



CITY 3 BSP DID NOT NEED BULLDOZERS FOR LAW & ORDER: MAYAWATI

OPINION 6 UPHOLDING THE FOURTH ESTATE IN DIGITAL AGE

WORLD 10 TRUMP CALLS JUDGE CROOKED AFTER FACING WARNING OF JAIL TIME

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KKR LOOK TO IRON OUT FLAWS AGAINST MI 12 SPORTS

Pak wants Rahul as PM to weaken Govt: Modi



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by BJP leaders during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Anand, Gujarat on Thursday

was there before 2014. But Modi's strong Government neither bows down nor does it stop," Modi said in a rally in Anand in Gujarat. The PM came down more and said unlike in the past when Congress was in power, the "tyres of Pakistan's terror have got punctured" now. "A country which used to export terror in the past, is now struggling to import 'atta' (flour). The hands which used to hold bombs are now holding 'bheek ka katora' (begging bowl)," he said. People across the world are now saying that India is a global bright spot. India is seen as a 'vishwa bandhu' (global friend) who can resolve conflicts between two countries, Modi said. The PM also reiterated that Congress wants to change India's Constitution to provide reservation of Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Classes (OBC) communities to Muslims. "Congress wants to give reservation to Muslims, the party's favourite vote bank. For that, they want to change the Constitution. I challenge Congress to give in writing that they will not change the Constitution to give reservation to Muslims on religious basis," he said.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ AHMEDABAD/NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday dubbed the Congress party a "disciple" of Pakistan, and targeted Rahul Gandhi saying the neighbouring country was eager to make the 'shehzada' of the grand old party India's next Prime Minister as the country's enemies want a weak Government in the neighbourhood. Modi's comments in an election rally in Gujarat,

linking Congress with Pakistan came a day after Chaudhry Fawad Hussain, a former Minister in Imran Khan's Cabinet in Pakistan, reportedly shared a video featuring Rahul on his social media handle and praised him. "Pakistan is crying because Congress is dying here. You all must have learnt that Pakistani leaders are now praying for Congress. Pakistan is eager to make 'shehzada' (referring to Rahul) the next PM. This is not surprising because we already know that Congress is Pakistan's 'murid' (follower). The partnership between Pakistan and Congress has now been exposed completely. It shows that the country's enemies want a weak Government in India, not a strong one...A weak Government which was there at the time of 26/11 Mumbai terror attack. They want a corrupt Government which



Not at home in Amethi, RaGa may try Rae Bareilly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the suspense over Congress nominees from Amethi and Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, party sources indicated that Rahul Gandhi is likely to contest from the seat he lost last time and face sitting BJP MP and Union Minister Smriti Irani. With Friday being the last date of filing of nominations, the party is expected to announce its candidates from the two prestigious constituencies late at night. Sources said the party has started making preparations for the nomination filing in both the seats in Uttar Pradesh, which have been traditionally held by members of the Gandhi-Nehru family and revealed that the entire Gandhi family, including sitting MP of Rae Bareilly Sonia Gandhi and party chief Mallikarjun

Kharge, is scheduled to travel in Uttar Pradesh in a chartered plane. They added that Rahul is the most likely choice of the party for Amethi which he lost to Irani in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Sources also said since Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has declined to contest from Rae Bareilly, a grandson of former Congress leader and Indira Gandhi's aunt Sheila Kaul may be fielded from Rae Bareilly, earlier represented by Sonia. Sonia has called it a day for electoral politics and has been elected as a member of Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan. People and locals associated with the Gandhi family are already in Amethi and neighbouring Rae Bareilly and are believed to have prepared the nomination documents for both Rahul as well as Priyanka.



BJP denies ticket to WFI ex-chief, names his son

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Ending weeks of speculation, the BJP on Thursday denied ticket to sitting MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh who has been embroiled in a sexual harassment controversy and fielded his son Karan Bhushan Singh from Kaiserganj in Uttar Pradesh. For the first time since 2009, the BJP dropped its heavyweight leader and sitting MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh from Kaiserganj. The former president of Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) is currently facing allegations of sexual harassment levelled against him by six women wrestlers. Karan is likely to file his nomination on May 3. The move retains the seat's contest within the family highlighting the influence of the Thakur leader and six-time MP in the region and the party. The party also named Dinesh Pratap Singh as its candidate from Raebareilly, a Gandhi family bastion which has been won by former Congress president Sonia Gandhi for five consecutive times. Sonia, who won from the Gandhi family bastion five consecutive times, was elected to the Rajya Sabha unopposed from Rajasthan earlier this year. The deadline to file nominations for Amethi and Rae Bareilly is on Friday. These



The BJP gives a party ticket to Karan Bhushan Singh, the son of former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Singh

seats are going to polls in the fifth phase, on May 20. Karan Bhushan is the youngest son of Brij Bhushan. Born in 1990, Karan is presently the president of the Uttar Pradesh Wrestling Association. Previously, Karan was the senior vice president of the UP wrestling association. Karan Bhushan is a national-level double-trap shooter. He holds a law degree besides doing a business management course in Australia. He will be making his debut in electoral politics this time.



Maliwal cries foul as L-G sacks 223 DCW 'illegal' staff

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

With its topmost leader and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal still in Tihar, the AAP has received yet another blow as the Women and Child Development (WCD) Department of the Delhi Government has terminated the services of 52 "illegally" appointed contractual employees of Delhi Commission for Women (DCW). Earlier, Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on April 29, issued an order to discontinue the services of 223 contractual employees from the DCW, calling their appointment illegal. The termination has been carried out on the basis of a report submitted by a committee way back in June, 2017. Earlier, an order issued on April 29 said that the WCD Department had terminated the services of 223 contractual staff, but the department on Thursday issued a statement saying it had directed for the termination of 52 such employees.

Clandestine 'dole surveys' make poll panel see red



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid controversy over freebies promised by the political parties in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission (EC) took "serious view of activities by political parties and candidates seeking details of voters under the guise of various surveys for their proposed beneficiary schemes" and termed such activities as "corrupt practice of bribery under Section 123(1) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951". In an advisory issued to all national and State level parties, the commission has asked them to immediately cease any

activities "that involve registering individuals for post-election beneficiary-oriented schemes through any advertisements/survey/App." The advisory came ahead of the third phase of the Lok Sabha Elections 2024, slated for May 7. The commission has directed all District Election Officers to take appropriate actions against any such advertisements within the statutory provisions. The commission noted that during the ongoing elections has come across instances where some political parties and candidates have been engaging in activities that blur the lines between legitimate surveys and partisan efforts to register



individuals for beneficiary-oriented schemes and individual benefits under the guise of conducting surveys or creating awareness about the existing schemes of the Government or creating awareness about the party manifesto regarding prospective individual benefit schemes etc. Highlighting the possible quid-pro-quo arrangement", the commission said the act of inviting or calling upon voters to register for post-election benefits "may create an impression of the requirement of one-to-one transactional relationship between the elector and the proposed benefit". This also has the potential to generate quid-pro-quo arrangements for voting in a particular way thereby leading to inducement, the poll body added. It added that the potential of quid pro quo for voting and inducements amounts to bribery/corrupt practice. In this regard, the Election Commission directed all District Election Officers to take appropriate actions against any such advertisements within the statutory provisions namely Section 127A of the Representation of People's Act, 1951, 123 (1) of the Representation of People's Act, 1951, and Section 171 (B) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Start training cops for new criminal laws' rollout: Centre



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry has said the three new criminal laws, which will be rolled out across India from July 1, are a transition from the colonial legacies towards a system of justice based on the principle of access to justice by all, and has sought the help of all States to train the policemen for their effectively implementation. In a communication to all the States and Union Territories (UTs), the Home Ministry also said many new provisions, synchronised with modern-day times and contemporary technologies, were incorporated in the new criminal laws and their aim is to bring an era of ease of policing and ease of

justice. The new laws are the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Act. The laws will replace the colonial-era Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872 respectively. The new laws aim at providing speedy justice to the citizens of the country and will strengthen the judicial and court management system. "The new laws are a transition from the colonial legacies towards a system of justice, based on the principle of access to justice by all... It is the endeavour of the government of India to reach out to all ranks of police and prison officers in the country and make them aware of the positive and advanced changes so as to equip them with the basic knowledge and understanding of various new provisions, which will help them in implementing the same in right earnest and with confidence," the Home Ministry said in its communication. To fulfil this objective, the Home Ministry said it has been striving to educate the police and prison officers about the new laws. The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) has developed the training of trainers' module and various other training programmes for different levels of police and prison personnel on the new criminal laws.

Biden brands India 'xenophobic' along with China, Japan

PTI ■ WASHINGTON



US President Joe Biden has called two of his QUAD partners - India and Japan - and two of his adversaries - Russia and China - "xenophobic" nations, asserting that none of these countries, unlike the United States, welcome immigrants. "This election is about freedom, America and democracy. That's why I badly need you. You know, one of the reasons why our economy is growing is because of you and many others. Why? Because we welcome immigrants," Biden told his supporters at a fundraiser here on Wednesday evening. "We look to — the reason — look, think about it. Why is China stalling so badly economically? Why is Japan having trouble? Why is Russia? Why is India? Because they're xenophobic. They don't want immigrants," Biden, the presumptive candidate of the Democratic Party, said. "Immigrants are what make us strong. Not a joke. That's not hyperbole, because we have an influx of workers who want to be here and want to contribute," the president said at the Democratic Party fundraiser. India and Japan are members of QUAD - a four-member strategic security dialogue that also includes the US and Australia. Biden hosted Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a State Visit last year while Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited the White House last month for an official visit.

Tiny feet waltz back to school with innocent confidence

ABHI SINGHAL/ADITI SHARMA/ SAMAR PANDEY/RISHABH MALIK ■ NEW DELHI

It was just another start of the day for the school going toddlers and young children on Thursday who a day earlier had been evacuated from their classrooms following a bomb scare across over 100 schools of the Delhi NCR. In the schools which resumed, children appeared to be more confident than their parents when they exchanged the routine 'tata; bye-bye' greetings. Several schools, however, decided to remain closed as part of security measures and a few of them observed a low attendance. The Pioneer reporters visited more than a dozen schools across

the national Capital and observed that students were back to school in their school buses, private vans or parents' pick drop facility. Principal of Kendriya Vidyalaya in Sadiq Nagar, Mamta Singh said, "Our attendance today has not dropped and students are also feeling safe and secure and it is our responsibility to ensure the security of the students". School management had assured parents on Wednesday itself that there is no need to worry. We didn't get anything on our official email ID," she added. The parents came to drop students off at school just like on a normal day without any fears. On Wednesday, 131 schools received bomb threats via email, which led to mass evacuation and panic in the schools of Delhi and Noida.



Ajit Singh, who came to drop his children at Sarvodaya Vidyalaya in Keshav Puram in north Delhi area said, "It is just like any other day, and he as a parent was not scared at all." He further added that this was only a way to create panic. Sadina Khatoun, a mother of two children, came to drop her

Hoax aimed at mass panic: FIR

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police Special Cell in its FIR registered revealed that the perpetrators of the hoax bomb threat letters received by nearly 200 Delhi schools wanted to "create mass panic and disturb public order. FIR states that the movement of these units to the schools "resulted in massive inconvenience," according to the source. The FIR has been registered at Special Cell Police Station under IPC sections 505 (2) (statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes),

507 (criminal intimidation by an anonymous communication), and 120 (B) (punishment of criminal conspiracy). According to police sources, the investigation will be done by the Counter Intelligence Team Special Cell. The IFSO unit is also trying to find out the origin from where the mail was sent, till now the connection to Russia (IP address) has been revealed as the domain of the email is "mail.ru". The investigating agency is also probing the angle of joint conspiracy between China and ISI to ascertain if there is a larger conspiracy at work in the matter.

children at the Delhi MCD Primary School in Sukhdev Kunj and expressed that she was not scared and even other students have also turned up in the school. Several schools also sent messages early in the morning to parents not to send their children to school whereas a majority of parents were concerned after the bomb threats. While talking to some parents outside the school, they looked concerned, "My daughter's school did not receive any threat email and school has also convinced the parents about the security of the kids but still as a mother our concern is obvious," said Divya Singh, mother of a class 4 student in The Indian School, Sadiq Nagar, New Delhi.

8-yr-old girl dies, 2 others hurt as car rams into tree

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

An eight-year-old girl was killed and two of her family members were injured when a speeding loader struck their bike in Nigoha on April 29 night. The incident came to light after police registered a case on Thursday.

The deceased was identified as Palak from Nigoha, while the injured were identified as Ram Kishore and his wife from Mohanlalganj. Ram Kumar is Palak's maternal grandfather. According to reports, Palak and her family members, including her mother's sister, were returning home riding two different motorcycles. Around 7 pm, a speeding loader hit the motorcycle carrying Palak, Ram Kumar, and his wife. The trio sustained grievous injuries and were admitted to a private hospital. Palak succumbed to injuries a few hours after treatment. Ram Kumar suffered fractures in his hands and legs, while his wife also sustained injuries.

In another road accident in Malihabad, a 20-year-old student died, and two of his classmates sustained injuries and were admitted to KGMU Trauma Centre after doctors at the Malihabad CHC deemed their condition critical. The incident occurred around 11 am on Thursday when the car they were traveling in colli-



ded with a tree on their way home. The deceased was identified as Samad from Kewalhar village in Malihabad, and the injured as Nawaz (20) from Basti Dhanwant Rai village and Arsalan (18) from Mirzaganj in Mohanlalganj. As per reports, all the victims were travelling in a car on their

way home from school when the vehicle rammed into the tree in Kewalhar village. The impact was severe, causing Samad's death on the spot, and trapping the other two occupants inside the badly mangled car. Locals rushed to the scene upon hearing the loud crash and alerted the police. The trapped victims

were rescued and taken to the Malihabad CHC, where Samad was pronounced dead. The other two injured were referred to KGMU Trauma Centre due to their critical condition. A police spokesperson said that Samad's family requested not to proceed with the inquest and autopsy.

SEWER TRAGEDY Contractors booked for culpable homicide

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Wazirganj police registered a case against firm director Himanshu Gupta and two contractors KC Pandey and Kailash Dixit under IPC Section 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) in connection with the sewer tragedy case. The FIR was registered on the complaint of the victim's brother, Vinay Kumar.

In his complaint, Vinay alleged that his brother Sushil Yadav and father Shobran Yadav were instructed by the accused to enter a sewer line without proper safety equipment or machinery. This resulted in the release of poisonous gases, leading to their untimely demise. Vinay also mentioned that other workers fled the scene after his family members drowned in the sewer. "The last call I received from my father was around noon. He informed me that they were summoned by KC Pandey near Residency to clean a sewer line. Later in the evening, I received news of their tragic demise," Vinay informed the police. Authorities stated that the complaint from JE Jal Kal G Verma would also be included in the investigation.

Unemployed youth, housewives among 15 file nominations

SHARMILA KRISHNA ■ LUCKNOW

On the penultimate day of the Lok Sabha elections, unemployed youth, spiritual leaders, and housewives submitted their papers on Thursday. Candidates started arriving at the district collectorate early in the morning.

A total of 15 nominations were filed, including one for the Lucknow East assembly constituency, six for the Lucknow Lok Sabha and eight for the Mohanlalganj Lok Sabha constituencies. Thirty-seven-year-old unemployed youth Vimal Kumar Shukla submitted his nomination as an independent candidate for Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency.

Shukla, a first-time candidate, explained, "In 2011, I was selected as a sub-inspector, but due to an administrative error, I have been unemployed since 2018. I am contesting to advocate for youth issues and combat issues like frequent exam paper leaks in Uttar Pradesh, which profoundly affect individuals and families." Housewife Suman Verma of the Bhartiya Shakti Chetna filed her nominations for the

Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency for the second time. "My focus will be on addressing crime and addiction issues in the city," she stated, vowing to provide a strong challenge to incumbent Rajnath Singh. Dr Aarti (35), representing the All-India Forward Bloc, filed her nomination for the Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency for the first time.

An advocate for women empowerment with a PhD, she said, "We are fearless, belonging to Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's party. Ideological diversity is crucial, and I aim to represent a spectrum of thought. Uttar Pradesh, once a land of opportunities, has turned into a labor market."

Dharam Guru Syed Ali Hussain of the Sarvajan Seva Party, a three-time election contender, pledged to make significant changes to the city if elected. "The prevailing unemployment and lack of education demand urgent attention," he stressed. Social worker Vikas Kishore, contesting for the first time from Mohanlalganj constituency, acknowledged the likelihood of the incumbent Kaushal Kishore's (BJP's) vic-

tory but expressed gratitude for the encouragement to contest the election.

Babloo Srivastava, a newspaper editor, emphasised the need for improved education. "Governments and MPs have fallen short in this area," he stated, underscoring his intention to provide free education and scholarships.

Saurav Kumar Shukla, representing the Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan, compared his candidacy to Atal Bihari Vajpayee's initial electoral defeat, highlighting the importance of starting somewhere to bring about change.

Housewife Shalini Asthana of the Bhartiya Sarvdam Party highlighted health, education, and employment reform as her core campaign issues.

Other nominees included Alok Kushwaha from the BSP for the Lucknow East assembly constituency, Sushil Kumar from the Bhartiya Nav Kranti Party, Sunita from the Am Janta Party, Sita Ram from the Awami Samta Party, Akhilesh from the Rashtriya Atal Junta Party, Vinay Kumar from the Rashtriya Uday Party, and Independent Ramesh Kumar for the Mohanlalganj Lok Sabha constituency.

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I Shaik Marimabi My Son is Shaik Razak Army No JC 704397F, Unit Amc center C/O 56 APO, in his Army Record My Name was wrongly Mention Marimabi, while my correct name is Shaik Marimabi for Future.

NOTICE

I Shaik Chinna Moulali My Son is Shaik Razak Army No Jc 704397 F, Unit Amc center C/O 56APO, in his Army Record My Name, was wrongly Mention Chinna Moulali While my correct Name is Shaik Chinna Moulali for Future.

NOTICE

I am Ex-Serviceman 790269-L Ex Jwo Bipin Bihari Giri, resident of Village- Bansi Bazar, Post- Main Post Office, Tehsil and District- Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh. I have entered the names of my two daughters Akanksha Kumari and Kirti Kumari in my records, which is wrong. The correct names are Akanksha Giri and Kirti Giri, which is required to be entered in the records.

NOTICE

I RISHABH RAJ declare that my father ArmyNo.15691531M Hav Rajkumar unit 4IDSR C/O 56 APO Village-Madhuban Post-Chopra Ram Nagar, Teh Banmankhi, Dist-Purnia, Bihar Pin 854102 in my father service records my name wrongly written as RISHAV RAJ but my correct name as per UID RISHABH RAJ has to correct my name in my father's army service records.

NOTICE

I Raaj Kumar Madnani R/o 122/556 Sindh Colony, Shastri Nagar, Kanpur have changed my name from Raj Kumar Madnani to Raaj Kumar Madnani for all purposes.

NOTICE

Mahesh Kumar and Mahesh Kumar Mishra both names belong to the same person, i.e. mine. In future, I will be known as Mahesh Kumar Mishra S/o Sheo Kumar Mishra, DOB 23.12.1968, R/o-H-2/39 Krishnapuram, Kanpur Nagar.

सूचना

सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि मेरा सही नाम नवीन कुमार केसरवानी पुत्र स्व. सुन्दर लाल केसरवानी है जो मेरे आधार कार्ड और पैनकार्ड में अंकित है। बुद्धिवा मेरे रेलीगेयर बुकिंग लिमिटेड के गैर कर्करण आई डी 13026907 हबिक्ट (1) I NE 040H01021 व (2) I NE 040H20013 में मेरा नाम नवीन कुमार पुत्र स्व. सुन्दर लाल केसरवानी अंकित हो गया है। उपर्युक्त दोनों नाम मेरा ही है। भविष्य में मुझे मेरे सही नाम नवीन कुमार केसरवानी पुत्र स्व. सुन्दर लाल केसरवानी के नाम से जाना व पहचाना जाए। नवीन कुमार केसरवानी पुत्र स्व.सुन्दर लाल केसरवानी पता-105/202 महावीर विहार, पानदेवीबा, प्रयागराज।

Two brothers killed over land dispute

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a sensational broad daylight double murder in Jaunpur, two brothers were brutally beaten to death with sticks and bricks while three others, including their wives, were critically injured in the attack. The killings took place over a land related dispute in Paltapur village under Barsathi police station of Jaunpur.

On receiving information of the incident, Superintendent of Police Dr Ajay Pal Sharma reached the spot along with police force of many police stations. Police force has been deployed in the village for security. According to reports, 50-year-old Dashrath alias Munna Yadav of the village was leased some land in 2012. It is alleged that Keshnath Yadav was not allowing him to take possession of the leased land. There was a rivalry between the two over the dispute over this land. Dashrath had moved the Allahabad High Court and the high court had directed the Madiyahun tehsil administration to give possession to the victim. In compliance with the order issued a week ago, the tehsil

administration gave possession of the land to Dashrath. However, Keshnath was agitated over this move. Early in the morning on Thursday, Keshnath along with his accomplices demolished Dashrath's hut and threw it in the canal. When Dashrath came to know about it, he along with his family members went to Keshnath to register their protest. However, Keshnath and his henchmen attacked Dashrath's family with sticks and bricks, killing Dashrath Yadav and his brother and critically injuring another elder brother Bharat Lal, Bharat's wife Anara Devi (48) and Dashrath's wife Kabutara Devi (44). The injured were shifted to hospital and efforts were on to nab the assailants.

