's abilities to continue playing for the team in the forthcoming season. "We believe in giving chances to youngsters at



the club, and Samik Mitra is someone who has great potential. He is young, and we have already seen his capabilities in the matches that he has played for the team," said Coyle.

"It's important that such talented players stay at the club, and I believe that he can continue to grow with the team," he said. Mitra made four appearances for the club

in the ISL 2023-24 season and looks to deliver quality performances for the team in the upcoming season as well.

He also spent his early days at Chennaiyin FC, joining the club's U-18 team in 2017 and playing there during his formative years, where he acquired the necessary skills before departing for the Indian Arrows in 2019.

"I am really excited for another season with Chennaiyin FC. We qualified for the playoffs this season and want to do even better in the coming year. This club is the right place for me to grow and learn from some of the best coaches and players in the country."

"I have grown a lot in the last few years and want to continue the upward trajectory in my career," commented Mitra after committing to the club for another year.



# Gritty Punjab Kings floor CSK by seven wickets

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Punjab Kings mounted a pragmatic chase to consign Chennai Super Kings to a demoralising seven-wicket defeat at their own den in their IPL match here on Wednesday. Punjab rode on quick 40s by Jonny Bairstow (46, 30b, 7x4, 1x6) and Rilee Rossouw (43, 23b, 5x4, 2x6) to move past Chennai's modest 162 for seven, which was built around skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad's solid 62 (48b, 5x4, 2x6). The win took PBKS to seventh place on the points table with eight points, while CSK stayed on fourth with 10 points. The Super Kings' defence of 163 faced multiple barricades as their spinners – Moeen Ali and Ravindra Jadeja – were rendered ineffective because of dew and pacer Deepak Chahar walked off the field with a niggle after bowling just two balls. But that should not take the sheen out of PBKS' effort with the bat on the night.

After the early departure of opener Prabhsimran Singh, who played two convincing strokes, Bairstow and Rossouw kept the visitors in the hunt with a handy 64-run alliance as they also went past 50 in the Power Play segment. Bairstow treated spinners Jadeja and Moeen with disdain taking three boundaries and a six off them. In stark contrast to their Punjab counterparts, the CSK spinners gave away 44 runs in five overs without any return. But Bairstow's attempt to be too cheeky ended his stay. The England batter went for a cute ramp shot off Shivam Dube, but could only manage to feather it to MS Dhoni behind the stumps. However, Rossouw and Shashank Singh (25 not out, 26b) made 44 runs in quick time as PBKS remained ahead in the game. Rossouw, who pummelled Dube and Thakur for a six each, had a brilliant chance to make a fifty. But his attempt to smash Thakur's low full-toss out of ground resulted in



his stumps getting rearranged. But those were minor irritants in an otherwise polished effort as Shashank and skipper Sam Curran (26 not out, 20b) knocked off the remaining runs without much fuss during their unbroken 50-run alliance. Earlier, Gaikwad braved a sluggish Chepauk pitch to make a solid fifty, but CSK struggled massively against Punjab spinners – Harpreet Brar and Rahul Chahar.

Gaikwad and Ajinkya Rahane (29, 24b) added 61 runs for the opening wicket but they consumed 49 balls. There were flashes of intent too. Gaikwad played a fine upper cut off pacer Arshdeep Singh for a boundary and Rahane creamed three fours in a row off Curran, including a lovely cover drive. The slide of CSK began once PBKS brought their spinners on immediately after the Power Play that yielded a satisfactory 55 runs.

Rahane tried to slog sweep Brar but his skier ended in the hands of Rossouw in the deep. But the left-arm spinner inflicted a bigger blow in the next delivery, trapping Dube, who was named in India's T20 World Cup squad, leg before for a first-ball duck. Dube, promoted to No. 3 to counter spin, failed to connect an almighty heave off a fuller ball on the middle-stump by Brar, and he had to walk back despite seeking help from DRS.

In the next over, leg-spinner Chahar got rid of Ravindra Jadeja, who was deceived by a delivery that turned into him a whisker to beat his prod. It was a total shutdown for CSK between sixth and 10th over, losing three wickets for just 16 runs.