DROWNED Meanwhile, four children drowned in Bahraich while bathing in a canal in the Nanpara area. The people present nearby immediately jumped to rescue the children and managed to save two children safely from the canal. Later, on the information, the local police along with a team of divers and other authorities reached the spot and retrieved the bodies of four children after hours of

search operation. Among the deceased three are girls. The police sent the bodies for post-mortem. According to sources in the police, the deceased were identified as Aanchal, Choini, Rahul and Mahi, all of Girdharpur village. The canal is located near the Kotwali Nanpara in Girdharpur village. As per the villagers, in the scorching heat, people of the village usually take bath in the canal. On Wednesday, several children of the village went to the canal to take a bath when the mishap took place. Meanwhile in Ballia, a 24-year-old man was allegedly beaten to death on Thursday, seven people were booked in the case, police said. Seven people have been booked for allegedly killing Brijesh Singh in Khajuri area, they said. Additional Superintendent of Police Anil Kumar Jha said that Singh, was allegedly thrashed by some men in the Khajuri area and left with a head injury. His family rushed him to the Community Health Center (CHC) where he died during treatment. The victim's brother Nitish told the police that Singh had an argument with the accused on Monday, ASP Jha said. Based on Nitish's complaint, a

case was registered against seven people under section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code. The body was sent for post-mortem and teams were formed to arrest the accused. In another incident in Ghazipur district, two members of a family were killed and one other was injured when the motorcycle they were riding on was allegedly hit by a car here, police said on Thursday. According to the police, Anil Kumar, a resident of Paraspur Chaura of Bhudkuda police station area, was travelling on a motorcycle with his pregnant wife Kanchan Devi (28) and son Ayansh (4) when they were hit by a bus near Piyari Bazaar in Saidpur Kotwali area on Wednesday. Devi died on the spot and Ayansh succumbed to his injuries in the hospital, they said, adding that Kumar is undergoing treatment. The road was briefly blocked by the locals and was cleared only after Sub Divisional Magistrate Dr Pushpendra Patel and Deputy Superintendent of Police Shekhar Sengar reached the spot and pacified them, the police said. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem, they said.

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

No need to panic about Covishield jab: Dr Surya Kant

Amid reports of adverse effects associated with the Covishield vaccine, head of the respiratory medicine at King George's Medical University (KGMU) and brand ambassador for Covid vaccination in Uttar Pradesh Dr Surya Kant has reassured the public that there is no need to panic. Dr Surya Kant said that the Covishield vaccine is completely safe. "Any adverse effects from such vaccines typically manifest immediately, and the likelihood diminishes even further a month after vaccination," he said. He pointed out that millions of people in the country have received Covishield without any officially documented cases proving adverse effects. Dr Surya Kant himself received the first dose of the Covid vaccine (specifically Covishield) on the first day of the vaccination rollout. Despite being vaccinated for over three years, he said he has not experienced any adverse effects. "Such effects are extremely rare and may occur in one or two cases out of millions, similar to other medications and injections," he added. Dr Surya Kant explained that conditions like thrombocytopenia syndrome (TTS) could occur rarely with



AstraZeneca and Covishield vaccines, where platelet levels decrease or conditions leading to heart attacks could occur. "However, with vaccines administered for two to three years now, there is no need for concern," he added. He suggested that various factors could contribute to blood clotting, and solely blaming the vaccine is not appropriate. Dr Surya Kant emphasised that this vaccine has not only saved millions of lives but also empowered people to resume normal activities outside their homes. Dr Surya Kant advised caution against the misleading information circulating on social media about Covishield. To prevent heart attacks, he recommended avoiding obesity, maintaining healthy sugar and blood pressure levels, quitting smoking, and incorporating green leafy vegetables into the diet. He also advocated consuming only homemade, fresh, and clean food.

Concern over delay in lung cancer detection

Lucknow (PNS): Medical professionals and experts gathered at the Indian Medical Association (IMA) Bhawan in Lucknow for the 'Lung Cancer Update 2024', organised by the department of respiratory medicine, KGMU, Lucknow Chest Club, UP chapter of the Indian Chest Society, under the aegis of the Indian Society for the Study of Lung Cancer (ISSLC). The event brought together leading oncologists, pulmonologists, researchers, and healthcare practitioners from across the region to explore the evolving landscape of lung cancer diagnosis, treatment, and management. "Lung cancer shares common symptoms and risk factors with many respiratory disorders and is often misdiagnosed as pulmonary tuberculosis. Smoking remains a major risk factor for the development of lung cancer. Delays in diagnosis due to similar symptoms often result in late presentation to doctors, frequently in advanced stages of cancer," noted senior doctors. Head of the department of respiratory medicine, KGMU, and ISSLC member Dr Surya Kant said, "Everything that glitters is not gold; similarly, every shadow on a chest X-ray is not tuberculosis." "In India, lung cancer accounts for around 6% of all cancers and approximately 8% of cancer-related deaths. Globally, every year witnesses 20 lakh new cases of lung cancer, of which 18 lakh result in fatalities," he added.

FIRs lodged in fraudulent land registrations

Lucknow (PNS): Two FIRs were lodged at different police stations in the state capital — Wazirganj and Bijnor — on Thursday, alleging fraudulent land sale deed registrations involving unidentified persons who colluded with officials and staffers of the registry department. The alleged scandal reportedly involved individuals within the registry department. Interestingly, the land was registered fraudulently without the involvement of any officials or staffers from the registry department, raising suspicions of internal complicity. Lucknow Development Authority Vice-Chairman Indramani Tripathi declined to comment on the charges. This fraudulent activity has deprived legitimate landowners of their rightful possession.

Bizman duped of ₹26 lakh on pretext of scrap sale

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Two men duped a businessman of Rs 26 lakh under the pretense of selling him scrap from a company named Phenil Sugars Limited based in Basti district. The victim, Shailendra Kumar Awasthi of Kanpur, filed a complaint against the suspects identified as Qamruddin Jalaluddin from Rohit Bhawan on Sapru Marg in Hazratganj, and CB Singh from Badlapur in Jaunpur. In his complaint, Awasthi stated that he met CB Singh through business dealings, and Singh introduced him to Qamruddin Jalaluddin, whose office was located at Rohit Bhawan on Sapru Marg in Hazratganj. The fraudulent transaction took place in 2023. Singh spoke highly of Jalaluddin and represented him as a scrap dealer. Singh informed Awasthi that Jalaluddin had secured a contract to purchase scrap from Phenil Sugar Limited in Basti district for Rs 80 crore. Singh presented contract papers and a bank statement purportedly showing the funds transferred to Phenil Sugars Limited. "Singh assured me of the fairness of the deal I was asked to enter into with Jalaluddin. We signed a contract between our companies, and Jalaluddin and I signed an agreement on behalf of our respective companies.

Subsequently, I transferred Rs 26 lakh to Jalaluddin through a bank transaction and was instructed to bring labourers to the factory in Basti," Awasthi explained. Awasthi and 40 labourers travelled to Basti to commence work as agreed. "Initially, Jalaluddin requested a week's delay, then further delayed our start date. This pattern of stalling tactics continued for three months. Upon investigating their reputation within our business community, I found out that they were known fraudsters. I demanded a refund from Jalaluddin, who then issued post-dated cheques. However, the cheques bounced due to insufficient balance in Jalaluddin's account," the victim recounted.

DOCTOR FRAUDED A woman doctor was duped of nearly Rs 75,000 by cyber criminals who impersonated Mumbai Cyber Cell investigators and threatened her with jail time for her alleged involvement in money laundering in Gudamba. The incident took place on April 28, and a case was registered on Thursday. According to reports, Dr Sunita Amber from Jankipuram (Sector G) received a call from an unknown mobile number, which appeared as 'FedEx' on the Truecaller app. The caller informed Sunita that her Aadhaar card had been used to book an illegal shipment, resulting in a case being filed against her at the Mumbai Crime Branch. The caller then allowed her to speak with a purported "investigator" from the Mumbai Cyber Cell via a transferred voice call on Skype. "I was informed that a money laundering case had been registered in my name. They also claimed that several bank accounts were operating in Mumbai using my name and Aadhaar card as identification," she recounted. In a similar incident in Krishna Nagar, a woman was defrauded of Rs 2 lakh by false claim that she had sent an illegal shipment to Iran using her Aadhaar card. As per reports, Shivangi Dixit from Kanhaiya Kunj Vihar in Krishna Nagar received a call from an unidentified mobile number labeled as 'FedEx' on Truecaller. The caller alleged that Shivangi had dispatched an illegal shipment to Iran, which was intercepted at a checkpoint during inspection. The perpetrators engaged her in a Skype call, promising to verify her Aadhaar card and other details. "They also informed me that illicit activities were being conducted through my bank account and demanded Rs 1 lakh as hush money, which I paid," she added.

CITYBRIEFS

LABOUR DAY Labour Day was observed through a special assembly organized by Daffodil House, in DPS, Eldeco, on Wednesday. To celebrate the hard work and dedication of these workers, a labour-themed song and dance performance were presented by the students. A speech was also delivered, highlighting the importance of Labour Day. All the helper employees were given gifts as a token to acknowledge their contribution. Principal Manisha Anthwal highlighted the achievements and accomplishments provided by these employees to the school.



FLIGHT TO NINTH INT'L DESTINATION Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport inaugurated flight to ninth international destination, Ras Al-Khaimah, on Thursday. The flight will be operated by Air India Express. CCSI Airport spokesperson said, "The flight will fulfil Lucknow airport's focus to offer seamless connectivity to passengers flying to Middle East destinations. With the addition of this flight, the number of international movements has increased to 21 from 19 earlier." The first flight with 170 passengers departed from Lucknow at 8:35 hours and reached Ras Al-Khaimah at 10:55 hours (IST) on Thursday. The airline will be operating the Lucknow to Ras Al-Khaimah flight on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. While the Ras Al-Khaimah to

Lucknow flight will depart at 11:55 hours (local time) and 13:25 hrs (IST) and arrive in Lucknow at 17:15 hours (IST) and will be operated on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday.

SPECIAL SESSION A special session on "Temple Economics and Dharmik Development" at Sangeet Natak Akademi in Lucknow featured Mizoram Governor Dr Hari Babu Kambhampati as chief guest. Other guests included Awanish Kumar Awasthi, Advisor to the Chief Minister, Principal Secretary (Tourism and Culture) Mukesh Kumar Meshram, and CEO of Kashi Vishwanath Temple Trust Vishwa Bhusan Mishra. Discussions focused on Uttar Pradesh's religious tourism, highlighting temple development's impact on employment and commerce. Dr Kambhampati emphasised temples' role in economic stability, citing Ayodhya's Shri Ram Temple's contribution to pilgrimage tourism. Awasthi highlighted tourism growth under PM Narendra Modi and CM Yogi Adityanath, preparing

for Kumbh-2025 with robust infrastructure.

TWO NEW SPECIES ICAR-National Bureau of Fish Genetic Resources (NBFGR), mandated by the ICAR to document and catalogue the fish germplasm resources of the country, discovered two new species from Brahmaputra basin in Arunachal Pradesh. "The first species is Creteuchiloglanis nuthemuenensis, which was discovered in Duphlokho River, which is a headwater of the Kameng river in the Brahmaputra basin in the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. The new species has been named after the vernacular name of 'Netherdukpen' ethnic group 'nuthem' to honour them, the director said. The second species, Glyptothorax punyabratai, has been described from Tung Stream, a small tributary of Tissa river, in Brahmaputra river basin. The new species has been named after Dr Punyabarata Das, the founder director of ICAR-NBFGR.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS

CHANGE OF NAME

I, LALBAHADUR S/O BAJNATH R/O Gram Aibakpur(Goraiya) Sikh Mirzapur Chunar U.P.-231306 has changed my name to LALBAHADUR BAJNATH SINGH.

PD(405)A

Cong, SP trying to divert SC, ST, OBC quota to minorities: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath staged an extensive roadshow in Mainpuri on Thursday in support of Bharatiya Janata Party candidate Jaiveer Singh, while urging voters in Etah to re-elect Rajveer Singh. Additionally, he appealed to Firozabad residents to cast their votes for Vishwadeep Singh for holistic development. During all three public gatherings, Chief Minister Yogi vehemently criticised the Congress, the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party. Addressing a huge gathering in Firozabad, Chief Minister Yogi highlighted a concerning aspect of the Congress manifesto, which suggests granting minorities the freedom to consume food according to their preferences. "The majority of Indians say that we do not eat beef, but some people deliberately encourage cow slaughter to irritate them," he remarked. Chief Minister Yogi warned that supporting such agendas would invite condemnation from future generations and ancestors alike, implying that voting for the INDI Alliance would be akin to participating in sinful activities. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath led an impressive roadshow in support of Jaiveer Singh, the Tourism Minister in the Yogi government and the BJP candidate for the Mainpuri Lok Sabha seat. During the roadshow, voters voiced their support for Chief Minister Yogi, echoing the chant "Saat Mayi, SP Gayi" (On May 7, SP is gone). Addressing the people after the roadshow, Chief Minister Yogi said, "Your enthusiasm reflects Mainpuri's commitment to change this time. The



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during an election rally in Etah on Thursday

Samajwadi Party, which is focused on family interests, insulted Babu Kalyan Singh and disrespected faith. They should face consequences for their alliance with Congress." In Etah, Yogi Adityanath remarked that Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar opposed reservation based on religion in the country, yet Congress was intentionally seeking to impose Taliban-like governance with the aim of "Islamising" India. Yogi asserted, "By doing so, Congress is maliciously attempting to sow seeds of division in the country once again. Beware of the alliance between Congress and SP.

These parties are trying to drag India back to slavery by diverting reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes to the minorities. Their aim to prioritise reservation for Muslims over Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is a direct affront to the principles of Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar's Constitution." He emphasised that the voters are faced with a choice between those who betray Lord Ram and those who are devotees of Lord Ram. In such circumstances, it is crucial for voters to decide whether SP and

Congress deserve their support, he added. Yogi also noted that those responsible for the murders of Raju Pal and Umesh Pal were now deceased. In Firozabad, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that a new version of the Congress-SP INDI Alliance resembling Aurangzeb had emerged, proposing the imposition of inheritance tax. He likened this proposal to Aurangzeb's imposition of Jizya tax on Hindus. The chief minister questioned whether people would agree to pay Jizya in independent India. He emphasised that when the

country is in capable hands, adversaries remain subdued, but when it is in weak hands, threats emerge. He highlighted that when adversaries attempt to harm India, a strong response is delivered, causing them to falter. Furthermore, he criticised Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for fleeing the country during times of crisis, only to return during elections to make grand promises without genuinely caring for India's welfare. He pointed out the lack of justice for victims during the SP-BSP government's tenure, emphasising that Congress had compromised the dignity of the nation.

BSP govt did not need bulldozers for law & order in UP: Mayawati

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati on Thursday made a frontal attack on the Yogi Adityanath-led Bharatiya Janata Party government in Uttar Pradesh, saying she did not require a bulldozer to maintain rule of law in the state when she was in power. "When the BSP was in power in UP, we did not allow Hindu-Muslim riots to take place. Respect was given to all religious groups, their lives, properties and religious beliefs," she added. "Have you heard of riots taking place during my governments in Uttar Pradesh. Whichever party was in power here, be it the Samajwadi Party, the Congress or the present BJP, riots have taken place," the BSP president said, addressing an election rally at the Christian College grounds in Mainpuri on Thursday afternoon. Mayawati also said the BSP might spring a surprise to those alleging that the party had fielded candidates only to help others win or lose in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. Speaking on the law and order issue, she said, "Earlier during the festival time, be it of Hindus or Muslims, incidents used to take place, but not during my government." Mayawati also recalled how there was absolute peace in UP when the Ayodhya verdict was delivered by the high court during her government. "Schools, colleges and offices were closed throughout the country barring UP and not even a small incident took place. We ensured the safety and security of the people belonging to all religions and castes as well as the safety of the lives and properties of all," she said. The Allahabad High Court verdict was pronounced on

September 30, 2010 when Mayawati was the chief minister of UP. "Whenever there were festivals, some incident used to take place but you have seen the law and order during my tenure. There was a rule of law for which we did not require bulldozers like the present BJP government. We had established the rule of law through legal means," she added. Referring to the three candidates of her party in Mainpuri, Etah and Firozabad, Mayawati said they had been fielded "not to help anyone win or lose but to win themselves with record votes." "The opponents are saying during their campaign in Mainpuri that the BSP (candidate) will make others win or lose but will not win themselves. But the exact opposite might happen. Those who are saying this might themselves get the second or third spot," she asserted. The BSP president also reiterated that during the past few years, there have been exploitation and oppression in the garb of Hindutva because of feeling of hatred, specially with Muslims, which will be stopped when the BSP comes to power as she had done during her government in UP by paying attention to all sections of the society. "If voted to power at the Centre, the BSP will do solid work like it did in UP during its government. Parties like the Congress and the BJP and its supporting parties have to be stopped from coming to power," she said. "The wrong policies of these parties and their working styles have been tried by you. There is a vast difference between what they say and what they do. They are using every tactic to come back to power. The people have to remain alert," she said, adding that these parties

should not be voted back to power in their own interest and in the interest of the state and the country. **SIX MORE CANDIDATES ANNOUNCED** The BSP on Thursday released its 11th list of candidates for the ongoing Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh. While announcing the names of six candidates for the Lok Sabha polls, the BSP has also named its candidate for the by-election to Lucknow East assembly seat. The party has given its ticket to Alok Kushwaha while Narendra Pandey has been made the party candidate from Kaiserganj Lok Sabha seat. The BSP has given its tickets to Saurabh Kumar Mishra from Gonda, Mohammad Nadeem Mirza from Domariyaganj, Narendra Pandey from Kaiserganj, Nadeem Ashraf from Sant Kabir Nagar, Shiv Kumar Dohre from Barabanki and Mashood Ahmed from Azamgarh. BSP supremo Mayawati has changed the party's candidate from Azamgarh for the third time. Earlier, former BSP state president Bhim Rajbhar was fielded from Azamgarh. He was later shifted to Salempur and Sabiha Ansari was given the ticket. Now Mashood Ahmed will be the party candidate from Azamgarh. Recently, Mayawati had released a list of 10 candidates for the Lok Sabha polls in which she announced the names of candidates for Amethi, Jhansi, Pratapgarh constituencies. She replaced Amethi candidate Ravi Prakash Maurya with Nanhe Singh Chauhan. Ravi Prakash Kushwaha has been fielded from Jhansi and Prathamesh Mishra from Pratapgarh. The BSP has also announced a candidate from Rae Bareilly. It is fielding Thakur Prasad Yadav from this key constituency.

A 'family' affair for Yadav candidates

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a strategic shift from the legacy of Mulayam Singh Yadav, who was renowned for promoting Yadav representation both within and outside the family, the Samajwadi Party has opted to field only members of the Saifai family as its Yadav candidates in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. Political analysts have been swift to comment on this tactical manoeuvre. Rajendra Kumar, a seasoned political observer, remarked, "Under Akhilesh's leadership, the SP seems to be adopting a new approach by exclusively nominating Yadav candidates from within the Saifai family, a notable departure from Mulayam Singh Yadav's strategy." With approximately 19.40 per cent of Yadav voters in Uttar Pradesh typically aligning with the SP, this move by Akhilesh Yadav is poised to be tested in the upcoming elections, he said. Of the 63 seats the SP is contesting out of 80 in UP, only five Yadavs have been fielded so far - Dimple Yadav from Mainpuri, Akhilesh Yadav from Kannauj, Dharmendra Yadav from Azamgarh, Akshay Yadav

People who got Covishield will vote against BJP: AKY

Budaun/Bareilly: Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday attacked the BJP on the issue of the Covishield vaccine side effects and said that people who got the injection will vote against the party. Addressing a rally in Budaun in support of Samajwadi Party (SP) candidate Aditya Yadav, he also repeated the allegation that the BJP collected "donations" from the companies that manufactured the vaccine. "Not only is there a threat to the Constitution, but you also have a threat to life due to their decision," the SP chief said. "Think what those who have got the vaccine administered

will be going through when they see their certificates. Now these people will also come out to vote against the BJP this time because it was looking for an opportunity in a disaster," he claimed. Recently, UK-headquartered pharma giant AstraZeneca has admitted that in "very rare cases", its COVID-19 vaccine, which is known as Vaxzevria in Europe and Covishield in India, can cause a blood clot-related side effect but the causal link is unknown, according to court papers being quoted in the UK media. In India, the AstraZeneca vaccine was manufactured by the Serum Institute of India. **PTI**

from Firozabad and Aditya Yadav from Budaun. Notably, all these candidates belong to the Saifai family. These constituencies are considered strongholds of the SP, meticulously cultivated under the leadership of Mulayam Singh Yadav. "Historically, candidates from

the Saifai family have exclusively contested from these constituencies, with rare exceptions," noted Kumar, highlighting the party's efforts to consolidate its hold over the Yadav voter bank. Rajendra Chaudhary, the chief spokesperson of the SP, defended the party's decision, citing

the principle of PDA - Pichhada, Dalit and Alsankhayak (minority). "The nomination of five Yadav candidates aligns with our alliance's framework and the principle of PDA," Chaudhary asserted. The exclusive nomination of candidates from the Saifai family has left many Yadavs feeling disillusioned, as the SP is traditionally seen as the authentic voice of the Yadav community. "There is a growing sense of disconnect between Yadav voters and the party's ticket distribution," remarked disillusioned party members. Comparatively, the SP has allocated 8.47 per cent of its tickets to Yadavs, while the Bahujan Samaj Party has allotted 9.30 per cent of its declared tickets to Yadavs. In contrast, the Bharatiya Janata Party has fielded only one Yadav candidate. Arun Yadav, state president of the All India Yadav Mahasabha, expressed disappointment, stating that Yadavs feel neglected by all parties. "We are treated as mere vote banks without genuine representation," he lamented, hinting at the need for Yadavs to carve out their independent political path akin to other communities like Rajputs.

Shah stresses on increasing participation of voters

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Concerned by a noticeable decline in voting percentage, Union Home Minister Amit Shah spearheaded a crucial meeting with Bharatiya Janata Party workers in Lucknow. The session was dedicated to devising comprehensive strategies aimed at enhancing voter turnout in Uttar Pradesh. "The focus of this meeting was how to improve the party performance so that the BJP wins over 70 seats from UP," a senior leader familiar with the discussions revealed to 'The Pioneer'. Shah, during the deliberations, emphasised on increasing voter participation to elevate polling percentage across the state. Stressing on the importance of mobilising voters, he underscored the need to encourage voters to step out of their homes and actively engage in the democratic process. In line with these objectives, the meeting emphasised the activation of 'panna pramukhs' and booth-level workers, urg-



ing them to play an active role in their respective constituencies to facilitate maximum voter outreach. Furthermore, discussions centered round the importance of strengthening social equations and fortifying the BJP's bonds with various communities. The party explored avenues to effectively connect with diverse demographics, aiming to broaden its support base across UP. The high-profile gathering was attended by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, BJP state president Bhopendra Singh Chaudhary, and other senior leaders.

The meeting continued late into the night, signaling the thoroughness with which strategies were deliberated upon. "The seriousness with which the party views the challenge of improving voting percentage was palpable throughout the meeting," an office-bearer said. As the BJP intensifies its efforts to address the decline in voting percentage and enhance its electoral prospects in UP, the outcomes of this strategic meeting are anticipated to play a pivotal role in shaping the party's strategy for the upcoming elections.

Priority is to take Rae Bareilly's history to new heights: Singh

Rae Bareilly: The BJP's Rae Bareilly candidate Dinesh Pratap Singh Thursday said the hard work by him and party workers over the past months would bring down the Gandhi bastion. The Member of Legislative Council in Uttar Pradesh spoke to PTI Videos shortly after being nominated as the party candidate for the seat, represented by Congress leader Sonia Gandhi since 2004. Singh, who joined the BJP in 2018 and contested against Sonia Gandhi in 2019, indicated that he and party workers in Raebareilly have prepared for the contest over the last six months. The hard work put in by them would "bring down any bastion", he said. Singh said that the region had produced several seers, and claimed that the "fake Gandhis" had buried the grand history of the region and "put their name" on it. His priority, Singh said, was to take Raebareilly's history to "new heights". Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath congratulated him after the BJP's announcement. **PTI**

People in Dalit bastis want basic necessities, dignity

Hathras/Firozabad: In the rural expanse of western Uttar Pradesh's Hathras and Firozabad, where the pastoral beauty belies deep-seated challenges, those living in Dalit colonies want basic necessities and dignity and freedom from filth and sewage. Several villages this PTI reporter visited had a Dalit colony separately and these villages had debilitating homes and sanitation issues. In these villages, the realities of sanitation and poverty shape the narratives of women like Aarti Devi and Maya, whose voices echo the aspirations and frustrations of their communities. In Hathras's Pilakhana, the air is heavy with the stench of stagnant water that surrounds modest homes, many of which are precariously perched in disrepair. For Aarti Devi, a Dalit woman whose days are consumed by cleaning the households of so-called upper caste people, her

own living conditions are in stark contrast with the cleanliness she strives to achieve elsewhere. "Our houses are swallowed by filth and sewage. We clean the homes of others, but our own lives are submerged in dirt. Where is swachh (cleanliness) here," asked Devi, apparently referring to the government's Swachh Bharat campaign. She manages to earn only about Rs 3,000 every month by working in four households and is the sole breadwinner in her family. For her, elections are an opportunity to at least be vocal about her struggles and have some power. "At least party workers come and look at our state and at times our problems are also addressed right before the polls so we look forward to the assembly and Lok Sabha polls," she said. She is indecisive of whom to vote. "We gave this government absolute power - in Centre

and in state - but still nothing beneficial came our way and the situation has further only worsened," she said. Devi's story resonates across the Dalit enclaves in Hathras and Firozabad, where women like Pushpa from Hathras's Akrahad find themselves caught in a cycle of poverty exacerbated by societal barriers. "We barely earn enough to feed our children but even then we vote as our husbands say. Despite this being a SC reserved constituency we continue to be deprived," she said. In the villages, the promise of government schemes like the PM Awas Yojna remains unfulfilled for many. Half-built houses stand as monuments to unmet expectations, awaiting the next installment that never arrives. Maya from Hathras's Jafrabad reflects on this with a sense of yearning for change. "We want more than empty promises. We need leaders who see us, who understand our struggles," she said. **PTI**

AAP leaders may canvass for SP, Cong in UP

PRABHA SHANKER ■ LUCKNOW

The Aam Aadmi Party, which is embroiled in a controversy over the alleged excise policy scam with some of its top leaders languishing in jail following an Enforcement Directorate probe, is firing salvos from the side of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) on the Bharatiya Janata Party in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. Some ministers of the Delhi government and AAP's UP in-charge Sanjay Singh are likely to address rallies in UP to garner support for INDIA bloc partners Congress and Samajwadi Party. AAP is not contesting the Lok Sabha elections from UP this time. This is the second consecutive time when AAP has decided to remain away from jumping into the poll ring in UP after 2014 when party's founder and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal contested unsuccessfully from the Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency where he faced Prime

Minister Narendra Modi. Then Arvind Kejriwal, who was dubbed as parachute candidate by the vernacular newspapers and the BJP functionaries, had succeeded in catching the fancy of the voters who were looking for a leader who was different from the existing leaders of the opposition and had a spark in him. Despite his criticism of being a leader contesting election against Prime Minister Modi to gain popularity, Kejriwal secured over two lakh votes due to his so-called charisma and for being a dis-senter. Then the political pundits had written reams on AAP and Kejriwal, terming him a politician who was alternative to many of the existing faces in the Indian political spectrum. In view of the importance of UP in Lok Sabha elections and in the formation of government at the Centre, the AAP made several desperate attempts to carve a niche for itself among the voters in the state. In the days of Ram temple construction, AAP had raised the issue of alleged land scam and

raised fingers on the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra trust functionaries. Also, Kejriwal visited Ayodhya and had taken out a march there to oppose the BJP functionaries and raise issues concerning the people. AAP had contested the UP assembly elections in 2022 and fielded candidates from 380 seats but did not get any success. None of its candidates was elected. The exposure to the 2022 assembly elections, however, helped AAP in expanding its party organisation to booth levels across UP and it gained political mileage from it in the local bodies elections in 2023 by winning seats of chairpersons of nagar palika in Rampur, Bijnor and Aligarh. In the contest for municipal corporation it secured eight seats while in nagar palika polls 30 corporators of AAP won the election and 61 nagar panchayat members of the party were also elected. But the party leadership failed to further expand its horizons after this grand success. The Party insiders said the AP lead-

ers and workers at state level lost their morale after prominent leaders of the party, including Kejriwal, were arrested one after one while party's UP in-charge Sanjay Singh was also arrested later in the alleged excise policy scam. Singh is out of bail at present. "Now the party leadership is focusing on ensuring victory of INDIA bloc candidates while using its vote base in their favour and throwing their workforce behind the INDIA bloc candidates," they said. They say the AAP succeeded in carving out a separate place for itself among the voters in UP by constantly flaying the ruling dispensation, particularly the BJP, and showcasing itself as a strong alternative to the political parties which are fighting the saffron surge in UP. However, the AAP suffered a series of setbacks as the ED probe advanced in the excise policy scam and its leaders, including Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia and party's UP in-charge Sanjay Singh were sent to jail. The AAP organisation could not

chalk out a strategy to contest the Lok Sabha elections in 2024. "AAP had contested the Lok Sabha elections in 2014 when Kejriwal was fielded against Prime Minister Modi in Varanasi on an experimental basis. We have no plans to foray into the Lok Sabha elections in UP as we are still a developing party," a leader of AAP said. The AAP leader said the party does not have enough infrastructure and organisational units in UP to contest the general election. "Contesting the general election needs a lot of workforce, booth-level organisation and a leader of mass appeal. Though the AAP has a popular face in the form of Kejriwal, it lacks other requirements and so the party did not field any of its candidates. Our leader Sanjay Singh is addressing public meetings in support of INDIA bloc candidates and asking party supporters to vote for them. In future some ministers in Delhi government may also address public meetings in UP and in other states," he said.

Vice-Chief of Army Staff visits IIT-K

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

In a significant development aimed at forging strategic partnerships, Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi, PVSM, AVSM, Vice Chief of Army Staff (VCOAS), accompanied by ADG Major General CS Mann and other high-ranking army officers, visited the Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT Kanpur) on Thursday.

The distinguished guests were welcomed by Prof Manindra Agrawal, Director of IIT Kanpur, and Prof Kantesh Balani, Faculty in charge, Army Cell, IIT Kanpur.

The visit facilitated in-depth discussions between the army officials and IIT Kanpur's faculty members specialising in defence-related areas, focusing on exploring potential collaborations to develop niche technology solutions for the Indian Army. The institute's professors showcased IIT Kanpur's research capabilities by providing an overview of the ongoing defence projects at the institute.



IIT-K Director Prof Manindra Agrawal felicitating Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi, Vice-Chief of Army Staff.

Sanjay Tandon, Director of the DRDO Industry Academia Centre of Excellence at IIT Kanpur, elaborated on the CoE's mandate to establish an ecosystem for focused research

and collaboration in advanced technology areas for defence and security.

This highlighted the institute's commitment to encouraging industry-academia part-

nerships in strategic domains. The faculty members showcased various innovative technologies to the Army officers, including a substation inspection robot, a generator for precision guidance kits, high-altitude logistics and eVTOL solutions, Quadraped and Rotary Robots, and Kamikaze drones. Three defence-technology startups incubated at IIT Kanpur also presented outstanding innovations, stressing the institute's role as a hub for entrepreneurship and technology transfer. The Indian Army team also visited the C3i Hub and FlexE Center at IIT Kanpur. This visit reinforced IIT Kanpur's position as a premier institution actively contributing to the nation's defence and security efforts through advanced research and development.

OBSERVED: Hundreds of workers of different establishments, affiliated to INDWE/INTUC, other unorganised sectors and associations attached to all central

organisations observed the International Labour Day (May Day) at INTUC's national headquarters in Cantonment here on Wednesday. They paid homage to martyrs who sacrificed their lives during the Chicago movement launched to reduce working hours of labourers. National secretary, INTUC, PS Bajpai addressing the gathering said privatisation leads to exploitation of workers. National senior secretary HN Tewari paid homage to martyrs. The proceedings were conducted by INTUC's local unit president Sidhnath Tewari. Others who spoke on the occasion were INTUC leader Rajesh Shukla, Lallan Awasthi, Vinod Tewari, GD Sharma, Rakesh Singh, Ashutosh Tewari, Shailendra Pandey, Dinesh Sachan, Devendra Gautam, Vipin Kumar, Prem Chandra, Mahendra Nath, Ankit Kumar, Surendra Kumar, Ratan Kumar, Umesh Shukla, Ram Sanwar Singh, Kapil Muni, Triloki Vyas and Sarvesh Bhaduria.

Girl found hanging

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A teenaged girl was found hanging under mysterious circumstances in a room of her house under Safipur Kotwali police station area of Unnao on Thursday afternoon. Her kin took her to the community health centre (CHC) where she was declared dead by the doctors. The police sent the body for autopsy. Inspector Shyam Narain Singh said further action in the matter would be initiated on the basis of the autopsy report.

NCP faction announces support to Ajai Rai

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad Pawar faction) has announced its support to Congress (INC) candidate Ajai Rai, who will be a candidate of INDIA Bloc for Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency. District president of this NCP faction Ravidutt Mishra has issued a letter of support to Ajai Rai as per the instructions of the top unit of the party and by handing it over to Ajai Rai here on Thursday. Ajai Rai and Varanasi district and city

Congress committees have expressed gratitude for this support and announcement.

District chief of Sharad Pawar faction of NCP Ravidutt Mishra, in the letter of support while welcoming the candidature of Ajai Rai as the Lok Sabha candidate from Varanasi, has said that Rai is always known for his struggles for the grassroots problems and concerns of the people in Banaras. Therefore, he added that we want that Ajai Rai, who is capable in the decisive match, should emerge victorious.

Voter awareness drive launched

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Department of Posts has taken up the responsibility of making voters aware about voting in the Lok Sabha elections under the ongoing voter awareness campaign under the 'SVEEP Programme' of the Election Commission of India. Postmaster General (PMG) of Varanasi Region Krishna Kumar Yadav started this campaign at Varanasi Cantt Head Post Office here on Thursday.

He said that a large number of public reaches the post offices daily for their work, so the post offices are the right place for voter awareness. This massive campaign will run through a total of 1,729 post offices in Varanasi, Bhadohi, Chandauli, Jaunpur, Ghazipur

and Ballia districts under Varanasi region. On the occasion, Yadav appealed to the people to ensure their participation in the great festival of democracy. He said that the people are being made aware by stamping 'Chunav ka Parv, Desh ka Garv' and Varanasi Lok Sabha Election Voting date June 1, 2024 on the mails delivered through post offices, whereas, postmen will also motivate to the people to use their voting rights to strengthen democracy in the country along with delivery of mails. The PMG further said that the postal employees will also motivate customers coming to the post offices for various works like speed post and registry booking, opening of POSB and IPPB accounts, Aadhaar enrollment and updation etc to

cast their vote. Besides, he said that the voters will also be motivated to vote through letters reaching the homes of lakhs of people.

He administered the voters' oath to all the postal employees present and also requested all Postal department employees to play an active role in the door-to-door voter awareness campaign.

On the occasion, Superintendent of Post Offices Vinay Kumar, Assistant Director Brijesh Sharma, assistant superintendents RK Chauhan, Indrajit, inspectors Dilip Kumar, Aniket Ranjan, AAO Santoshi Rai, Postmaster Cantt HO Gopal Dubey, Ajita, Rahul Verma, Shriprakash Gupta, Manish Kumar, Anand Pradhan and many officials were also present.

Emphasis on increasing voting percentage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

At a meeting of community SVEEP ambassadors/ icons held under the chairmanship of District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam here on Thursday, the participants talked about running a voter awareness campaign to achieve maximum voting percentage in the upcoming Lok Sabha General Election-2024. Representatives of more than 20 communities were present in the meeting. In the meeting, it was decided to increase the voting percentage from 59 per cent recorded in the last elections to 70 per cent.

In the meeting, the DM asked the people present from different communities about their opinions to increase voting. He said that the administration has been making continuous efforts for the last six months to increase voting and in this regard, arrangements have been made at the polling stations for cold drinking water, pandal for shade, separate lines for disabled, pregnant and elderly voters and wheelchairs etc. He appealed to the participants to motivate everyone to increase the voting percentage.

According to him, voters above 85 years of age after filling Form 12D will get the facility of home voting and efforts are being made continuously through various mediums like tag line on gas cylin-



DEO S Rajalingam inspecting UP College campus in Varanasi on Wednesday.

ders, cinema hall tickets, human chains, car and scooty rallies etc for voting on June 1. The DM also appealed to the present group to create awareness for increasing voting through their cultural programmes and the restaurants and hotels can talk about giving discounts. The DM also stressed on creating awareness through various programmes among about 31,000 disabled people and a total of 117 trans-genders registered in the district. He also said that an awareness campaign should be carried out from about 1,200 registered boats and senior citizens should also continuously talk about voting during morning walks.

The members of Street Vendors' Association informed that they will put up banners at their shops and talk about 'pahle madaan, phir jalpaan' (first voting, then refreshments). The women's group also talked about raising awareness through various activities.

Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himamshu Nagpal told the representatives of various communities, including street vendors, farmers, teachers, erickshaw pullers, boatmen, fishermen, animal rearers, doctors etc to continuously make efforts to increase the vote percentage in their community and motivated to achieve 100 per cent voting. He also asked the participants to down-

load the Voter Help Line App so that they can get all the information related to voting. He said that it is our responsibility to motivate all the voters living outside to come here and vote and to save Banaras as in the various phases of Lok Sabha elections held earlier, a continuous decline in the voting percentage was seen in comparison to 2019.

At the end of the programme, the district magistrate administered the oath to encourage everyone to vote and certificates were distributed to the people present as representatives of different communities, including star player Padma Shri Pandit Shivnath Mishra, Dhrupad singer Padma Shri Prof Ritwik Sanyal, Prof Revati Sakalkar and others. The meeting was conducted by Regional Cultural Officer Subhash Yadav. It was also attended by Additional District Magistrate (ADM/Administration) Vipin Kumar, Additional Municipal Commissioner Dushyant Maurya and various election related officials and representatives of different communities.

Meanwhile DM/District Election Officer (DM/DEO) S Rajalingam inspected the UP College campus from where polling parties will be sent for Shivpur and Varanasi Cantt assembly constituencies for

voting of Lok Sabha election. Apart from this, polling parties will leave from Jagatpur Post Graduate College and Jagatpur Inter College Jagatpur Varanasi for Rohania and Sewapuri, from Kashi Krishak Inter College at Harhua for Ajgara and from the Police Lines for Varanasi North and Varanasi South. Election materials and EVMs will be distributed to the polling parties at the said places, after which they will proceed to the polling centres in vehicles. During his inspection on Wednesday, the DEO gave directions to the officers in charge for systematic distribution of materials, number-wise parking of buses and installation of signages giving information about their location. Apart from this, in view of the extreme heat, instructions were given to pay special attention for drinking water, arrangement of shade by setting up tents, seating arrangements etc. The DEO also attended the first training session of presiding and first polling officers at UP College and answered questions about EVM training etc. He also took other information. During the visit, Additional Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) S Channappa, Chief Development Officer Himamshu Nagpal, ADM (Administration) and others were also present.

Pandey assumes charge as DCM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Ramesh Pandey assumed charge as Divisional Commercial Manager (DCM) of Varanasi Division of North Eastern Railway (NER) on Wednesday.

Before this, he was working as Assistant Vigilance Officer in Railway Board, New Delhi from 2022. Born in 1970 in Chandauli, Pandey has obtained the degree of Master of Business Management after BSc and MSc (Mathematics). He also obtained Transport

Management diploma from Sikkim University. Apart from this, Ramesh Pandey is an IRTS officer who has obtained the degree of BE and MA Economics and his first appointment was in February 2002 on the post of Assistant Transport Manager (Security), NER Gorakhpur.

He has seven years of experience in catching vigilance related cases and preventing corruption while holding important posts like Inspector of Police in Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Anti Corruption Bureau (ACB), Lucknow. He got experience of efficiently discharging the responsibilities of ATM (Security) in North Eastern Railway/Gorakhpur for six years.

One killed in mishap

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A man was killed when vehicle of BJP candidate Devendra Singh Bhole and Block Pramukh Chaubepur's convoy collided with each other in Tikra village of Bithoor police station area on Thursday morning. The police rushed to the spot and carried out a probe. The identity of the deceased could not be ascertained. The incident took place when BJP candidate from Akbarpur was returning from a meeting. Suddenly, the convoy of Chaubepur's Block Pramukh suddenly arrived from the opposite direction in Tikra village. The vehicles of convoy of both the leaders collided head on and this also led to killing of the man.

HCBA executive members sworn in

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The swearing-in ceremony of the newly elected 28-member executive of Allahabad High Court Bar Association (HCBA) was held on Thursday. Chief Electoral Officer BM Zaidi and senior advocate TP Singh administered the oath to the newly-elected officials in the library hall of the High Court. The office-bearers who took charge included newly elected President Anil Tiwari, General Secretary Vikrant Pandey, Senior Vice-President Rajesh Khare, Vice President Agnihotri Kumar Tripathi, Akhilesh Kumar Mishra, Subhash Chandra Yadav, Neeraj Tripathi, Neelam Shukla, Joint Secretary Administration Sumit Srivastava, Joint Secretary (Mahila) Anchal Ojha, Joint Secretary Library Abhijeet Pandey and Joint Secretary



Press Puneet Shukla. A large number of advocates, including outgoing President of the Bar Ashok Singh and Secretary Nitin Sharma, were present.

RED CARDS: After speeding up of action in Goonda Act cases in the Commissionerate Court Prayagraj, now red cards have started being issued in view of the Lok Sabha elections. In order to ensure that the elections are held in a peaceful manner and those accused under the Goonda Act are not able to conspire to create trou-

ble, red cards are being issued to them by the Commissionerate. A total of 2,100 red cards are to be issued. In this, 1,150 red cards were given to the accused under the Goonda Act.

INSPECTED: Chief Engineer and Head of Public Works Department (PWD), Vinod Kumar Srivastava, inspected the Railway Over Bridge (ROB) built on Leader Road near the High Court Pani Tanki on Thursday. The chief engineer, who arrived with more than a dozen offi-

cials, inspected the bridge for about an hour and took stock of it. The chief engineer said the first priority of the department is the safety of people's lives. He said that as far as the demolition of the ROB is concerned, there is no plan to do so before Mahakumbh. The department is now exploring the possibility of repairing the bridge and the inspection is being done for this purpose.

BODY FOUND: The body of a 43-year-old woman was found hanging in the room in the Muthiganj area of the city here on Thursday. The family members became worried when the door of the room did not open for a long time in the morning. When they peeked into the room, they saw that the body hanging from the noose. The police reached the spot with forensic team. The body was brought down and sent for the post-mortem.

Take precaution in summer, CMO appeals to people

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary appealed to the people to take proper precautions during heat wave. "Summer brings with it many types of diseases. Amidst the heat, it also affects the body's immunity. Along with digestive and skin related problems, there is also a risk of seasonal flu and infection. Even the number of patients suffering from various diseases in hospitals has started increasing. Then the responsibility of the health department increases even more," he said.

The CMO said that due to lack of water and salt in the

body, blood circulation gets hampered due to which the problem of heat stroke occurs. "The body has sufficient capacity to tolerate temperature fluctuations, but after a certain limit, when exposed to excessive heat, the body is unable to balance itself according to the environment and the problem of heat stroke occurs. This can affect the brain and kidneys. Blood circulation in the body may be affected. There may be eye irritation. There may be heart related problems. There may be muscle problems," Dr Chaudhary said.

According to him, in the summer season, diseases like heat stroke, diarrhoea, vomiting, jaundice, typhoid, viral

fever, redness of eyes, skin irritation etc occur. "It has adverse effects on the body which can sometimes prove fatal," he said and added that to avoid physical difficulties due to the effects of hot winds or heat waves, an appeal has been made to the people in the public interest that it can be avoided by adopting a little precaution. The CMO said that if any person notices main symptoms of prickly heat, cramps, weakness in the body, dizziness, severe headache, nausea, sometimes fainting, then he/she should immediately go to the nearest hospital and health centre and get treatment after consulting doctors and experts there.

He said that people should drink water before leaving the house and should keep drinking water at regular intervals. Due to this, there is no shortage of water in the body. "Wear light, loose fitting cotton clothes, so that air reaches the body and keeps the body cool by absorbing sweat. Apart from using pure and fresh food, food left after three hours of preparation should not be used. Do not consume food items kept open in the market. Leave the house only after covering the entire body and also use sunglasses. Apart from this, avoid consuming alcohol, tea, coffee, carbonated soft drinks etc as it dehydrates the body," Dr Chaudhary added.