For a team that generally bosses the middle passage between the seventh and 15th over making runs at a rate of 10.6, the CSK was a shadow of their marauding self, managing just 47 runs against PBKS. A big chunk of credit should go to two Punjab spinners – Brar and Chahar – who exploited a slow track to the hilt to return with combined figures of 33 in eight overs for four wickets. They also did not concede a single boundary in their spell. Gaikwad did his best to bring CSK back into the match, using his wide array of shots against pacers Harshal Patel and Curran, and reached his fifty in 44 balls. The right-hander brought up his third fifty in a row in this

# SRH seek perfect chase against RR

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

An erratic Sunrisers Hyderabad would look to fix their chasing troubles and get their campaign back on track when they host the high-flying Rajasthan Royals in the Indian Premier League here on Thursday. A lot more is at stake for the Sunrisers than the Royals, who have virtually qualified for the playoffs. In ominous form till few days back, SRH dropped out of the top four on the points table after suffering back-to-back losses against wooden spooners Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Chennai Super Kings where they failed to chase down totals. With five wins and four losses, the 2016 champions sit on the fifth spot with 10 points. The Pat Cummins-led side's top and middle-order batters have failed collectively while chasing, forcing head coach Daniel Vettori to admit that the idea of going all out with the bat in the second innings might not be the right thing to do. SRH have breached the 250-run mark thrice this season but all while batting first. In contrast, they haven't managed to chase a total in excess of 200 even once. "We have been successful setting totals and now we have to look at how well we are in chasing," head coach Vettori had conceded after the loss to RCB. "We're pretty well-suited to chasing, but it hasn't really come off yet. So yeah, it is something (we need) to work on," skipper Cummins had said after he lost to CSK. SRH are too dependent on the explosive starts provided by Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma. And, while the duo gets going it's great but when they flop, SRH will want to do a better job at re-building their innings. It's also about time Aiden Markram steps up and justifies his spot in the playing XI, having had an underwhelming

season thus far. Runaway leaders Rajasthan Royals, on the other hand, will look to continue their near flawless run. The inaugural edition's champions have shown they are perfectly equipped to compete anywhere. They are perched atop the table with 16 points -- four points ahead of second placed Kolkata Knight Riders. They are all but through to the knockout stage. The Royals boast of a formidable top order, comprising Jos Buttler, Yashasvi Jaiswal, and skipper Sanju Samson, with all three of them in good nick. The West Indian duo of Shimron Hetmyer and Rovman Powell and youngsters Riyan Parag and Dhruv Jurel have also shown they can hit top gear. They have an equally potent bowling attack comprising Yuzvendra Chahal, the experienced Trent Boult, Avesh Khan and Sandeep Sharma.

**THE TEAMS (FROM):**  
**Rajasthan Royals:** Sanju Samson (c), Jos Buttler, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Riyan Parag, Donovan Ferreira, Kunal Rathore, Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Sen, Navdeep Saini, Sandeep Sharma, Trent Boult, Yuzvendra Chahal, Avesh Khan, Rovman Powell, Shubham Dube, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Abid Mushtaq, Nandre Burger, Tanush Kotian, Keshav Maharaj.

**Sunrisers Hyderabad:** Pat Cummins (c), Abdul Samad, Abhishek Sharma, Aiden Markram, Marco Jansen, Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Glenn Phillips, Sanvir Singh, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mayank Agarwal, T. Natarajan, Anmolpreet Singh, Mayank Markande, Upendra Singh Yadav (wk), Umran Malik, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Shahbaz Ahmed, Travis Head, Jaydev Unadkat, Akash Singh, Jhathavedh Subramanyam.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former Australia fast bowler Brett Lee feels Lucknow Super Giants did not manage Mayank Yadav's injury well, suggesting that the young tearaway pacer was brought back to IPL action prematurely after being sidelined due to abdominal soreness. The 21-year-old Mayank developed abdominal soreness during LSG's match against Gujarat Titans on April 7. That was his third IPL game, and he impressed one and all with his express pace and two Man-of-the-Match awards. He made a comeback in LSG's win against Mumbai Indians in Lucknow on Tuesday but walked off the field without completing his fourth over after an injury scare. LSG coach Justin Langer said the young pacer sensation is feeling "sore in the same spot" that kept him out of action for almost three weeks, while captain KL Rahul that added Mayank had complained of slight pain in his sides. Lee, one of the game's most feared fast bowlers, laid the blame on the LSG top management and medical staff.

# Mayank getting injured in first game on comeback has to directly be on LSG leadership: Lee



He said Mayank's initial injury would have required four to six weeks to heal, much more than the time period the youngster spent at

the sidelines before being brought back. "A side strain or whatever they're calling it, normally takes at least four to six weeks

to even come right. We don't know the depths of how big a strain it was but for somebody who is pushing the limits of his body by bowling 150

kmph, that's not good management at all," Lee said in a JioCinema release. "His first game coming back and getting injured, has to directly be on the leadership and the medical staff of the Lucknow Super Giants." The 47-year-old Lee, who took 310 wickets from 76 Tests between 1999 and 2008, sympathised with Mayank, saying he should have got the right advice. "The only person who has to pay this price is this poor young guy Mayank, who is just electric. Everyone in the IPL has loved seeing what he's brought... You wish he got the right advice, so he doesn't have to go through and absorb this. "Now, it's most probably going to mean that he's going to miss out on the World Cup if there's an injury that might come up." At the Ekana Stadium in Lucknow on Tuesday, Mayank walked off the field after bowling the first ball of