38 employees felicitated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ



To mark the occasion of International Labour Day, Shikha Goyal, president of North Central Railway Women Welfare Organisation (NCRW-WO), Headquarters, Prayagraj, felicitated the 38 dedicated and hardworking Group-D Railway employees of the North Central Railway headquarters, who have rendered 20 years or more service and also supported in the work of the organisation from time to time. On the occa-

sion, dentist Dr Manju Lata Handu informed the gathering about the oral care health issues so that people can keep their teeth, gums and mouth healthy. Dietitian Dr. Aparna Saxena briefed people about different types of dietary habits. Organisation secretary Nupur Agarwal, Meena Mathur, Madhuri Singh, Mithlesh Kumari, Kalpana Agarwal, Renu Ponia, Rita Sinha, Supriya Sinha, Alka Garg, Rajeni Chandrayan along with its other members were present.

Many injured as bus collides with tanker

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Around a dozen persons were injured when a speeding roadways bus going towards Kannauj from Kanpur collided with a stationary water tanker near the divider on Kanpur-Aligarh highway under Bilhaar police station area on Thursday. The police sent all the injured to hospital. The bus rammed into the tanker when it was standing there to water the trees. Of the 40 passengers in the bus, around a dozen, including Junaid of Chhibramau, his wife Kushnuma and a one-year old child, Ramnath of Sidhari Itiya, Gonda and his son were injured. The police sent some of the injured to Bilhaar CHC and some to Kannauj district hospital. Besides, others with minor injury were sent home



after first aid. Due to alertness of the bus conductor, a big mishap was averted.

CHAMPIONSHIP: On World Athletics Day, the 10th Kanpur District Athletic Championship would be organised here at the Christ Church College ground on May 7 and 8. Secretary, Kanpur Athletics Association, Dr Devesh Dubey said the World Athletics Day is observed on May 7 every year. It is observed as World Athletics Week and Fortnight all over the world from May 1 to 15.

Priya Patel brings laurels

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Priya Patel of BLW Cricket Academy has been selected in the National Cricket Academy U-15 camp being organised by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) in Bengaluru from April 29 to May 23. Receiving training in BLW, Priya Patel was selected for the UP team in the current season and was made the vice-captain. She is also a wicket keeper and middle order batsman. She learns the nuances of cricket under the guidance of coach Anil Rai while working hard at the BLW Stadium. On her selection, BLW GM Sushil Kumar Srivastava, BLW Sports Association General Secretary and CME (Production) Sunil Kumar, Cricket Secretary and Deputy Chief/Design Engineer SK Singh and senior sports officer B Prasad expressed happiness.

IFFCO Nano Zinc, Nano Copper (liquid) notified by government

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

IFFCO Nano Zinc (Liquid) and IFFCO Nano Copper (Liquid), prepared with IFFCO's nano technology have been notified by the Government of India under the Fertiliser Control Order (FCO).

Already Nano Urea and Nano Urea Plus have been notified. These products have been notified for three years, making four liquid fertiliser products of IFFCO available to the farmers. Zinc and copper are fertilizers falling in the category of micronutrients. Adding zinc to crops not only increases the nutritional value of the crop but also increases crop yield, resistance of the crop to environmental threats like drought and disease.



Increase in yield increases the income of farmers. Copper activates certain enzymes in plants, it is also essential in the process of photosynthesis, is essential in plant respiration and assists in plant metabolism of carbohydrates and proteins. This product is in the interest of farmers, soil and plants. This

information was given by Senior Executive Director (Unit Head) Sanjay Kudesia. IFFCO Officers Association President Anurag Tiwari and General Secretary Swayam Prakash, IFFCO Employees' Union President Pankaj Pandey and General Secretary Vinay Kumar Yadav expressed their happiness.

India slams US body religious freedom report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday slammed the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and said it continues to publish its propaganda on the country "masquerading" as part of an annual report.

In a sharp reaction to the USCIRF's latest report that has criticised India for alleged violations of religious freedom, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the organisation is known to be a "biased" entity with a political agenda.

"The US Commission on International Religious Freedom is known as a biased organisation with a political agenda. They continue to publish their propaganda on India masquerading as part of an annual report," Jaiswal said. "We really have no expectation that the USCIRF will even



seek to understand India's diverse, pluralistic and democratic ethos," he added. "Their efforts to interfere in the largest electoral exercise of the world will never succeed," Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing. In its latest annual report, the USCIRF has criticised India for alleged violations of religious freedom as well as on certain other issues. New Delhi's response came after the USCIRF released its 2024 annual report and recommended designating 17 countries, including India, as Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs), for "engaging in or tolerating particularly

severe violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief". The USCIRF report alleged that the government imposed "discriminatory nationalist policies"; "perpetuated hateful rhetoric" and "failed to address communal violence" among minority communities. The report also cited various instances, including Manipur violence, Haryana violence, and several Kashmiri leaders and separatists being detained when the Supreme Court, last year, upheld the government's 2019 decision to scrap Article 370 that granted special status to the then state of Jammu and Kashmir.

India protests against China's illegal construction in Shaksgam Valley

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has lodged a strong protest with China for carrying out construction activities in the Shaksgam valley, in an "illegal" attempt to alter the situation on the ground.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on Thursday the Shaksgam valley is a part of India and New Delhi never accepted the so-called China-Pakistan boundary pact of 1963 through which Islamabad "unlawfully" attempted to cede the area to Beijing. The Shaksgam valley is a strategically key region that is part of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

"We have consistently conveyed our rejection of the same. We have registered our protest with the Chinese side against illegal attempts to alter facts on the ground," Jaiswal said at his weekly media brief-

ing. "We further reserve the right to take necessary measures to safeguard our interests," he said.

The terse response came in the wake of China building roads in the PoK near Siachen. The new road is part of the Chinese efforts to enhance infrastructure development in occupied Kashmir north of Siachen. The road lies in Shaksgam Valley.

Satellite pictures show the road in Shaksgam Valley, a part of Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK) ceded to China in 1963, branches out from an extension of Highway G219 in China's Xinjiang and disappears into mountains at a place (coordinate: 36.114783°, 76.671051°) approximately 50 km north of India's northernmost point, Indira Col in Siachen Glacier. Last year, India also lodged strong diplomatic protests with Beijing for showing Aksai Chin plateau as its official territory.

No political clearance sought or issued: MEA on Prajwal trip

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Amid an escalating political row over alleged sexual harassment of several women by JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna who is not in the country, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Thursday said Revanna travelled to Germany on a diplomatic passport and he did not seek political clearance for the trip.

On Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's demand for revocation of Revanna's diplomatic passport, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said such action can be taken only on the directions of a court.

Revanna, the grandson of former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, is said to have left India on April 27, a day after voting for the Lok Sabha elections took place in his Hassan constituency.

The Janata Dal (Secular) has already suspended the Hassan MP from the party. "No political clearance was either sought

from or issued by MEA in respect of the travel of the said MP to Germany," Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing while replying to a volley of questions on the MP's reported travel to Germany.

"Obviously, no visa note was issued either. No visa is required for diplomatic passport holders to travel to Germany. The Ministry has not issued visa note for any other country," the MEA spokesperson said.

On Wednesday, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah urged the prime minister to take swift action to cancel the diplomatic passport of Revanna

that the JD(S) leader used to travel abroad.

Asked about whether the MEA may consider revocation of his passport in view of the allegations of sexual harassment against him, Jaiswal did not give a direct reply.

"As regards the possible revocation of the passport of any individual, I would refer you to the relevant provisions of the Passport Act 1967. A direction should come from a court for revocation of passport. We are not in receipt of any directions from any court in this regard," he said.

Jaiswal said Revanna travelled to Germany on a diplomatic passport and that he did not seek any political clearance for the trip.

The MEA spokesperson noted that parliamentarians are entitled to have diplomatic passports.

"The matter is being investigated and we will be doing whatever is needed to be done," he said in reply to another question.

India, Indonesia to review bilateral defence ties during meet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Indonesia will review the entire spectrum of their bilateral defence ties here on Friday during the seventh Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC) meeting, Defence Ministry said here on Thursday.

Giving details, officials said the meeting will be co-chaired by Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane and Secretary General of Ministry of Defence, Indonesia Air Marshal (Retired) Donny Ermawan Taufanto. Both sides will exchange views on regional and global issues of shared interest.

The India-Indonesia friendship, which was elevated to



the level of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2018, has widened the scope of bilateral relations to allow for new collaboration in the realm of defence industry,

science and technology. The defence relations form a significant pillar to this growing partnership. Defence engagements between the two nations have

diversified to include wide-ranging contacts between the services, military-to-military exchanges, high-level visits, capacity building and training programmes, cooperation in UN Peace Keeping, ship visits and bilateral exercises. The defence cooperation agreement signed in 2001 between India and Indonesia stipulated the establishment of the JDCC to explore and identify potential areas of cooperation, matters of common interest, initiate, coordinate, monitor and control the approved cooperative activities.

The Secretary General, who is on a visit to India from May 02-04, will also undertake discussions with Indian defence industries in New Delhi and Pune.

Admiral Swaminathan takes charge as Navy Vice Chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan on Wednesday assumed charge as Vice Chief of Navy here. He was commissioned into the Indian Navy in July 1987 and is a specialist in Communication and Electronic Warfare, navy said here. He is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Khadakvasla; the Joint Services Command and Staff College, Shrivenham, United Kingdom; the College of Naval Warfare, Karanja; and the United States Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, USA.

Swaminathan's educational qualifications include a BSc degree from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; MSc in



Telecommunications from Cochin University of Science and Technology, Kochi; MA in Defence Studies from King's College, London; MPhil in Strategic Studies from Mumbai University; and PhD in International Studies from Mumbai University. In another appointment, Air

Marshal Hardeep Bains on Wednesday assumed charge as 36th Commandant of the prestigious National Defence College here. He took over from Lt General S S Dahiya. Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor assumed the appointment of Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief (AOC-in-C) Training

Command (TC) on Monday. Air Marshal N Kapoor was commissioned into the Fighter stream of the Indian Air Force on 06 December 1986. He is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Defence Services Staff College and National Defence College. A Qualified Flying Instructor and a Fighter Combat Leader, he has more than 3400 hours of flying experience.

During his illustrious career, the Air Marshal has held numerous field and staff appointments. His operational tenures include being the Commanding Officer of a fighter squadron in the Central Sector, Station Commander of a flying base in the Western Sector and Air Officer Commanding of a premier air base.

Men at risk of premature death while women grapple with poor health in life: Study



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

While men face a higher risk of premature death, women tend to spend more of their lifetime grappling with poor health, according to a recent global study published in Lancet Public Health. The findings, drawn from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021, highlight stark differences in the distribution of illness and premature mortality between genders over the past three decades, shedding light on the diverse and evolving health needs of men and women across the globe.

Researchers analyzed data spanning from 1990 to 2021, examining the prevalence of various health conditions and events leading to premature death. Key findings reveal that musculoskeletal conditions, mental health issues, and headache disorders, though non-fatal, are more prevalent among women, leading to prolonged periods of ill health. This is compounded by women's longer life expectancy, resulting in higher levels of illness and disability throughout their lives.

Furthermore, the study highlights specific conditions like ischaemic heart disease, lung cancer, and chronic kidney disease, where sex differences impact men at younger ages and exacerbate over time. Covid-19, the dominant health

concern in 2021, affected significantly more men than women, further emphasizing the importance of understanding and addressing these disparities. The study revealed that men lost 45 percent more life years from Covid-19 compared to women. This disparity underscores the need for targeted interventions to address the specific health challenges faced by each gender. One notable finding was the wide gap in health loss related to low back pain, which disproportionately disadvantages women, particularly in regions such as South Asia and Central Europe. The research highlighted that these health differences manifest from adolescence and persist throughout life, with women experiencing higher levels of illness and disability due to their longer life expectancy.

The authors emphasized the importance of implementing "concerted, sex- and gender-informed strategies" to promote equitable health outcomes. They called for enhanced reporting of sex and gender data to inform policy decisions and improve health interventions. Senior author Luisa Sorio Flor of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington stressed the timeliness of the study, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic's profound impact on health outcomes.

Every Indian is votebank of Congress, claims Kharge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday said when the elections are over, people will only remember him as the PM who indulged in "divisive and communal speeches filled with lies" to avoid an inevitable defeat.

Noting that the PM in his letter to NDA candidates had claimed that reservation will be taken away from SC, ST and OBC and given to the Congress "votebank", Kharge said, "Our votebank is every Indian — the poor, the marginalised, the women, the aspirational youth, the labour class, the Dalits and the Adivasis." In a letter to the prime minister, Kharge urged Modi to seek votes on the performance of his government over the last ten years instead of indulging in "hate speeches". The Congress president's remarks comes days after Modi levelled various charges against his party in his letter to NDA candidates after the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls.

Prime Minister Modi asked the BJP-led NDA candidates in



the Lok Sabha polls to spread awareness among voters about the Congress's intention to snatch "reservation from SC, ST and OBC communities and give it away to their vote bank". In a personal letter written to them, Modi also accused the Congress and its allies of having divisive and discriminatory motives, even though reservation on the basis of religion is unconstitutional. "I saw the letter written by you to all the NDA candidates about what they need to communicate to the voters. From the tone and content of the letter it seems that there is a lot of desperation and worry in you which is leading you to use language that does not suit the

office of the prime minister," Kharge said in the letter. Kharge claimed the prime minister was not interested in talking about the ever widening inequality, unemployment and unprecedented price rise. "You are not interested in talking about the increasing atrocities on women by your leaders," he said in his letter to Modi.

"It is better as the prime minister if you seek votes on the performance of your government over the last ten years instead of indulging in hate speeches. The Congress Party would like to challenge you or anyone you depute to debate with us on our manifesto and the points you have made," he said.

Rahul accuses Modi Government of snatching quota from Dalits, tribals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday accused the Modi Government of "clandestinely snatching away" reservation from Dalits, tribals and backward classes by "blindly" implementing privatisation, and said his party guarantees strengthening the public sector enterprises and open the doors for employment.

In a post in Hindi on X, Rahul Gandhi said the mantra of Narendra Modi's campaign to remove reservation is -- 'na rahega baans, na bajegi bansuri', meaning neither there will be government jobs nor any reservation will be available.

"The BJP government is clandestinely snatching away reservation from Dalits, tribals and backward classes by eliminating government jobs through 'blind privatisation', the former Congress chief said.

In 2013, there were 14 lakh permanent posts in the public sector, which by 2023 stood at 8.4 lakh, he said.

"By ruining top PSU's like BSNL, SAIL, BHEL etc., nearly 6 lakh permanent jobs



were eliminated from the public sector alone — these are the very posts which would have given the benefit of reservation," Rahul Gandhi said. There is no count of the jobs that are being eliminated through the back door in institutions such as railways by giving government work on contract, he claimed. "The 'privatisation' of the

Modi model is a plunder of the country's resources, through which the reservation of the deprived is being snatched away," he alleged.

The Congress guarantees that it will strengthen the public sector enterprises and open the doors for employment for every section of the society by filling 30 lakh vacant government posts, Rahul Gandhi said.

Women sarpanchs set to shine on global stage at UN

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Supriya Das Datta, Sabhadhipati of Sepahijala Zilla Parishad in Tripura, utilises her Diploma in Pharmacy to champion women's participation in decision-making and advocate for essential childcare facilities while Kunuku Hema Kumari, Sarpanch of Peckeru Gram Panchayat in West Godavari, Andhra Pradesh, leverages her Master's Degree in Technology to bridge access to vital healthcare services through organising medical camps. Likewise, Neeru Yadav, Sarpanch of Lambi Aheer Gram Panchayat in Jhunjhunu,

Rajasthan also known as 'Hockey wali Sarpanch' is armed with a Master's in Mathematics and Education and spearheads initiatives for girls' education and environmental conservation. These three extraordinary women leaders, each blending their qualifications with unwavering dedication to community betterment, are set to shine on the global stage on May 3, 2024 at an event at the UN Headquarters in New York, showcasing their pivotal role in driving gender equality, poverty reduction, and inclusive development. The event titled "Localizing the



SDGs: Women in Local Governance in India Lead the Way," is being organized by the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations and the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) during the last day of the 57th Session of the

Commission on Population and Development (CPD57) which started from April 29th April, 2024. It symbolises India's groundbreaking approach to empowering Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in local government to advance Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs) given that India leads the world with 1.4 million women constituting 46 per cent of local elected officials.

Secretary Vivek Bharadwaj who will lead the delegation of these women from the grassroots level will discuss strategies derived from India's PRIs to foster gender equality and women's empowerment, focusing on poverty reduction and inclusive development.

Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, will inaugurate the event, emphasizing the crucial role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in advancing gender

equality. The insights shared by Supriya, Kunuku Hema Kumari, and Neeru Yadav will highlight the transformative impact of women's leadership in enabling inclusive development and promoting women and girl-friendly governance. If Supriya will dwell on how she has been active in promoting child-care facilities to create a conducive work environment for women, Kunuku Hema Kumari will talk about her initiatives in establishing linkages between frontline health workers and women and girls in need of health services through her public outreach efforts.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Voter inertia

Low turnout in early phases of Lok Sabha polls is a cause of concern for parties, EC and democracy

The lukewarm voter response in the first two phases of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections raises several questions about the underlying reasons for their apathy. Is the weather a deterrent, or is it disillusionment with governance, scepticism towards nominees/parties, or lack of faith in electoral procedures like Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)? Indeed, there is a pressing need to rekindle voter enthusiasm and participation in the electoral process. An initial speculation regarding low turnout often points to adverse weather conditions. The scorching heat can indeed discourage voters, especially in regions prone to extreme climates. However, while the weather may play a role, it is seldom the sole determinant of voter participation. A more substantial factor contributing to voter apathy lies in the prevailing disillusionment with governance. Citizens, disappointed by unfulfilled promises, rampant corruption and inefficient administration, often perceive their votes as inconsequential. This disenchantment can lead to voter inertia,



where individuals feel disengaged from the political process altogether. Also, scepticism towards parties and their nominees exacerbates voter apathy. In an era marked by populism, polarisation and political opportunism, many voters struggle to identify with candidates or parties that truly represent their interests. The prevalence of dynastic politics and candidate selection based on nepotism only deepens this distrust. The leaders' conduct leaves much to be desired. Many times, they switch sides making a mockery of the voters' decision. Sometimes even the party the voters voted for joins hands with its arch-rival. In such scenarios, voters have reasons to feel cheated.

As if all this were not enough, there are doubts about the efficacy of the electoral process itself. Many people are given to doubt the machinery employed, including the EVMs. The introduction of EVMs was hailed as a milestone in ensuring transparent and efficient elections. However, over time, scepticism and conspiracy theories surrounding EVMs have proliferated, eroding public trust in the process. Allegations of tampering, malfunctioning machines and lack of transparency in EVMs handling have sowed the seeds of doubt in the minds of voters. Their perceived vulnerability to hacking or manipulation, coupled with the absence of a paper trail for verification, has fuelled apprehensions about the sanctity of elections. In such an environment, restoring faith in electoral procedures becomes imperative to bolster voter confidence. The situation turned so grave that the matter was taken to the Supreme Court. On this front, introducing measures such as VVPATs alongside the EVMs can go a long way in rebuilding voters' trust. Indeed, it would take an effort by the Election Commission as well as the political class to instil a sense of confidence among people that their vote is sacrosanct. By demonstrating integrity and a genuine commitment to serving the public interest, political parties can rebuild the trust with for-now disillusioned voters.

PICTALK



People visit the seafront on a hot summer day, in Mumbai

Upholding the Fourth Estate in digital age



SANTOSH MATHEW

In an era marred by misinformation, censorship and threats to journalists, the celebration of press freedom assumes greater significance than ever before

Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a Government without newspapers, or newspapers without a Government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter - Thomas Jefferson

Every year on May 3rd, the world comes together to celebrate World Press Freedom Day, a day dedicated to honouring the fundamental principles of press freedom, defending the independence of the media and paying tribute to journalists who risk their lives to report the truth. In an era marked by misinformation, censorship and threats to journalists worldwide, this day holds more significance than ever. Press freedom is the cornerstone of democracy. It empowers citizens by providing them with access to diverse viewpoints and information, enabling them to make informed decisions. A free press serves as a watchdog, holding Governments and powerful entities accountable for their actions. It acts as a voice for the voiceless, bringing attention to social injustices and human rights violations.

Despite the crucial role they play, journalists around the world face numerous challenges in their pursuit of truth. They encounter threats, harassment and violence, both online and offline. Many journalists risk imprisonment or even death for daring to report on sensitive issues. Censorship, propaganda and attacks on press freedom have become increasingly prevalent, hindering the ability of journalists to fulfil their vital role in society. World Press Freedom Day. Since 1993, it has been observed globally to honour a declaration made by African journalists in Windhoek, Namibia, in 1991. It commemorates press freedom principles and acknowledges journalists' courage. UNESCO awards the Guillermo Cano Prize to those preserving press freedom. While technology has revolutionised the way information is disseminated, it has also presented new challenges for press freedom. Social media platforms have become powerful tools for



spreading information, but they have also been weaponised to spread misinformation and silence dissenting voices. Journalists must navigate through a digital landscape fraught with fake news and online harassment, often at great personal risk. India, home to one of the world's largest and most vibrant media landscapes, has faced scrutiny in recent years regarding its press freedom record. According to the World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), India's ranking has seen fluctuations. In the 2023 index, India was placed at 163 out of 180 countries, indicating significant challenges to press freedom within the country. "When asked to bend, the media crawled. And when asked to crawl, it cringed." This statement was made by Advani in the context of the Indian media's behaviour during the Emergency period (1975-1977), imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. During this time, press freedom faced severe restrictions, with journalists being arrested, newspapers censored and the Government exerting tight control over media outlets.



PRESS FREEDOM IS THE CORNERSTONE OF A DEMOCRACY. IT EMPOWERS CITIZENS BY PROVIDING THEM WITH ACCESS TO DIVERSE VIEWPOINTS AND INFORMATION, ENABLING THEM TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS

Advani's quote reflects his criticism of how certain sections of the media capitulated to Government pressure and failed to uphold journalistic integrity and independence. It suggests that instead of resisting unjust demands or censorship, some media outlets complied with the Government's wishes, even to the point of degradation. This quote serves as a reminder of the importance of a free and independent press in holding those in power accountable and safeguarding democracy. It highlights the need for journalists to remain vigilant in upholding the principles of press freedom, especially in times of political turmoil or authoritarian rule. British politician Edmund Burke is often credited with coining the term in the late 18th century, referring to the gallery of the House of Commons as the fourth estate, symbolising the press's influence on political affairs. The term "fifth estate" underscores the transformative role of social media in democratising access to information, enabling individuals to participate in public discourse and challenging established institutions and power structures. Social media platforms

empower users to share news, opinions and perspectives instantaneously, bypassing traditional gatekeepers of information. On World Press Freedom Day, we must reaffirm our commitment to defending press freedom and protecting journalists worldwide. Governments must uphold the principles of free speech and ensure the safety of journalists within their borders. Civil society plays a crucial role in advocating for press freedom and holding those who seek to suppress it accountable. Media organisations must continue to strive for independence, transparency and ethical journalism, even in the face of adversity. World Press Freedom Day is also a day to celebrate the courage and resilience of journalists who risk their lives to report the truth. It is a day to honour those who have faced persecution, imprisonment and even death for their commitment to upholding the principles of press freedom. Their dedication serves as a reminder of the invaluable role journalists play in safeguarding democracy and promoting transparency. (The writer is an associate professor, views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EMPOWERING VISUAL NARRATIVES

Madam — Apropos the news article, "A picture is worth a thousand words," published on May 1, this is my response. The depiction of sexual violence against women in the media often portrays them as helpless victims, reinforcing stigma and shame. Ankita Anand, a survivor herself, challenged this narrative by spearheading a campaign urging media outlets to rethink their imagery. Instead of portraying women as passive victims, she advocated for images that reflect their resilience and agency. Anand's efforts, along with initiatives like the image bank by the Hri Institute, mark a significant step in reshaping visual narratives around gender-based violence.

Through campaigns like "I Never Ask For It," survivors are reclaiming their stories, using mediums like textiles to challenge societal attitudes towards gender-based violence. These initiatives underscore the transformative power of imagery in shaping public perception and fostering empathy. Ultimately, the portrayal of sexual violence in the media should prioritise dignity and empowerment, amplifying the voices of survivors and challenging ingrained biases. It's a collective responsibility to ensure that visual narratives reflect the strength and resilience of those affected, rather than perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Rian Mehta | Chandigarh

CHINA'S SHADOW POLITICS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Why is the BJP avoiding China in campaigning?" published on May 1, this is my response. The discourse surrounding China in Indian politics is a delicate dance where words and actions are carefully measured. While the former Army Chief's blunt assessment of China as India's primary threat is refreshing, it also underscores the gravity of the situation. The recent revelations about the India-China confrontation shed light on systemic failures and diplomatic intricacies shaping bilateral relations.

Zara Khan | Mumbai

India's semiconductor mission



Apropos the news article, "Semicon ecosystem: A revolution in India," published on May 1, this is my response. The surge of semiconductor development in India marks a pivotal juncture in our technological evolution. As our reliance on technology deepens, so does the significance of these minuscule chips, which power everything from smartphones to space missions. India's strategic vision to foster a robust semiconductor ecosystem is commendable, as evidenced by ambitious projects and partnerships aimed at reducing import dependency and fostering innovation. Initiatives like the India Semiconductor Mission and skill development programmes underscore a concerted effort to nurture indigenous talent and infrastructure. Geopolitical shifts, especially amidst the China-US trade tensions, offer a timely opportunity for India to emerge as a preferred destination for semiconductor manufacturing.

However, challenges persist, particularly in bridging the skill gap and accessing advanced technology. Collaborations with global leaders and initiatives to attract talent back to India are steps in the right direction. The road ahead is promising, with India poised to not only meet its self-sufficiency goals but also emerge as a global leader in semiconductor innovation, contributing significantly to economic growth.

Advait Rao | Bengaluru

The wonderful aspect of dance is its ability to speak volumes without uttering a single word. It is a great way to share one's passion for dance, impart new skills and foster a sense of unity. One of the greatest strengths of dance is its finesse and ability to touch people emotionally. Remember, every little step counts when it comes to making a difference through dance. Dance comes in many forms, from ballet to hip-hop and from contemporary to folk. A talented dancer will naturally embrace all these styles and weave them into choreography. This not only enriches the dancer's performance but also acknowledges the global tapestry of dance. A dance community is a great space for everyone, regardless of their age, race and gender. After all, diversity is the lifeblood of creativity. Said John Dryden, the literary critic and an accomplished poet from England: "Dancing is the poetry of the feet."

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Time to curb fake videos in elections

A deepfake video of Union Home Minister Amit Shah sparks outrage during the Lok Sabha election campaign

The ongoing Lok Sabha election campaign has suddenly taken a very ugly turn after a fake video involving Union Home Minister Amit Shah has surfaced. Accusations and counter-accusations are common during campaigns and are not considered harmful. However, it is unacceptable for anyone or political party to resort to using 'deep fake' technology to release fake videos against their opponents to win elections. In a recent case, the country's Home Minister, Amit Shah, has become a victim of 'deep-fake' technology. Amit Shah delivered a speech at a BJP election rally in Siddipet, Medak district of Telangana on April 25. The video of this speech was allegedly tampered with and shared on social media. Fact checks have proven this video to be completely fake. In this fake video, Amit Shah is allegedly seen announcing the abolishment of reservations for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Now, imagine if someone could abolish the reservations provided to the



above-mentioned classes in the country. It is an impossible thing. In fact, with the help of new technology, the face of a person who is not even a part of that video is fitted into the

video. It is difficult to tell the difference between real and fake in a video manipulated through this technique. Whoever leader or political party created and released fake videos showing Amit Shah announcing the abolishment of reservations, how serious an act they have committed to spreading hatred in society. A complaint has been lodged by Prateek Karpe, an office bearer of BJP's Mumbai unit, at Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) Cyber Police Station. The complaint states that a deepfake video of Amit Shah was created, posted and shared on the internet, to defame BJP leader Amit Shah. The complainant also requested the police to immediately remove the fake video and register a case against those accused who allegedly shared it to create enmity and hatred among various castes. Based on the complaint, a case has been registered against the social media handle of Maharashtra Youth Congress and 16 others under various sections of the IPC and IT Act at Bandra-Kurla Cyber Police Station in Mumbai.

Of course, technological development has taken place rapidly in the world in the last few decades. The increasing use of digital platforms has made life easier and faster, but along with this benefit, some serious risks related to cyber security are also coming to the fore. With the boundless nature of cyberspace, the threats associated with it and the deceitful methods and tools of cyber criminals, the trend of cyber-attacks is constantly changing. Apart from this, terrorism and fundamentalism are also finding shelter in cyberspace. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Cybersecurity is no longer limited to the digital world. It has become a matter of national security." Cyberspace has become the new battleground. The Government must take strict action against these elements. Meanwhile, one only hopes that the authorities concerned would curb the menace of deep fake videos sooner rather than later with an iron hand. (The writer is a senior journalist and author of two books; views are personal)



VIVEK SHUKLA

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The mastery of emotions is a pivotal factor in shaping success and fulfilment



SAKSHI SETHI

In a busy world, as individuals navigate through various personal and professional challenges, their ability to understand and manage emotions plays a critical role in determining success, well-being and overall fulfilment. It is the emotions that shape how individuals interact, communicate, lead and innovate, thereby ultimately driving organisational success and fostering a positive work culture. Often it is found that much of an individual's behaviour is the result of emotions. However, these emotions are not a great guide to how one should behave in challenging situations. That is why identifying and working through them helps make better decisions. Feelings and needs are intertwined and knowing one helps an individual understand the other. It is the feelings that are the gateway into what health needs are thereby, promoting the individual to take appropriate action and enabling the self to grow and heal. If one is not in touch with their feelings, one may end up not knowing what they need which may further lead to indecision or emotional outbursts and the same is being faced in today's scenario be it the corporate world or the world of education.

The importance of emotional intelligence cannot be overstated in this fast-paced and interconnected world. At the workplace, what forms the utmost need is the combination of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, effective communication and a supportive work environment. By implementing such strategies, organisations can foster a culture where employees feel empowered to manage their emotions positively, leading to increased productivity, job satisfaction and overall well-being. Emotional intelligence positively correlates with job satisfaction. Employees with higher emotional intelligence are more satisfied with their jobs, as it fosters purpose, belonging and commitment.



Employees with high emotional intelligence excel in interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution and adaptability, while emotionally intelligent leaders inspire trust, motivate teams and cultivate a positive work environment. By promoting emotional well-being, organisations optimise employee performance and achieve better business outcomes. Recognising the importance of emotional well-being, organisations implement initiatives to support employees' mental health be it wellness programmes, counselling services or flexible work arrangements. Stress-reducing activities, workload management, work-life balance and emotional validation can reduce absenteeism, turnover and healthcare costs, promoting a healthier and more resilient workforce.

Organisations should look for silver linings or alternative perspectives that can help reframe the situation in a more positive light, for emotionally intelligent employees can bounce back from failures, learn from setbacks and thrive in the face of uncertainty. By practicing self-compassion, focusing on strengths and investing in ongoing learning and skill development to enhance competence and confidence, can an individual effectively manage challenging emotions in the workplace and foster a more positive and productive work environment.

Remember, a workplace that acknowledges and supports the emotional needs of employees can promote mental health, reduce stress and prevent burnout. Emotions are not only inevitable but the most essential ingredient in the workplace. Recognising them and then cultivating them can lead to a more engaged, collaborative and resilient workforce which will ultimately contribute to the organisation's success and sustainability.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

AFSPA repeal: A step towards 'Naya Kashmir'



ABHINAV NARAYAN

Amit Shah's proposal to repeal AFSPA in J&K could restore normalcy, but it must consider the broader implications and evolving security of the region



Recently, the Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that the Centre will consider the removal of AFSPA in J&K. This statement assumes significance as it reflects the Government's vision towards J&K and most importantly Prime Minister's promise of Naya Kashmir. Soon, after the Lok Sabha elections, the focus will be panned towards J&K as the Union Territory is scheduled to go for polls in September this year. After abrogating article 370, the Government seems to be turning towards solving another long-standing conundrum in J&K - AFSPA. At the security and strategic level, this attempt will accelerate the cleaning of Pakistan's propaganda by cleaning up their psychological warfare designs in J&K and will provide full throttle for holistic development. Before the Government sets its approach, it must see the bigger picture first.

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act gives sweeping powers to armed forces (which also extends to CAPF under Section 2) and most significantly provides them legal immunity for their actions under Section 7 of the act. However, the Supreme Court in 2016 struck down this blanket protection from prosecution. The Supreme Court said "It does not matter whether the victim was a common person or a militant or a terrorist, nor does it matter whether the aggressor was a common person or the state. The law is the same for both and is equally applicable to both". The sweeping powers under Section 4 of the act include

1. Arrest without warrant,
2. Fire (After due warning) upon or use other kinds of force even if it causes death, against the person who is acting against law or order in the disturbed area for the maintenance of public order.
3. To enter and search any premises in order to make such arrests, or to recover any person wrongfully restrained or any arms, ammunition or explosive substances and seize it.
4. Stop and search any vehicle or vessel reasonably suspected to be carrying such person or weapons. The AFSPA debate stems from two perspectives first is security necessity and second is cases of extrajudicial

killings in the Northeast. The most debatable part is the second one which has made this act controversial. In 2004, a thorough review of the act was done by the Justice Jeevan Reddy Commission which concluded that the act should be repealed and observed that "agitations such as in Manipur and elsewhere are merely the symptoms of a malaise, which goes much deeper" and called on the Government to address the "core issues". However, the importance of National security somehow gets shadowed by a few cases of misuse of the act.



THE IMPOSITION OF AFSPA IN THE STATE OR UT ITSELF EXPLAINS THAT THE STATE HAS ALMOST LOST ITS CAPACITY TO DEAL WITH THE SITUATION AND WHEN THE STATE LOSES ITS CAPACITY, IT MEANS THAT THE ADVERSARY OR ANY ADVERSE SITUATION WILL SOON GRIP THE STATE, LEADING TO MAYHEM AND A BREAKDOWN OF NATIONAL SECURITY

Call for AFSPA comes under extraordinary situations which if not controlled or mitigated can result in serious consequences from the genocide of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990, 1986 Kashmir riots killing 2000 2000 people primarily Hindus, Sopor firings in January 1993 killing 40 people to Bij Behara firings in October 1993 killing 60 people. Such horrifying incidents need stringent measures in place and a certain amount of free pass to operate efficiently. "We feel that by revoking special legal provisions, which are in place here, definitely our operational capabilities will be compromised," General Officer Command (GOC) of Army's Srinagar-based 15 Corps Lieutenant General Syed Ata Hasnain said in 2011. To deal with a situation that is spiralling out day by day in a state requires effective operational dominance over the adversary which can only be possible if armed forces can freely operate.

The imposition of AFSPA in the state or UT itself explains that the state has almost lost its capacity to deal with the situation and when the state loses its capacity then it means that the adversary or any adverse situation will soon grip the state leading to mayhem and breakdown of national security. Such situations of

breakdowns are not ordinary and demand extreme measures and interventions to normalise and any constraints in intervention will affect the normalisation process therefore to let "normalisation" progress an effective emergency response mechanism is required which AFSPA provides. A call for the removal of AFSPA should only come when the security environment is significantly improved or secured as hurried removal might bring back the old situation. The case of a fresh wave of radicalisation in 2018 in J&K after the killing of terror poster boy Burhan Wani is one incidence where a cautious decision must be made to decide the removal of AFSPA.

AFSPA is not immune; it has its limitations and misuses. For example, the Nagaland case in 2021 of killing innocent 14 civilians or the 1995 Kohima Massacre where 16th Rashtriya Rifles fired upon civilians mistaking the sound of the tyre bursting for a bomb attack killing 7 and injuring 36. The free pass or the freeness in the name of operational efficiency or capabilities has also led to some serious consequences which are eroding the primary objective of the act. The AFSPA Act is in place to mitigate the extreme situation in the state and to aggravate it. Such incidents aggravate the situation and further complicate the situation in a state. Therefore, these immunities either required a removal or needed a proper check to put caution in the exercise of powers by the armed forces which later was done by the Supreme Court in 2016.

AFSPA cannot stay for long as extraordinary or exceptional situations are temporary and once under control, AFSPA could be withdrawn. If it goes beyond necessity, then AFSPA's presence would hinder the normalisation process. The normalisation process does not

only include fighting with the adversary it also includes the restoration of a peaceful and harmonious environment. A state of being normal is only when the state begins to function without any constraints, fear and anxiety. AFSPA being in place distorts the state of being "normal" and rather heightens the anxiety and fear which in the long run affects the democratic ecosystem and governance in a state that might further lead to socio-political instability if overlooked. The case of J&K ever since the removal of Article 370 has significantly improved there was a 66 per cent drop in terror cases in J&K. The union territory has also seen a significant drop in terror recruitment under Army's Operation Sahi Raasta. According to reports only seven youth joined terror groups last year.

As the security environment in J&K is significantly improved, a call for the removal of AFSPA is well reasoned. Now, the CAPF presence would easily tackle any security situation if arises as the substantial threat of terror now seems to be subsiding. Like the Government withdrew AFSPA from Punjab in 1997 it should soon take a call on J&K as well, though few CAPF presence can be there considering bordering areas the operation of the act must be withdrawn.

The removal of AFSPA will facilitate and exhort confidence and peace among people. Most importantly, eliminates the sense of fear and accelerates the pace of normalisation and developmental processes at socio-political levels. The Prime Minister's promise in Naya Kashmir lies beyond the security to society and politics which will only strengthen after the removal of AFSPA.

(The author is an Advocate based out of New Delhi, views are personal)

Engaging in the theatrics of India's electoral carnival

In the realm of political theatre, candidates await their turn in the merry-go-round of power, setting the stage with tension and anticipation

In anticipation of the 18th Lok Sabha elections in India, political parties have fervently engaged in pre-electoral activities, including candidate selection, issue advocacy and public discourse—all these, much before the official announcement by the Election Commission (scheduled from April 19 to June 1, 2024). Of particular significance is the burgeoning cohort of 18 million first-time voters, who observe the electoral spectacle with keen interest as parties vie for their support by proffering ambitious pledges. Within this theatrical milieu, the composition of the Lok Sabha, comprising 543 parliamentary constituencies nationwide, assumes paramount importance. Each constituency plays a pivotal role in



RAJDEEP PATHAK

electing a singular representative, who assumes the mantle of voicing their constituents' concerns within the Lower House of Parliament. Thus, amidst the cacophony of democratic fervour, the formation of the (18th) Lok Sabha emerges as a focal point, embodying the democratic ethos and the intricacies of electoral representation within India's diverse polity - as we witness this chaotic carnival

(read dance) of democracy. Now picture this: Rallies echoing with rehearsed oratory; meetings buzzing with the monotonous drone of 'scripted' discourse; and the landscape littered with towering hoardings and captivating advertisements—all vying for attention like desperate contestants in a reality TV show. Each candidate, eagerly awaits their fate in this grandiose spectacle, hoping to shine bright enough to avoid being relegated to the shadows of political obscurity. But, as they say, once a politician, always a politician. This grand orchestra of democracy will see nearly a billion people herded like cattle into over a million polling booths, expected to cast their votes in a choreographed char-

ade to determine the future Government. In the realm of electoral politics, politicians assume the role of adept illusionists, skillfully concocting promises tailored to captivate the electorate. Through artful rhetoric, they conjure visions of development and inclusivity, appealing to voters' emotions despite the potential disparity with reality. Parties engage in a theatrical spectacle, donning elaborate garb and competing for attention with promises of infrastructure, welfare and prosperity. However, voters' decisions ultimately reflect both their susceptibility and the manipulative prowess of politicians. This electoral charade underscores the complex interplay between rhetoric, perception

and voter agency in contemporary democratic processes. Here past performances matter.

Enter the Narendra Modi Government, riding high on the waves of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas', with a later addition of 'Sabka Prayas'. Since 2014, the Modi administration has been pulling rabbits out of hats faster than a magician—from electrifying villages to construction of toilets across the country in a bid to make India defecation-free, to digitising governance (Digital India), Startup India and standing up for the people and the world during emergencies like Covid19. Of course, like any good magic show, there's always a healthy dose of criticism to keep things interesting - after all, what's a politi-

cal spectacle without a little touch of drama? India's diplomatic endeavours have bolstered its global stature, marked by strategic alliances with major powers and initiatives like the International Solar Alliance, etc., fostering collaboration in trade, technology and sustainable development. Concurrently, domestic developments such as Ayushman Bharat for healthcare, Saubhagya for rural electrification, Jan-Dhan Yojana for financial inclusion and so on, underscore efforts toward inclusive progress. Nonetheless, socio-economic disparities persist, emblematic of the ongoing challenges amidst India's democratic evolution on the world stage. The Indian electoral process is characterised by extravagant

rallies, serving as vibrant showcases of democracy where ordinary citizens are swept into the extraordinary theatre of politics. Whether attendees arrive voluntarily or are transported en masse, these gatherings epitomise the essence of democratic engagement. Amidst a backdrop of waving flags and resonant slogans, the democratic spirit radiates, offering a glimpse of both the triumphs and tribulations of competing political factions. Central to this spectacle, is the tireless efforts of party workers, orchestrating the mobilisation of supporters for these occasions.

One cannot forget that in this grand symphony, the Election Commission stands as the linchpin, ensuring the sancti-

ty of free and fair elections despite recurrent criticisms. Imagine the stalwart veterans anxiously clinging to their phones, praying for one more display of their experience in the political limelight, while the current faces (read chosen MPs) pace like restless lions in the corridors of authority, fearing either the sweet embrace of reselection or the bitter sting of rejection. But there's nothing to fear. For in the unpredictable world of politics, one never knows when the pendulum of fortune will favourably swing back. So, let us Vote so that the elected parties work to fulfil their manifesto.

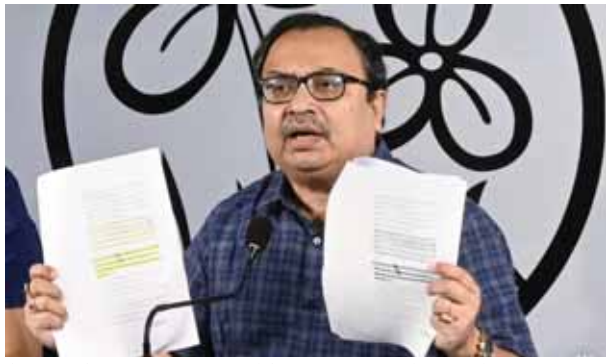
(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)



TMC, BJP LS candidates from North Kolkata sponsored by saffron outfit: Kunal Ghosh

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Senior Trinamool Congress leader Kunal Ghosh who on Wednesday was removed as party general secretary for jointly hosting a social programme with BJP's Lok Sabha candidate Tapas Roy created a flutter as much in the TMC as in Bengal politics saying there were two BJP nominees contesting from North Kolkata — one was Tapas Roy and the other was Sudip Bandopadhyay who despite being the official TMC candidate was actually being sponsored by the saffron outfit — and that the Bengal Government had information about the school teachers' recruitment scam. "I have nothing to say about the party's decision to remove me as the general secretary ... my concern is only about my party's fate which is why I have to tell the TMC supporters to come out and vote with open mind with the special consideration that they have two BJP candidates contesting from North Kolkata seat" apparently indicating Tapas Roy and Sudip Bandopadhyay. Incidentally Bandopadhyay the TMC's leader in Lok Sabha who is known for his proximity to South Block has not been in good terms with Ghosh and other leaders of North Kolkata. In fact his opponent Tapas Roy left the TMC little more than a month ago and joined the saffron outfit to get nominated for that party opposite Bandopadhyay. Earlier Ghosh was removed from his post after he joined Roy in a programme and called him a "true mass leader" former the dais. Roy a former TMC Minister who holds Bandopadhyay responsible for the raids conducted by the Enforcement Directorate in his house is likely to give the Trinamool Congress a tough challenge from a seat which was once held by late Congress and subsequently TMC leader and former Union Minister Ajit Panja. While the TMC has fielded Sudip Bandopadhyay from North Kolkata Roy is contesting on a BJP ticket opposite him. The Congress on the other hand has nominated its senior leader and Rajya Sabha Member Pradip Bhattacharya. Insofar as Ghosh's statement is



concerned it tends to come as big blow to its leadership it could not have come at a worse time than this when the Mamata Banerjee Government is facing the toughest challenge of its existence in power post the recruitment, ration, cattle and coal scams that have seen a number of its senior leaders including ministers and legislators going to jail. Apart from attacking Bandopadhyay, the rebel TMC leader also said that the TMC Government had information about the teachers' recruitment scam. "The party was well aware of the scam ... that money for school jobs were being collected in the name of Partha Chatterjee way before 2021," Ghosh said adding there were ministers in the Mamata Banerjee Cabinet who were a part of the recruitments scam. "I know a big shot in the Cabinet who was a party to the scam and

who is now roaming about holding his head high instead of being in jail," he told a Bengali television channel adding that there were many people who had collected money for jobs. Recently 25,753 school teachers and non-teaching staff lost their jobs after the Calcutta High cancelled the entire panel on account of the appointment procedure being non-transparent and upon the School Service Commission's failure to furnish the OMR sheets for the entire lot of examinees. Incidentally the High Court is hearing more such cases involving the fate of 25-30000 teachers in primary level. When asked whether he would continue to remain in the TMC, he said he would till he could before adding, "if for my clean statements I am thrown out of the party like I was thrown out as the spokesperson and general secretary I will continue as a supporter." When asked to comment on Ghosh's statements about most TMC leaders remained tightlipped citing their busy electoral schedules. When asked to comment rising CPI(M) face Minakshi Mukherjee said that there was nothing new in Ghosh's statement as "whole Bengal knows that Mamata Banerjee is a creation of RSS and she and Narendra Modi have a big understanding."