## OTHER SPORTS



# Tom Lockyer is at peace with prospect of retirement

AP ■ LUTON (ENGLAND)

Tom Lockyer, the Premier League player who suffered an onfield cardiac arrest earlier this season, says he is "at peace" with the prospect of having to retire from the sport. The Luton captain had a defibrillator fitted after collapsing during a game against Bournemouth in December. He had previously collapsed seven months earlier during a game at Wembley Stadium because he suffered atrial fibrillation. The 29-year-old Lockyer, who recently became a father for the first time, has not given up

hope of resuming his playing career. But he accepts that may not be possible. "I've made no secret saying I would love to return to football, but ultimately it would have to come down to someone who's a cardiologist or a specialist who has done full research into what has gone on and if it could happen again, because we've got a little girl now and she takes priority," Lockyer told BBC Radio Wales. "I would love to play football again, of course I would, it's my life but if it's the case that I can't, then I'm at peace with that as well.

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Krishan Pathak finds himself in a bizarre situation. He will have to battle it out with his friend and mentor PR Sreejesh for the lone goalkeeper's slot in India's hockey squad for the Paris Olympics. In Olympics, a country can carry only a 16-member squad as against 18 players in other tournaments, and that restriction often forces the coach to sacrifice one goalkeeper to include another player in a different position. It happened in the Tokyo Olympics as Sreejesh did the custodian's duty during India's bronze-winning run, while Pathak watched the action from the gallery. But this time, Pathak is not ready to give up the slot without a fight. "The coach hasn't told us the team composition for the Olympics. My aim is to be ready 100 percent when

the call comes. There is a healthy competition going on within the squad to earn a place in the Olympics-bound team. "Every player feels that he can be part of that squad. I am no different, and I want to be on that flight to Paris," Pathak told PTI during the team's training camp at the SAI centre here. Pathak shares a deep connection with Sreejesh. In fact, the veteran was India's goalkeeping coach during the 2016 junior World Cup, where Pathak showcased his talent to a broader world for the first time. The 27-year-old insisted that the competition for an Olympic berth has not affected their personal equation. "It's dream for me to work with and play alongside Sree bhai. We are very comfortable with each other. We share a lot of information, especially when one of us commits mistakes. We point that out to each other.



"Whenever I commit a mistake, he will come and tell me what went wrong and how to rectify it. Similarly, I will do that when Sree bhai makes a mistake. We have a great bonding between us - on and off the field," detailed Pathak. The immediate assignment in front of

him is the FIH Pro-League matches, starting at Antwerp, Belgium from May 22. India will face some top-flight teams like Germany and Belgium in that tournament. Pathak wanted to assert his claim for an Olympic berth through some strong outings in the Pro-League.

"We've played eight Pro-League matches in Ranchi and Rourkela. Now, we have some more Pro-League matches coming up ahead of the Olympics. We will meet some of those teams in the Olympics too. That familiarity will help us. "As a goalkeeper, I will look to source as much knowledge from the Pro-League matches about our possible opponents in the Olympics," he added. The Kapurthala man was all praise for Indian national team coach Craig Fulton, saying that the South African is helping the players to achieve their optimum potential ahead of the quadrennial showpiece. "When he spots a weakness, he starts working on it immediately. He hates wasting time. When we went to Australia recently, our attack and defence were not working as we lost the series 0-5.

PTI ■ CHENNAI

A Grandmaster much before the title was officially bestowed on her by FIDE recently, Indian chess player R Vaishali has revealed that there was a time she was unsure of being able to achieve the feat but managed to pull through owing to a good support structure. Vaishali completed the requisite 2500 ELO points Llobregat Open tournament in Spain to become only the third Indian woman after Koneru Humpy and Harika Dronavalli to become a GM. However, the title was officially given to her only recently

# Happy that the title is finally out: R Vaishali on officially becoming GM

following the FIDE Council meeting during the Candidates Tournament in Toronto last month. "After completing the (Women's GM) title, I knew it would be changed to GM someday. I did not think about the title so much," she told PTI in an interview. "Yeah, it took some time to get it official, but I'm happy that the title is finally out. I was okay with it (the delay)," she



added. The 22-year-old is basking in the glory of her solid performance in the Candidates tournament, where she won five consecutive games to finish joint second. She became a Woman Grandmaster in 2018 after completing her final norm during the Riga Technical University Open in Riga, Latvia. Having had to wait six years to finally earn the GM

tag, Vaishali said she became a bit unsure of the GM tag after her ratings stagnated due to lack of competition during the COVID 19 pandemic. "In between, I could not play any tournament for two years due to the (COVID-19) pandemic. But, I was working throughout, trying to improve my game. I completed my International Master (IM) cycle post-pandemic (in 2021)," she recalled. "Although I was improving my game slowly, my rating became stagnant. There were some low moments when I felt I might not get the title, but people believed in me and helped me to attain it," she said.