BJP dividing people in name of religion, says Omar Abdullah

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and Vice President of the National Conference Omar Abdullah on Thursday accused the star campaigners of the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) of harping on the religion bandwagon to divide the people. He said attempts are being made to spread hatred in this country and that too by the party whose leaders, including its PM (Narendra Modi), never get tired of saying that he (the prime minister) represents all 140 crore Indians. Interacting with the media after filing his nomination papers in the office of the Returning Officer in Baramulla Omar said the Election Commission should take action against the BJP. Responding to a question on Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's comment that cow slaughter will increase if Congress comes to power, Abdullah said the Election Commission should take action against the BJP.



"I do not know why they have a free run from the Election Commission to use religion in the polls. Others are told that they cannot use religion in the elections under the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) for either seeking votes or pitting people against each other," he said. Omar said, "The BJP's star campaigners not only use religion but attempts are also made to divide the people, be it in the name of 'mangalsutra' or land or cow slaughter. Unfortunately, attempts are being made to spread hatred in this country and that too by the party whose leaders, including its PM

(Narendra Modi), never get tired of saying that he (the prime minister) represents all 140 crore Indians. Omar was referring to Modi's allegations at an election rally that if the Congress came to power, it would redistribute the wealth of people to Muslims. "If that is so, then these statements used to spread hatred, especially against the 14 percent Muslim population, are very unfortunate," he said. The National Conference Vice-President filed the nomination papers for a Lok Sabha election after 20 years. He was a member of the 14th Lok Sabha from

2004-2009. "It is also after 10 years that I have filed nomination papers for any election. This tells you about the situation of democracy in J-K. The last assembly elections took place in 2014 and now for 10 years, there have been no assembly elections," he added. The Baramulla Lok Sabha seat is set for a close contest between Omar Abdullah and Chairman of the Peoples' Conference Sajad Lone. PDP has fielded former Rajya Sabha MP Mir Fayaz from the seat. The last date for filing nominations from the seat is May 3, while the polling is scheduled to take place on May 20. Asked about the NC's stand on the issue of the restoration of Article 370, Abdullah said his party's stand has always been very clear against the decision on Article 370. "We are seeking votes from the people against those decisions. It is not that we are alone. Many of our friends are also fighting this fight. God willing, the number of such friends will increase slowly," said Abdullah.

How voting percentages of Phase I, II LS polls went up suddenly, Sena(UBT) asks ECI

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Opposition Shiv Sena (UBT) on Thursday questioned the Election Commission of India (ECI) as to why and how the voting percentages of the Phase I and Phase II Lok Sabha polls "went up all of a sudden and that too after so many days". Alluding to the marked 6 to 7 per cent increase in the voting percentages from initial polling percentages released by the ECI initially, Shiv Sena (UBT) spokesperson Sanjay Raut demanded to know from the poll body as to where was the need for it to revise upwards the polling percentages after giving what was said to be the final polling percentages earlier on the web sites of Maharashtra Chief Electoral Officer and ECI websites. "After 11 days of the Phase I (April 19) and a week after the Phase II (April 26) polling, the ECI has released the voting percentages which are much higher than the live data given on the polling dates. Where have these extra votes come from?", Raut asked. Raut said that the voting percentages had changed by 7 to 10 per cent in many constituencies, though in Nagpur the percentage had reduced by some percentage points.



"After the low voter turn which had rattled the ruling BJP, the ECI has now released the increased polling percentages. The figures have aroused suspicion in the minds of the Opposition political parties as well as the people across the country," Raut said. "After the low voter turnout, many people had expressed concerns over the considerable drop in the voting percentages as compared with the polling percentage in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls," the Sena (UBT) spokesperson said. "The fact that the ECI's latest polling percentage data has risen in just 11 days of the first phase of LS polls has nearly equalled the 2019 tally has given rise to several questions," Raut said. "We are in a digital India and we are in a digital India. Why

did the ECI take 11 days to give final voting percentages? We can understand a difference of half or one percent increase or decrease in the final calculations. But what we are seeing is a 7 to 10 percent increase in the polling percentages. How can there be such a big increase in the polling percentages? This is difficult to comprehend," Raut said. The ECI had earlier pegged the polling percentage in the first phase polling held on April 19 at 60 per cent and the second phase of the polling held on April 26 at 60.96 per cent. As per the revised data released by the ECI, the voter turnout has gone up from the earlier 60 per cent to 66.14 per cent in the first phase and from the earlier 60.96 per cent to 66.7 per cent in the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls.

Controversy over Kerala murder suspect takes curious turn

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The controversy over Abdul Raheem of Kerala who has been sentenced to death punishment by a Saudi Arabian court in connection with the murder of a 15-year-old paralysis stricken boy took a curious turn by Thursday as certain media houses and self-styled human rights activists started threatening Nusrat Jahan who exposed certain grey areas in the efforts to save the youth. It was widely reported in Kerala media that the intervention of these human rights activists has succeeded in the victim's family members pardoning Raheem and expressing their willingness to accept the blood money of Rs 34 crore as per Sharia law. The Kerala society came together and collected Rs 34 crore through crowd funding which was praised by the secular, socialist and liberal society of the State as the Real Story of Kerala. Nusrat Jahan announced through her social media post that the claims of certain people that the Saudi Court has agreed to pardon Raheem if he pays blood money was not true. "No court order has been issued in this regard. The family of Raheem got a mail from



the embassy attaché and lawyer of the victim. The Shura court has to take a final decision after contacting each member of the victim's family. The team that claims to work for saving Raheem has failed to show any communication from Saudi Government but they collected Rs 34 crore as blood money," said Nusrat Jahan. She said Saudi Sharia has fixed that no more than 5 million Saudi Riyals (Rs 11.5 million) should be collected as blood money while the team from Kerala has already collected Rs 34 crore and this is a dubious act. According to Nusrat, no final word has come out of the Saudi Court or the Royal Government about the fate of appeal. "There are many unanswered questions in this case. It is not for the embassy staff to issue orders to the family of Raheem. There are officials posted as diplomats who are entrusted with such responsibilities," she said.

Start...

From Page 1 Integration has also been completed with 'Integrated Government Online Training' (iGOT) portal to make these courses available to police and prison personnel. These training modules have been shared by BPR&D with all states and UTs, enabling them to conduct training programmes in their police training institutes. "To further augment and strengthen the exercise of educating our police and prison officers (of all ranks -- aiming at reaching the last person in the hierarchical ladder) about the new laws, we seek your active indulgence and involvement in this endeavour and request you to make appropriate arrangements in your state and UT for providing intensive training to all police and prison personnel without leaving anyone behind. "You will appreciate that unless we equip all our officials with relevant information and knowledge, we will not be able to effectively implement the new laws," the communication said, asking top state officials to personally review the training schedule of all ranks of police and prison personnel about the new laws and ensure that everyone receives adequate briefing about the same.

Maliwal cries foul...

From Page 1 According to an official, 223 posts were "illegally" created but only 52 staffers were hired and the remaining posts were vacant. It is alleged that the former chairperson of the DCW, Swati Maliwal, who is currently Rajya Sabha member, had appointed the staffers without permission, going against the rules. The crackdown is set to become another flashpoint between the Lieutenant Governor's office and the ruling AAP over the administration of the national capital. The development also comes at a time when AAP leader and Kejriwal is in jail after being arrested in connection with alleged irregularities in the capital's now-scrapped liquor policy. Calling the notice to DCW a "Tughlaqi order", Maliwal on X wrote, "LG has issued a Tughlaqi order to remove all the contract staff of DCW. Today, the Women's Commission has a total staff of 90 out of which only 8 people have been provided by the government, the rest are on 3-month contracts." "If all the contract staff is removed, the Women's Commission will be locked. Why are these people doing this? This institution has been built with blood and sweat. Instead of giving it staff and protection, you are

destroying it from its roots?" Maliwal added. The committee was constituted by the then Lt Governor Anil Bajjal to look into the complaints of "irregular and illegally created posts and contractual appointments" in February, 2017 at DCW, said the statement from the WCD Department. "The committee, headed by the then Chief Secretary and comprising Principal Secretary (Finance), Secretary (WCD) and Secretary (Law) as members, after inquiry, had found the appointments and the processes that were followed, to be illegal and had held the appointments to be invalid ab initio", it said. The committee had recommended that the appointment of existing contractual staff engaged without having sanctioned posts, are void ab initio and they cannot be allowed to continue, it said. "However, the DCW and its then chairperson, Swati Maliwal, who in the first instance had appointed these individuals, illegally kept the recommendations of the Committee in abeyance and the same could be moved by the WCD Department only upon her demitting office recently," the statement added. The officials said that currently, 52 contractual staffers were employed.

Pak wants...

From Page 1 The PM also challenged the Congress and the INDIA Bloc to give in writing that it won't give reservation to Muslims "through backdoor by reducing OBC quota" in the states where the party and its allies are in power. "I am challenging the shehzada to give this guarantee. There is no sense in taking the copy of the Constitution on the head and dancing. If you want to learn how to live for the Constitution and die for it, then come to Modi," the PM added. Modi also took a dig at the grand old party over opposition leader Salman Khurshid's niece Maria Alam's call for 'vote jihad'. Alam, a Samajwadi Party (SP) leader, called for a "vote jihad" in favour of the INDIA Bloc candidate from Farrukhabad Lok Sabha seat of Uttar Pradesh. "Now, the INDI alliance calls for vote jihad. This is new, because we have so far heard about 'love jihad' and 'land jihad'. This is said by a person who belonged to an educated Muslim family, not someone who studied in madrasa. I

hope you all know what the meaning of jihad is and against whom the jihad is waged. This is an insult to democracy and not a single Congress leader has condemned it," he said. Modi said such statements prove that intentions of the INDIA Bloc were "dangerous". In another rally at Junagadh in Gujarat, Modi said the ongoing Lok Sabha elections were not for satisfying his personal ambitions, but for fulfilling his "mission". Accusing the opposition Congress of having a "dangerous mentality", Modi said its manifesto is written in the language of Muslim League. Referring to the controversy surrounding Katchatheevu island, the PM said during Congress rule, the Union Government had no idea about the exact number of islands India had. "I then got a satellite survey done and found that we have 1,300 islands. Some of them are as big as Singapore. We will develop some of them for tourism purposes," said Modi.

Clandestine 'dole...

From Page 1 "Therefore, the Commission directs all political parties and candidates or their agents or any other person(s) to immediately cease and desist from any activities that involve registering individuals for beneficiary-oriented schemes through any advertisements (in print or in digital space), pamphlets, websites, web or mobile applications, text or social media platform (WhatsApp, etc.) messages, missed calls, distribution of forms, or by collecting personal data under the pretext of offline surveys forms or digital surveys etc," the Commission said. The commission has directed all district election officers to take appropriate action against any such advertisement within the statutory provisions, including section 127A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (which prohibits printing or publishing of any election pamphlet or poster which does not bear the names and addresses of the printer and publisher). The other provisions of the EC has asked its officials to use to clamp down on such practices

are section 123 (1) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (corrupt practices), and section 171 (B) of IPC (accepting gratification). The commission also cited examples of activities which "obscure the distinction between authentic surveys and biased attempts to enroll people in programmes for political gain". These include newspaper advertisements calling upon individual voters to register themselves for benefits by giving missed calls or calling a phone number. The Commission also cited the distribution of guarantee cards in the form of pamphlets giving details of prospective individual benefits along with an attached form asking for details of voters such as name, age, address, mobile number, booth number and constituency name. It flagged the distribution of forms seeking details of voters such as name, ration card number, address, phone number, booth number, bank account number, constituency name and number in the name of "socio-economic survey" of prospective beneficiaries for expanding an ongoing Government benefit scheme.

Not at home in Amethi...

From Page 1 The Amethi and Rae Bareilly constituencies go to polls on May 20 in the fifth round of the seven-phase general elections. Sources said official announcement was delayed as Rahul's affirmation came late evening after he and party president Kharge, who were both in Shimoga at a joint poll rally in Karnataka, held discussions over his nomination from Amethi. The Uttar Pradesh leadership of the Congress has already called upon the Gandhi family to contest both the seats traditionally held by their family. The members of the Central Election Committee

have also urged the party leadership to field both Rahul and Priyanka. The Amethi seat has been represented by Rahul from 2004 and he remained the member of Parliament from the constituency for three consecutive terms till 2019. He currently represents the Wayanad constituency in Kerala from where he has contested this time also. The Rae Bareilly constituency was represented by Sonia Gandhi from 2004 to 2024. Prior to that, Sonia Gandhi had represented the Amethi Lok Sabha constituency after she entered politics and contested for the first time in 1999.

BJP denies ticket to WFL...

From Page 1 Days after Karan's election, Olympic medalists Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Malik had threatened protests, claiming the government had promised that Brij Bhushan or his relatives or associates would not govern the sport. Karan is also the president of the Cooperative Village Development Bank in Nawabganj, Gonda. Polling will be held in Kaiserganj in the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections on May 20. Earlier, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh blamed the media for the delay in the announcement of his name as the BJP candidate for the seat. Interestingly, Brij Bhushan has already begun his campaign in Kaiserganj on April 8 with a road show even though the party has not declared his candidature. He was found appealing to voters to fulfil Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream of 'Abki Baar, 400 Paar'. The president of the Wrestling Federation of India for over a decade, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh hit the headlines in 2023, when the country's top wrestlers, including Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat and Sakshi Malik, accused him of sexually harassing women wrestlers and staged a massive protest in the national Capital.

parents were concerned about school security and raised some security protocols for the educational institutions like CCTV cameras around the entry-exit of the school gates along with security deployment of guards during the entrance of the gates. On the other hand, primary school Konark public school located in the same area showed signs of concern from parents which resulted in a dip in attendance in the school. Bal Bharti Pusa, Springdales and Salwan Public Schools were also the target of bomb threats via email. Strict security measures were enforced following the previous day's threat. Children were confined to classrooms and restricted from accessing playgrounds, gardens, or the canteen area. The threat to Bal Bharti Public School, Springdales led to heavy traffic congestion in areas like Pusa, Karol Bagh, and Rajender Nagar, with significant police presence and traffic officers assisting in clearing the roads. Despite the tense situation, the overall attendance remained relatively stable, with an 80 per cent turnout. However, some parents opted to keep their children at home for safety reasons, particularly in the Montessori and nursery classes, resulting in a 40 per cent decrease in attendance for these grades.

Tiny feet waltz back...

From Page 1 Guru Harkrishan Public School was one of the schools which had received bomb hoax mail on Wednesday. In its Shahdara branch students were seen at usual strength just like the regular days but



RJD stands for Rishwatkhori Jungleraj Dal: Nadda

PTI ■ ARARIA (BIHAR)

Launching a frontal attack on the RJD, which is an alliance partner of the INDIA bloc in Bihar, BJP national president J P Nadda on Thursday said the party led by Lalu Prasad stands for 'Rishwatkhori Jungleraj Dal'. Addressing a public rally in Araria Lok Sabha seat in support of BJP candidate Pradeep Kumar Singh, Nadda accused the opposition coalition of "protecting" corrupt people, whereas Prime Minister Narendra Modi was "striving hard" to end corruption in the country. Araria will go to polls in the third phase on May 7. "A majority of the leaders of the INDIA bloc, including those of the Congress and RJD, are either in jail or out

on bail. PM Modi wants to end corruption but the INDIA bloc leaders call for protecting the corrupt. RJD, whose leaders are on bail, means corruption. R stands for 'Rishwatkhori' (bribery), J for 'Jungleraj' and D means 'Daldal' (slough of mud)," he said. "On one side, we have a PM who is working for the country and on the other, you have the INDIA bloc, a 'parivar bachao, dynasty bachao' alliance," he alleged. Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, RJD's Lalu Prasad and Tejashwi Yadav, all are out on bail, Nadda claimed. "Parties of the 'ghamandiya alliance' are all 'parivarvadi' (dynastic)... Look at Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and Mehbooba Mufti, Mulayam Singh Yadav and



Akhilesh-Dimple, Lalu-Rabri-Tejashwi-Tej, Misa-Bharti, Mamata-Banerjee and Abhishek, KCR-

KTR-Kavita, Karunanidhi-Stalin-Udayanidhi... Congress has Sonia-Rahul-Priyanka... All of them are dynasts," the BJP national president alleged. "Corrupt leaders of INDIA bloc who are in jail include Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, and other AAP leaders Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain," he added. Reiterating that the BJP-led NDA will win 400-plus Lok Sabha seats, including all 40 in Bihar, Nadda asserted that the eastern state has developed only under NDA rule, with a six-lane highway being built from Varanasi and Kolkata which will pass through the state. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's only aim is welfare of every person from the Dalit, tribal and backward sections of the society.

The NDA government has brought a large section of the country's poor above the poverty line in the last 10 years. But INDIA bloc leaders want to give reservation on religious lines. The Congress is giving tickets to those belonging to 'tukde-tukde' gang," Nadda added. "India was the 11th largest economy when PM Modi came to power and now the country is the fifth largest economy, leaving behind United Kingdom and many other countries. We will be the third largest economy by 2027," he said. Highlighting growth statistics of the country under NDA rule, Nadda, said, "Pharmaceutical and toy exports have surged... India has become the third-largest automobile market, surpassing Japan."

Yogi accuses Kharge of hurting Hindu religious sentiments



PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday accused Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge of hurting the religious sentiments of Hindus with his recent remarks on Lord Ram and Shivam. At a rally in Chhattisgarh on Tuesday in support of a party candidate Shivkumar Dahariya, Kharge said, "His name is Shivkumar. He can compete with Ram because he is Shiva." "I am also Mallikarjun. Main bhi Shiv hoon," he said. Mallikarjun is another name for Lord Shiva. The UP chief minister said that the party is facing significant setbacks in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and is resorting to disparaging the beliefs of the Hindu majority community to vent its frustration over impending defeat in the Lok Sabha elections. Congress president's derogatory remarks are a "new beginning of the party's downfall," he said. "The Congress's history is replete with such actions. Yet, during elections, such behaviour becomes conspicuous. By bringing up such issues, the Congress is not only disrespecting the faith of India but also hurting the sentiments of the majority community," Adityanath said while addressing the media at his official residence before embarking on election rallies in Mainpuri, Etah, and Firozabad. He condemned the attempt to pit Lord Ram against Lord Shiva in speeches of Congress

leaders. "Lord Ram and Lord Shiva hold significant reverence within its worship practices. In Ramcharitmanas, there are instances where Lord Ram worships Lord Shiva and vice versa, illustrating their mutual respect and complementarity," he said. "Our scriptures bear testimony to the fact that betrayal of either Lord Shiva or Lord Ram inevitably leads to defeat and downfall," he said. "The Congress carries forward the British legacy of 'Divide and Rule'. It sows the seeds of discord in society based on caste, region, and language for petty political gains. The party will continue its divisive agenda in future as well to stay relevant in Indian politics," he added. He claimed that Congress in its manifesto has pledged to include Muslims also among the beneficiaries of the reservation meant for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. He also expressed his disapproval of Congress' disregard for India's Sanatan traditions and accused the party and its president of disrespecting and manipulating the country's faith. Chief minister Adityanath criticised the party leader for not only undermining the Hindu faith but also steering Congress towards oblivion through such divisive actions. He hoped that the divine wisdom of Lord Shri Ram and Devadhive Mahadev Shiv would guide the Congress leadership to embrace the path of truth amid these challenges.

Rahul will be forced to take out Congress Dhundho Yatra after June 4: Shah



PTI ■ BAREILLY (UP)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday attacked Rahul Gandhi, saying he started his party's campaign with Bharat Jodo Yatra that will end with a 'Congress Dhoondho Yatra,' suggesting that the party will get a severe drubbing in the Lok Sabha elections. Addressing an election rally here, Shah alleged that Rahul, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, and SP's Akhilesh Yadav did not attend the Ram Temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya fearing this may alienate their vote bank.

Shah said that this election is for ending terrorism and Naxalism and making India the third major economy globally. Shah hit out at the INDIA bloc partner Samajwadi Party, saying it indulges in dynastic politics for its president Akhilesh Yadav has given tickets to five members of his family in the current election. He said that while Akhilesh is contesting from Kannauj and his wife Dimple Yadav is in fray from Mainpuri, Akshay Yadav, Aditya Yadav, and Dharmendra Yadav, all three his family members, are contenders from Firozabad, Budaun, and Azamgarh.

Final electoral roll has over 4.14 crore voters in Andhra Pradesh

PTI ■ AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Mukesh Kumar Meena on Thursday published the final electoral roll of the state in the run-up to the forthcoming polls, pegging the total number of voters over 4.14 crore, which rose by nearly six lakh from January 1. In exact figures, the total number of voters in the southern state are 4,14,01,887, who include 2.02 crore male voters, 2.1 crore female voters, 3,421 third gender voters and 68,185 service electors. "Voter list has been finalised and frozen. On the day of freezing the list, April 25, including all categories of voters, service voters, male, female and third gender voters, there are 4,14,01,887 voters," said Meena, addressing a press conference at the secretariat here. The CEO noted that the electoral rolls witnessed an increase by 5,94,631 voters between January 1, 2024 and April 1. The voter list was updated until the last day of receiving the nominations, April 25. Meena called on the electorate to check their names and polling stations at



polling stations where the upper limit of 1,500 electors has been breached. The highest number of auxiliary polling stations (50) have been added in Visakhapatnam district. Meanwhile, the CEO noted that 12,438 polling stations out of the total have been identified as critical while webcasting has been proposed for 29,897 or 64 percent of the polling stations. Until Thursday, as part of the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), Meena observed that two deaths, 156 injuries and 13.4 lakh properties were involved in cases of electoral violence. Besides binding over 72,416 persons, the Election Commission has also registered 9,337 seizure FIRs and 864 FIRs related to enforcement such as loudspeaker violations, irregular meetings and others. Likewise, the poll body seized liquor, cash, drugs, precious metals, freebies and other inducements worth Rs 204 crore from March 16 to May 2. Further, Meena observed that safety measures would be put in place at polling stations prone to heat waves, such as setting up tents, canopies, umbrellas and shade structures, along with providing chairs. Likewise, cooling devices such as fans will be arranged at necessary polling stations for maintaining comfortable temperature for voters and polling personnel, including drinking water facilities at all the polling stations. Elections for the 175-member Assembly and 25 Lok Sabha seats in Andhra Pradesh are scheduled on May 13 and the counting of votes will be held on June 4.

BJP not against Muslims; Modi respected by several Islamic countries: Rajnath

PTI ■ SUPAUL/SARAN (BIHAR)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday debunked the opposition charge that the BJP was creating a Hindu-Muslim divide, highlighting the goodwill enjoyed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in several Islamic countries. The former BJP president, who addressed election rallies in Supaul and Saran Lok Sabha constituencies of Bihar, also urged the minority community to be wary of the Congress and its ally RJD, charging the opposition parties with "seeking votes by kicking sand in your face." "In at least five Islamic countries of the Arab world, Modi has been conferred with the highest honour. And they (the opposition) have the temerity of charging us with (creating divisions) between Hindus and Muslims," Singh asserted. "I would, however, urge my Muslim brethren not to be ensnared by these people, the

parties like RJD and Congress, which are trying to get your votes by kicking sand in your face," he said. Singh, in his address, also said reservations along religious lines is not possible under the constitution. "Of course, there is a provision for quotas for the backward classes and those sections of Muslim population that are lagging behind are covered under the same," he said. "Muslims should also understand our motive behind illegalising triple talaq. How can one tolerate such a practice which had inflicted untold miseries upon so many Muslim sisters and daughters? We took action without worrying about electoral consequences. I am glad to see that our stand against triple talaq has also been appreciated by many Muslims," the defence minister said. Singh also claimed that the NDA was on course to achieve its target of 400-plus



Lok Sabha seats, and "a beginning" has been made in Surat, where the BJP candidate got elected unopposed, and in Indore, where the Congress nominee withdrew his nomination papers and joined the saffron party. "Now, the opposition is crying hoarse that this would imperil democracy. Let me tell you that since Independence, at least 28 candidates have got elected unopposed. Twenty of them belonged to the Congress and two were from its ally Samajwadi Party," Singh said, without elaborating. He also said the grand old party would soon become extinct "like dinosaurs" and "future generations would have to be told that something called the Congress existed."

"Mahatma Gandhi wanted the party to be disbanded. It seems the party is being cursed by his soul," Singh said. The defence minister said he did "not wish to speak against anybody who has been the prime minister since it involved an institution and not just an individual", while drawing a contrast between the rule of Modi and Congress PMs since Jawaharlal Nehru. "I do not say that those in our ranks have been consecrated with milk. But, whenever somebody is found guilty of any wrongdoing, the BJP-led NDA has not shied away from getting rid of tainted elements," asserted Singh. The senior BJP leader lauded his Bihar ally, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who heads the JD(U), saying, "You may have many grievances against him, but you cannot say that he is corrupt. In contrast, you have the RJD, which has been most notorious with regard to its track record on corruption, while in power."

"Beware of parties like the RJD, which want to take you back to the age of the lantern, and set up cow sheds doubling up as schools," said Singh, referring to the opposition party's poll symbol and a scheme launched by its president Lalu Prasad in the 1990s, when he was the chief minister of Bihar. He also claimed that under Modi, the global standing of India has grown, citing the willingness of Russia and Ukraine to halt the war for a few hours to facilitate return of students. "Also, unlike in the past, terrorists cannot strike at will as we have made known that India will hit back, even going across the border, if the need arises," the defence minister said. He also alleged that the decade-long tenure of Manmohan Singh was marred by stagnation. "But, Modi worked a miracle. We have jumped to the fifth spot and experts around the world agree that we are poised

to be among the top three by 2027," said Singh, who also pointed out that "organisations like the IMF say we have brought out 25 crore people from the clutches of poverty, something which the Congress could not achieve despite slogans of 'garibi hatao'". Referring to the advocacy of inheritance tax by Sam Pitroda "an advisor of the Congress' top leadership who also heads the party's overseas wing", the former BJP president asked, "Do you want such a system to be in place?". The Union minister also stressed on Modi's welfare initiatives, touching upon the 'Jan Dhan' scheme, and the proposal to bring "all people aged over 70 years, whether poor or not", under the Ayushman Bharat Yojana. "We also intend to provide 300 units of electricity, free of charge, to every household through rooftop solar panels," Singh added.

Dharmendra Pradhan files nomination from Sambalpur

PTI ■ SAMBALPUR (ODISHA)

BJP leader and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, who filed his nomination from Sambalpur Lok Sabha seat in Odisha on Thursday, expressed confidence that his party will win not only the general elections but also the assembly polls in the state. Returning to the electoral fray after 15 years, 54-year-old Pradhan visited Samaleswari Temple here in the morning to seek blessings. He then participated in a two-hour-long road show from the temple to the DC office where he filed the nomination. "There is a demand for change in Odisha and the BJP is determined to win not only the Lok Sabha polls but also the upcoming Assembly elections in the State," he told PTI.

This election is for Modi's mission, not ambition, says PM; dares Congress to restore Article 370

PTI ■ JUNAGADH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the ongoing Lok Sabha elections were not for satisfying his personal ambitions, but for fulfilling his "mission." A strong and stable government was important not only for the country but also for the world, he said at a poll rally in Junagadh in Gujarat. "These elections are not for my ambition, as people have fulfilled that ambition in 2014. The 2024 elections are for Modi's mission," the PM said. Accusing the opposition

Congress of having a "dangerous mentality", Modi said its manifesto is written in the language of Muslim League. For Congress, this election was all about saving its existence and the party was taking help of its "Mazhabi vote bank" to stay afloat, the prime minister claimed. In his address, he challenged the Congress to restore Article 370 in Jammu-Kashmir, abolish the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the law that bans triple talaq. "I have buried Article 370. It is gone now. I want to challenge the Congress' royal family and its 'shehzada' (a

jibe at the Gandhi family and Rahul Gandhi) that if it is your hidden agenda, then come out in the open and tell people you will restore Article 370," he said. "I want to see how much courage they (Congress) have to insult the Constitution drafted by Babasaheb Ambedkar. You (Congress) will fail because this (standing in your way) is Modi," the PM asserted. Referring to the controversy surrounding the Katchatheevu island, he said during the Congress rule, the Union Government had no idea about the exact number of islands India had. "I then got a satellite survey



and found that we have 1,300 islands. Some of them are as big as Singapore. We will develop some of them for tourism purposes," said Modi. A Congress leader had recently spoken about separating South India and forming a new nation, while those in the Opposition INDIA Bloc also make statements on similar lines, he

several uninhabited islands, the PM pointed out, adding "if given a free hand" that party will "sell off the Himalayan peaks". Attacking Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge over a recent remark pertaining to Lord Ram and Lord Shiva, the PM said the opposition party had declared this election is a fight against Lord Ram. "The Congress president said his objective was to defeat Lord Ram and that Lord Shiva will defeat Lord Ram. What are they thinking? The Mughals destroyed Ram Temple in Ayodhya and Somnath Temple with this same mentality," the PM

asserted. Speaking about reservation for Muslims, Modi said after Independence it was decided following careful deliberations that religion-based quotas would not be given. "Those deliberations went on for months. And no BJP or RSS leader was in the picture. Learned Congress leaders as well as Babasaheb Ambedkar took part in the discussion. After deliberations, they decided reservation will not be granted on the basis of religion," he said. The Congress now wants to snatch such quota and give it to others, Modi said.

Police dismantle pro-Palestinian demonstrators' encampment

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

Police removed barricades and began dismantling a pro-Palestinian demonstrators' fortified encampment early Thursday at the University of California, Los Angeles, after hundreds of protesters defied orders to leave. Some people were detained, their hands bound with zip ties.

The action came after officers spent hours threatening arrests over loudspeakers if people did not disperse. A crowd of more than 1,000 had gathered on campus, both inside a barricaded tent encampment and outside it, in support. Protesters and police shoved and scuffled as officers encountered resistance. With police helicopters hovering, the sound of flash-bangs, which produce a bright light and a loud noise to disorient and stun people, pierced the air. Protesters chanted, "Where were you last night?" at the officers, in reference to Tuesday night, when counter-protesters attacked the encampment and the UCLA administration and campus police took hours to respond.

Tent encampments of protesters calling on universities to stop doing business with Israel or companies they say support the war in Gaza have spread across campuses nationwide in a student movement unlike any other this century. The ensuing police crackdowns echoed actions decades ago against a much larger protest movement protesting the Vietnam War. In the Mideast, Iranian state television carried live images of the police action, as did Qatar's pan-Arab Al Jazeera satellite network. Live images of Los Angeles also played across Israeli television networks, as well.

California Highway Patrol officers poured into the campus by the hundreds early Thursday. Wearing face shields and protective vests, they stood with their batons protruding out to separate them from demonstrators, who wore helmets and gas masks and chanted, "You want peace. We want justice." Police methodically ripped apart the encampment's barricade of plywood, pallets, metal fences and trash dumpsters.

Will Israel end war without group's destruction?



Demonstrators gather on the UCLA campus, after nighttime clashes between Pro-Israel and Pro-Palestinian groups, on Wednesday. AP/PTI

Beirut (AP): Hamas on Thursday was considering the latest proposal for a cease-fire with Israel that the United States and other mediators hope will avert an Israeli attack on the Gaza town of Rafah. But chances for the deal are entangled with the question of whether Israel can accept an end to the war without reaching its stated goal of destroying Hamas.

The stakes in the cease-fire negotiations were made clear in a new UN report that said if the war in Gaza stops today, it will still take until 2040 to rebuild all the homes that have been destroyed by nearly seven months of Israeli bombardment and ground offensives in the territory.

It warned that the impact of the damage to the economy will set back development for generations and will only get worse with every month fighting continues. Hamas has insisted it won't sign onto the deal without assurances that, if it eventually releases all its hostages, Israel will end its

onslaught in Gaza and pull its troops out of the territory.

The proposal that US and Egyptian mediators have put to Hamas — apparently with Israel's acceptance — sets out a three-stage process that will bring an immediate six-week cease-fire and partial hostage release but also negotiations over a "permanent calm" that includes some sort of Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, according to an Egyptian official.

If Israel does agree to end the war in return for a full hostage release, it would be a major turnaround. Since Hamas' bloody Oct. 7 attack stunned Israel, its leaders have vowed not to stop their bombardment and ground offensives until the militant group is destroyed. They also say Israel must keep a military presence in Gaza and security control after the war to ensure Hamas doesn't rebuild.

Publicly at least, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to insist that is the only acceptable endgame.

He has vowed that even if a cease-fire is reached, Israel will eventually attack Rafah, which he says is Hamas' last stronghold in Gaza. He repeated his determination to do so in talks on Wednesday with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was in Israel on a regional tour to push the deal through.

The deal's immediate fate hinges on whether Hamas will accept uncertainty over the final phases to bring the initial six-week pause in fighting — and at least postpone what it is feared would be a devastating assault on Rafah, Gaza's southernmost town where some 1.4 million Palestinians have taken refuge.

Egypt has been privately assuring Hamas that the deal will mean a total end to the war. But the Egyptian official said Hamas says the text's language is too vague and wants it to specify a complete Israeli pull-out from all of Gaza. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to talk about the internal deliberations.

Trump calls judge 'crooked' after facing warning of jail time

AP ■ WAUKESHA

Donald Trump returned briefly to the campaign trail Wednesday and called the judge presiding over his hush money trial "crooked" a day after he was held in contempt of court and threatened with jail time for violating a gag order. Trump's remarks at events in the battleground states of Wisconsin and Michigan were being closely watched after he received a USD 9,000 fine for making public statements about people connected to the criminal case. In imposing the fine for posts on Trump's Truth Social account and campaign website, Judge Juan M. Merchan said that if Trump continued to violate his orders, he would "impose an incarceration punishment."

"There is no crime. I have a crooked judge. He's a totally conflicted judge," Trump said speaking to supporters at an event in



Waukesha, Wisconsin, claiming again that this and other cases against him are led by the White House to undermine his campaign. The gag order bars him from making public statements about witnesses, jurors and some others connected to his hush money case. Trump is still free to criticize Merchan.

The former president is trying to achieve a balancing act unprecedented in American history by running for a second term as the

presumptive Republican nominee while also fighting felony charges in New York. Trump frequently goes after Merchan, prosecutors and potential witnesses at his rallies and on social media, attack lines that play well with his supporters but that have potentially put him in further legal jeopardy. Trump insists he is merely exercising his free speech rights, but the offending posts from his Truth Social account and campaign website were taken down.

Merchan is weighing other alleged gag-order violations and will hear arguments on Thursday. Trump has often called this case and other criminal cases against him "election interference," saying they keep him from campaigning for the presidential election in November. Attendees agreed he is being unfairly prosecuted, contending the trial and gag order were designed to distract him. "It's a trial looking for a crime," said Ray Hanson, of

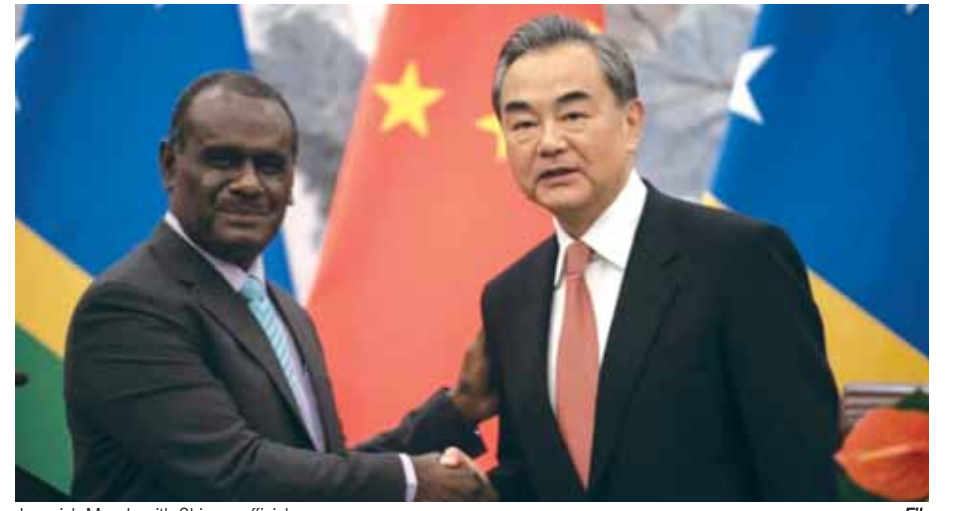
Hartford. Hanson said he expected Trump's lawyers would "keep him in line" so he doesn't violate the gag order, as much as he likely wants to talk about the trial. Manhattan prosecutors have argued Trump and his associates took part in an illegal scheme to influence the 2016 presidential campaign by purchasing and then burying negative stories. He has pleaded not guilty.

Trump's visits to Wisconsin and Michigan mark his second trip to the swing states in just a month. For the previous rallies, the former president largely focused on immigration, referring to people who are in the US illegally and who are suspected of crimes as "animals." Meanwhile, Democrats are hoping to remind voters ahead of these visits about Trump's position on abortion, which Trump has been openly concerned about being a political liability for him and Republicans.

Solomon Islands lawmakers elect former Foreign Minister as new prime minister

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Solomon Islands lawmakers on Thursday chose former Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manale as the new prime minister of the South Pacific island nation that has grown closer to China in recent years. The withdrawal of pro-Beijing former Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare from the contest to remain head of the government to make way for Manale as their party's candidate is an indication the country could follow a similar direction. The prime minister was chosen in a secret ballot of 49 lawmakers who won general elections on April 17. Governor General David Vunagi said Manale received 31 votes. Sogavare had hoped to become the first Solomons prime minister to maintain power in consecutive four-year terms following the election. During his previous term, China's influence increased more in the Solomons than anywhere else in the South Pacific.



Jeremiah Manale with Chinese official. File

Sogavare switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to Beijing and struck a secret security pact that has raised fears of the Chinese navy gaining a foothold in the region. Meg Keen, the director of the Pacific Islands program for

Lowy Institute, a Sydney-based international policy think tank, said Manale will be a "less fiery and combative leader for the West to manage but he will continue to pursue close relations with China." "As the former foreign min-

ister he helped broker the security deal with China that panicked the West. But he is also a seasoned diplomat with experience at the UN and in western countries — he's no stranger to western engagement," Keen said in an email.

Over 40% of Americans see China as enemy: Report

AP ■ WASHINGTON

More than 40 per cent of Americans now label China as an enemy, up from a quarter two years ago and reaching the highest level in five years, according to an annual Pew Research Center survey released Wednesday.

Half of Americans think of China as a competitor, and only 6 per cent consider the country a partner, according to the report. The findings come as the Biden administration is seeking to stabilise US-China relations to avoid miscalculations that could result in clashes, while still trying to counter the world's second-largest economy on issues from Russia's war in Ukraine to Taiwan and human rights.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen have both recently visited China in the administration's latest effort to "responsibly" manage the competition with Beijing. Despite those overtures, President Joe Biden has been

competing with former President Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee in November's election, on being tough on China. The Pew report, which is drawn from an April 1-7 survey of a sample of 3,600 US adults, found that roughly half of Americans think limiting China's power and influence should be a top US foreign policy priority. Only 8 per cent don't think it should be a priority at all. For the fifth year in a row, about eight in 10 Americans report an unfavourable view of China, the Pew report said.

"Today, 81 per cent of US adults see the country unfavourably, including 43 per cent who hold a very unfavourable opinion. Chinese President Xi Jinping receives similarly negative ratings," the report said. About eight in 10 Americans say they have little or no confidence in Xi to do the right thing regarding world affairs. About 10 per cent said they have never heard of him.

American attitudes toward China have turned largely critical after the US launched a trade war against China in 2018 and since the emergence of COVID-19, which was first reported in China.

Beijing's human rights record, its closeness to Russia and its policies toward Taiwan and Hong Kong also have left Americans with negative views of the country, according to Pew's previous analyses.

At the same time, the US government has been overt about competing with China on economic and diplomatic issues.

Following that, 42 per cent of Americans say China is an enemy of the US, the highest level since 2021, when Pew began asking the question. The share is much larger among Republicans and Republican-leaning independents, Pew said, with 59 per cent of them describing China as an enemy, compared with 28 per cent of Democrats and those leaning Democratic.

Norway to increase defence spending

AP ■ COPENHAGEN

The Norwegian centre-left government said on Thursday that it wants to add 7 billion kroner (USD 630 million) to the Scandinavian country's armed forces over the next 12 years amid increased tensions in the region. The announcement came on top of plans announced last month of a "historic increase" of 600 billion kroner (USD 54 billion) in the oil-rich country's defence budget over the same period.

"We must increase the operational capability of the Armed Forces," Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store, citing heightened tensions in the region as the reason for the boost.

Gahr Store said on Thursday that the combined budget increase meant that Norway would be able to reach NATO's goal of military spending of 2 per cent of each member country's GDP this year.

In 2024, the Scandinavian country's defence budget is expected to increase to 104 billion kroner (USD 9.4 billion). Finance Minister Trygve Slagsvold Vedum called it "a strong growth" and said it was "a necessary investment to strengthen our freedom".

Gahr Store heads a coalition that includes his own social democratic Labour party and the left-leaning Centre Party. He is expected to win support for the proposal in the 169-seat Storting assembly. No date for a vote was set.

On Tuesday, party leaders in the Norwegian parliament announced that the Scandinavian country was donating 7 billion kroner to Ukraine as part of a five-year support package. That comes on top of the 75 billion kroner (USD 6.8 billion) which Norway already has said it will donate, making it one of the world's biggest donors to war-torn Ukraine.

Georgia parliament cancels session after huge protests

AP ■ TBILISI (GEORGIA)

The parliament of Georgia cancelled its Thursday plenary session following massive protests against a proposed law that critics fear will stifle media freedom and endanger the country's bid for membership in the European Union. The parliament's announcement said the cancellation was connected to damage the building suffered during Wednesday protests in which police used water cannon, tear gas and pepper spray against the tens of thousands of demonstrators.

The legislature on Wednesday approved a second reading of the bill that would require media and non-commercial organizations to register as "pursuing the interests of a foreign power" if they receive more than 20% of funding from abroad. The third and final reading was expected in mid-May and it was not clear if the cancellation of Thursday's session would affect the bill's progress. The



ruling Georgian Dream party withdrew a similar proposal last year after large crowds protested. Protesters denounce the bill as "the Russian law" because neighboring Russia uses similar legislation to stigmatize independent news media and organizations critical of the Kremlin. Eighty-three of Georgia's 150 lawmakers approved the bill in its second reading, while 23 voted against it. Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, increasingly at

odds with the governing party, has criticized the bill and vowed to veto it if it is passed by Parliament. But the governing party can override the veto and ask the parliamentary speaker to sign the bill into law. The EU's foreign policy arm earlier this month also criticized Georgian Dream's decision to reintroduce the law, which it said "raises serious concerns" around media freedom in the country — something it called "crucial for the EU accession process."

New form of mpox that spreads easily found in Congo's biggest outbreak

AP ■ CONGO

Congo is struggling to contain its biggest mpox outbreak, and scientists say a new form of the disease detected in a mining town might more easily spread among people.

Since January, Congo has reported more than 4,500 suspected mpox cases and nearly 300 deaths, numbers that have roughly tripled from the same period last year, according to the World Health Organisation. Congo recently declared the outbreak across the country a health emergency. An analysis of patients hospitalised between October and January in Kamituga, eastern Congo, suggests recent genetic mutations in mpox are the result of its continued transmission in

humans; it's happening in a town where people have little contact with the wild animals thought to naturally carry the disease.

"We're in a new phase of mpox," said Dr. Placide Mbalakingebeni, the lead researcher of the study, who said it will soon be submitted to a journal for publication. Mbalakingebeni heads a lab at Congo's National Institute of Biomedical Research, which studies the genetics of diseases.

The lesions reported by most patients are milder and on the genitals, Mbalakingebeni said, making the disease trickier to diagnose. In previous outbreaks in Africa, lesions were mostly seen on the chest, hands and feet. He also said that the

new form seems to have a lower death rate.

In a report on the global mpox situation this week, WHO said the new version of the disease might require a new testing strategy to pick up the mutations.

With experts pointing out that fewer than half of people in Congo with mpox are tested, Mbalakingebeni said: "The risk is that unless patients themselves come forward, we will have a silent transmission of the disease and nobody will know."

Mbalakingebeni said most people were infected via sex, with about a third of mpox cases found in sex workers. It was not until the 2022 global emergency of mpox that scientists established the disease

was spread via sex, with most cases in gay or bisexual men. In November, WHO confirmed sexual transmission of mpox in Congo for the first time.

There are two kinds, or clades, of mpox, which is related to smallpox and endemic to central and west Africa. Clade 1 is more severe and can kill up to 10 per cent of people infected. Clade 2 triggered the 2022 outbreak; more than 99 per cent of people infected survived.

Mbalakingebeni and colleagues said they have identified a new form of clade 1 that may be responsible for more than 240 cases and at least three deaths in Kamituga, a region with a significant transient population travelling elsewhere in Africa and beyond.

2 years after SC draft leak, abortion consuming US politics and courts

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Two years after a leaked draft of a US Supreme Court opinion signalled that the nation's abortion landscape was about to shift dramatically, the issue is still consuming the nation's courts, legislatures and political campaigns — and changing the course of lives.

On Wednesday, a ban on abortion after the first six weeks of pregnancy, often before women realise they're pregnant, took effect in Florida, echoing laws in two other states. In Arizona, meanwhile, lawmakers voted to repeal a total ban on abortion dating back to 1864, decades before Arizona became a state. Also this week, the Kansas Legislature increased funding for anti-abortion centres, while advocates in South Dakota submitted the required number of signatures for a ballot measure to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution. The status of abortion in states across the

country has changed constantly, with lawmakers passing measures and courts ruling on challenges to them. Currently, 14 states are enforcing bans on abortion at all stages of pregnancy, with limited exceptions. Most Democratic-led states, meanwhile, have taken steps to preserve or expand access.

"Some of it's exactly what we knew would happen," said David Cohen, a professor at the Thomas R. Kline School of Law at Drexel University who studies abortion policy, "and others have been big surprises that have put, frankly, the anti-abortion movement on their heels".

Although more than 20 states have begun enforcing abortion bans of varying degrees since the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in June 2022, studies have found that the number of monthly abortions nationally is about the same — or higher — than it was before the ruling.

Asked to weigh in on the emotional debate, voters have supported the position favoured by abortion rights advocates on

all seven statewide ballot measures since then.

The Supreme Court's decision in the Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization case was released officially on June 24, 2022, upending nearly 50 years of abortion being legal nationwide. But the world caught a glimpse of it about six weeks earlier, on May 2, after a news outlet published a leaked draft. "With the Dobbs decision, the will of the people is now able to be adhered to," said Stephen Billy, vice president of state affairs for Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America. He said abortion rights supporters have amplified uncertainty in laws — especially over whether abortion is allowed in medical emergencies: "They've tried to sow political division just to advance their policy agenda," he said.

At the time Politico published the leaked draft, Amanda Zurawski was undergoing fertility treatment and was about two weeks away from learning she was finally pregnant.



Travel Across Enchanted Landscapes

At an exhibition celebrated as Earth Day last month we stepped into a world where art embraces nature, says SAKSHI PRIYA

Imagine wandering into a world where art reflects the vibrant spirit of nature, capturing its rhythmic seasons and climates with elan. This is the essence of 'Paradise Regained,' an exhibition at Palette Art Gallery which celebrated Earth Day with a stunning display of landscape.

In a harmonious blend of acclaim for nature and artistic mastery, the title of the exhibition draws inspiration from renowned English poet John Milton's epic poem by the same name; indeed, a fitting tribute to Earth Month in April. Curator Uma Nair explains the choice, stating, "April is Earth Month, and landscapes are the most important part of the Earth. 'Paradise Regained' thus becomes a powerful symbol, not only honouring the artistic legacy but also emphasising the critical role landscapes play in our world."

The exhibition featured works by 10 exceptional artists, each offering a unique perspective on the beauty and importance of landscapes. It was in fact a symphony of artistic interpretations. Each artist, with his or her unique style and vision, came together to paint a mesmerizing portrait of nature in all its splendour. Sanam Narayanan's work invites us into a fantastical realm. His paintings, meticulously crafted on canvas with rice paper as the base, depict houses adorned with Kerala's verdant foliage. The technique of pointillism is used to create a captivating sense of depth and detail, highlighting the soil conditions and the ethereal mist that seem to cling to the trees. This interplay of imagination and reality creates a truly magical experience.

Umesh PK's landscapes are



incomparable odes to nature's multilayered beauty. His brushstrokes transport us to a world where nature thrives, and constantly remind us of power to captivate. His pieces are a subtle testimony to the delicate balance between humans and nature, an a stark pointer to the connection we humans often tend to overlook or forget.

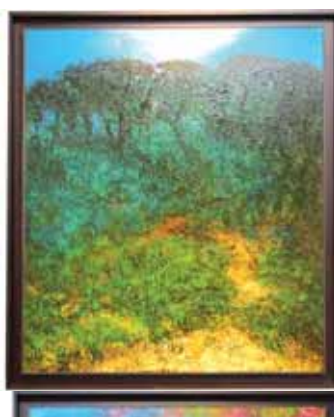
Paramjit Singh, a veteran artist with over six decades of experience, showcases his love for nature with vibrant oil paintings. His landscapes are pathways that draw the viewers in and invites them to explore a kingdom in which flowers reign supreme. Each piece reflects a lifetime dedicated to the artistic exploration of the natural world.

The beauty of 'Paradise Regained' is transcendental and is etched in one's memory beyond the initial visual impact. Each artist offers a window to his or her creative process and evokes artistic emotions through art. Sanket Viramgami's intricate miniature landscapes offer a glimpse into the future world, like postcards from an imagined future. Jyodip Acharyee presents a stark contrast

with his geometric interpretations of landscapes, offering a fresh perspective of familiar scenes.

Shaji Appukuttan transports viewers to the lush, tropical forests of Kerala, so lifelike they almost seem to breathe. His detailed artwork captures the essence of a vibrant ecosystem. Curator Uma Nair describes artist Prasad KP as "the greatest discovery" by the Gallery. His paintings, with pathways and figures amidst detailed landscapes, offer a deeper look as we move forward. Jayashree Chakravarty's work draws inspiration from Kolkata's Salt Lake region, translating its unique beauty onto canvas. Suresh Kamballur's work demands attention for not only depicting the magical essence of night, but for how he transforms it into a poetic dreamscape. Bathed in the soft glow of moonlight, his paintings capture the essence of nature with a touch of surreal beauty. The moonlight itself becomes a character and illuminates details with nature's signature writ large.

KP Pradeep Kumar delves into the realm of autobiographical landscapes. His paintings are not



just depictions of nature, they are reflections of his own lived experiences and emotions. In a conversation artist Pradeep Kumar described his artwork as a language that explores a multitude of themes; he emphasises that his art is a source of self-expression, a way to process his inner world. He finds freedom in creating art that resonates with him, hoping it will connect with others as well. He describes it as an "execution of my thought process into the painting," a freedom that allows him to explore his identity and translate his unique perspective onto the canvas.

Kumar emphasises that his artwork serves as a resource for him, a way to process and express his inner world. He finds a sense of freedom in the creative process, stating, "I never make art by keeping in mind that everyone would have to like it." His primary motivation is to create art that resonates with him, hoping it will connect with others as well.

Uma Nair's vision as a curator takes centre stage in 'Paradise Regained,' as her discerning eye for talent and craft come through in her exhibition that about the very essence of nature. Through an insightful walk-through, she acts as a guide, enriching the visitor's experience with each piece. Her discerning eye reveals every artist's inspiration and the deeper meaning informing their landscapes, allowing viewers to appreciate not just the art, but also the emotional depth that informs each piece of poetry. 'Paradise Regained' serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of appreciating and protecting our planet, each piece a masterpiece in its own right, offering visitors a chance to experience the wonder of landscapes through the unique lens of artistic expression. This exhibition is truly a celebration of Mother Earth where one can immerse oneself and draw lessons from the fact that Earth Day is not just another Day; it is a call for action for each one of us, every day, a chance to celebrate and protect the paradise we have been blessed with. Only by appreciating its beauty, understanding its complexities, and taking steps towards its preservation, can we ensure a healthier planet for ourselves and future generations.

Photos: Pankaj Kumar

AN ARTIST FINDS SOLACE IN NATURE

Ompal Sanswal's solo Exhibition JIVA reflects his unwavering commitment to preserve nature



BY SAKSHI PRIYA

Renowned for his exquisite artistry, National Award-winning artist Ompal Sanswal's solo exhibition, JIVA is a mesmerizing journey into the heart of nature. Featuring around 60 of Ompal's paintings, this marks his first solo outing after a hiatus of 15 years. Each piece of art in the gallery feels like a shower of rainbows, with every stage of colour highlighted, showcasing the artist's unparalleled skill and artistic vision. It serves as a poignant reminder of the beauty and importance of our natural surroundings, particularly as the world observed Earth Month last month.

Each artwork evokes a profound connection to nature, reminding us of the beauty that the artist has captured. It's akin to sitting in a peaceful forest, listening to the gentle chirping of birds—a hall full of paintings that truly lives up to the title of 'Meditations on Trees.' In his meticulously crafted paintings, the long roots and branches heavy with leaves take on various shapes, telling different stories—some mythological, others resembling human-like figures with eyes, nose, and mouth. Each painting reflects the deep bond between Ompal and his mother, evoking a sense of nostalgia and connection.

Curated by renowned art historian and scholar Uma Nair, the exhibition was hosted by Black Cube Gallery for its debut at Bikaner House. Uma Nair's eyes for art never fail to impress, showcasing each painting in its true essence, beyond mere visual appeal. Her ability to highlight the intricate details and deeper meanings embedded in each artwork elevates the exhibition to a whole new level. The timing of the exhibition during Earth Month in April adds to its significance. Sanya Malik, the director of Black Cube Gallery, has played a pivotal role in bringing this exhibition to life. Her keen eye for detail and her dedication to presenting Sanswal's paintings in the most captivating manner have truly enhanced the overall experience of 'JIVA.' As the world celebrates Earth Month, this exhibition serves as a poignant reminder of the beauty and importance of our natural surroundings.

The 'JIVA' exhibition is a heavenly experience, where nature, trees, animals, and humans are



Photos: Pankaj Kumar

The 'JIVA' exhibition by Ompal Sanswal is not just a collection of paintings but a profound reflection of the artist's soul and his deep-rooted connection with nature. Through his meticulous artistry, Sanswal transports viewers into a world where trees are not mere subjects but living beings, each with its own story to tell. His paintings, with their intricate details and vibrant colors, evoke a sense of tranquility and harmony, inviting us to contemplate our relationship with the natural world.

'JIVA' is not just an exhibition—it's a journey, a meditation, and a celebration of our deep-seated connection with nature. It urges us to cherish and preserve our environment for generations to come, echoing the artist's message of love and respect for trees and nature.

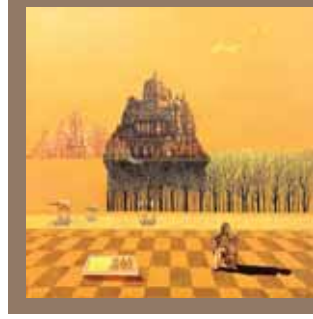
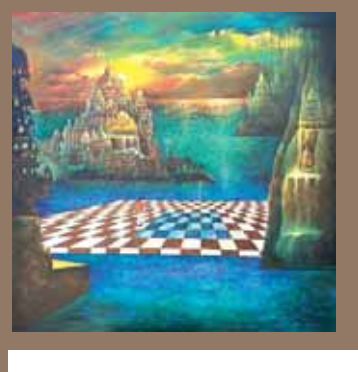
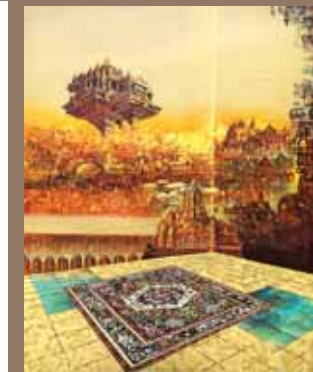
A SURREAL JOURNEY THROUGH TIME AND IMAGINATION

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

Step into a world where art tells stories, and dreams come to life. Kumar Vikas Saxena's latest exhibition, 'It makes me wonder,' is a magical journey through time and imagination. Each painting is like a window to a different world, inviting you to explore and discover. Drawing inspiration from history and culture, Saxena's art blends reality with dreams, that is unique and captivating.

'It Makes Me Wonder,' is a series of paintings that explores the human subconscious through a surrealistic lens. Each painting is a visual narrative of history and culture, seamlessly weaving together elements of the past and present, taking viewers on a breathless journey through time.

The well-balanced colours of yellow and brown, coupled with the rustic feel of the theme, evoke a sense of time travel to ancient civilizations. Saxena's solo exhibition is a historical and an immersive experience through a series of thought-provoking paintings. Each artwork feels like a pathway to a history book, every piece discovering its own historical



reflection of humanity, nature, and history. What sets his artwork apart is the combination of different architectural styles, his creations resonating with his love for ancient architecture. What sets Saxena's artwork apart is his ability to combine different

architectural styles, creating a harmonious blend that resonates with his love for ancient architecture. His paintings are not mere depictions of buildings; they are monuments to the human spirit, testaments to our capacity for greatness and our quest for meaning.

Saxena's childhood spent in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, where his home environment was full of art, is reflected in his solo exhibition. His love for nature, nurtured during his solitary moments in the lush pine forests of the mountains, is evident in every piece of art. Each painting captures the beauty of nature in the raw, a textured rawness that retains its innocence. Saxena's art is a tribute to his sense

of freedom. He does not believe in imposing his thoughts on his viewers, preferring instead to let them interpret his artwork in their own way. "I don't give titles to my paintings because I don't want to impose my thoughts," he says adding, "I want people to think whatever they want to think of my artwork."

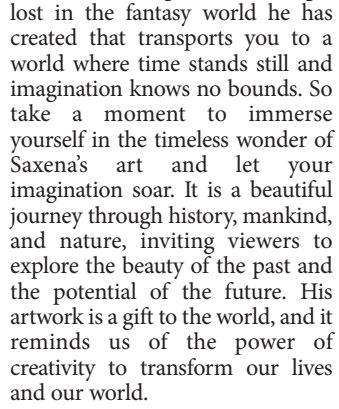
This approach has resulted in a body of work that is both personal and universal, inviting viewers to embark on their own journey of discovery. In a conversation the artist revealed that his main source of inspiration is his love for ancient architecture. "I love creating art that is mostly in a rustic form, which takes me into history whenever I go to any historic place," he says, emphasising that, "I want to live in that moment, as if I was there at that time."

He expressed a desire to create art that not only reflects the past but also speaks to the present and the future. His paintings are a testament to his belief that the future is built upon the foundations of the past, and he seeks to celebrate the timeless beauty of heritage while embracing the dynamism of progress. In the words of Kumar Vikas Saxena, "Every piece of art resonates with a dream within a dream, the mesmerizing art that allows us to get lost in the fantasy world. Each piece of artwork takes you on a journey to a fascinating

wonderland, a reality world that makes you think of the past and the future."

Saxena's exhibition is a testament to the power of art to inspire, provoke thought, and ignite our imagination. The exhibition showcases Saxena's excellence in creating a world that captivates everyone who views it, inviting them to lose themselves in his artwork. The paintings are evidence of his artistic vision, showcasing a world that seamlessly blends mankind's history and civilization with each artwork telling a unique story of balance between man and nature.

'It Makes Me Wonder' is a dreamlike experience, transporting viewers to a world that is both familiar and unknown. Saxena's works is a testament to his ability to create a sense of wonder inviting viewers to get lost in the fantasy world he has created that transports you to a world where time stands still and imagination knows no bounds. So take a moment to immerse yourself in the timeless wonder of Saxena's art and let your imagination soar. It is a beautiful journey through history, mankind, and nature, inviting viewers to explore the beauty of the past and the potential of the future. His artwork is a gift to the world, and it reminds us of the power of creativity to transform our lives and our world.



Balancing professional and civic duties

URVASHI RAUTELA has been in the limelight of late for the song 'Vigdiyan Heeran' with singer HONEY SINGH.

In a conversation with SAKSHI PRIYA, she reflects on the significance of a citizen's duty as a voter



You recently cast your vote. How important is it for celebrities to actively participate in the democratic process?

It is very important. I was the first person in the queue to cast my vote at 6:45 am to focus as it is our birthright, and similarly for responsible Indian citizen. At the same time as artists, we inspire today's generation, so it is very important for all of us to set a great and positive example. I feel the more youth participate in the electoral process, the better the result for our country and nation.

What challenges did you face breaking into Bollywood as an outsider, and how did you overcome them?

I believe people are familiar with my journey, including my background, the titles I have won, and my filmography. I feel the power and love of my audiences, which has made the entire journey great. I am grateful and blessed by the kind of love I have received on social media. I visited a

blind school in Uttarakhand for some Urvasi Rautela Foundation work, and the response was beautiful.

Vigdiyan Heeran with Honey Singh has generated a lot of excitement. What drew you to this project, and what can audiences expect from it?

Yes, it has received a lot of love. Even though the video was short, being a part of the legendary and cult song 'Love Dose', 'Vigdiyan Heeran' instantly became a hit the moment it was announced. It's a great track, part two 'Love Dose' after 10 years. There will be a part three as well as people love me and Honey's pairing. They have an emotional connection with us, and fans love us together. It's all about the love from the people

and the fondness for Honey Singh.

Theres a great back-and-forth energy between you and Honey Singh in the video. How was it working with him again?

My experience working with Honey Singh was amazing and fantastic. But I really want to ask Honey Singh about his working experience with me. Next time, I will definitely meet him and ask as I really want to know.

Finally, there is a lot of buzz about your stunning palace-like home in Uttarakhand, reportedly valued at Rs 25 crore. Why has it taken so long to complete? It is a beautiful property, and generally, amazing and beautiful things take time to build.

Whether it's a house, property, or even the Ram Mandir, it takes time to construct. It will be ready soon, and I will definitely do a housewarming soon.

As a public figure, you often face both praise and criticism on social media. How do you handle negative comments?

I don't let success get to my head, and I don't let negative comments affect me either. They are just momentary things for me. I believe in improving myself and keeping things simple. I focus on making myself better and don't really pay attention to negative comments.

Looking back at your journey so far, what would you say has

been the most defining moment of your career, and why?

This is a difficult question for me, but I believe there isn't just one defining moment. Meeting the Prime Minister of Israel stands out to me. I gifted him the *Bhagavad Gita* and had a two-hour conversation with him and my family. He is a very powerful political leader and one of the most influential people in the world. Additionally, being the youngest judge in the history of Miss Universe was another defining moment for me.

What are your thoughts on the current music scene in India, and how do you see it evolving in the future?

I believe that old songs had a different charm, and their lyrics were very meaningful. However, today, I feel more inclined towards old cinema and songs from the 80s and 70s. I think that era was great, and I prefer the music from that time.

How do you balance your personal life with your professional commitments, especially in an industry as demanding as Bollywood?

I believe it's all about balance. Despite the demanding nature of the industry, I try my best to balance my personal and professional life. For example, I recently voted and also made sure to spend quality time with my family.



KKR look to iron out flaws against off-colour MI

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Kolkata Knight Riders will look to iron out their flaws and get the better of a mis-firing Mumbai Indians when the two teams, placed on the opposite ends of IPL points table spectrum, clash here on Friday. With six wins in nine games giving them 12 points and the second position in the IPL points table, a berth in the playoffs looks within the grasp of two-time winners KKR. But the Shreyas Iyer-led side will have to find consistency across departments and avoid any slip-ups in order to make it to the final four. Each of their three losses have come in the last six games for KKR, who were at the receiving end of a record run chase by Punjab Kings but did well to bounce back with a seven-wicket thrashing of Delhi Capitals. With the bat, KKR's requisite firepower in the ranks entwined with an ultra-aggressive approach has delivered the goods more often than not but it is their bowling which needs improvement. Mitchell Starc has given nearly 12 runs an over while managing a mere seven wickets in eight outings. On flat, batting-friendly pitches, the

lanky Australian's lack of control has also been exploited well by zealous batters. Harshit Rana is among those with most wickets (11) for KKR this season but the right-arm seamer will serve a one-match ban for his animated celebrations after dismissing DC's Abhishek Porel. Vaibhav Arora's nine scalps in five games make him KKR's best bet with the ball. A small Wankhede Stadium with a batting-friendly wicket tends to encourage scores in excess of 200 and the team would be mindful of that. Spotlight will also be on Rinku Singh, whose exclusion from India's main squad for the T20 World Cup, has triggered an outpouring of sympathy for the 26-year-old. The power-hitter has not got enough game time this season which probably tilted the scales against him. For Mumbai Indians, the race to the IPL playoffs seems lost even though the five-time winners have five more games to play. Even if Mumbai Indians win each of these, they can only get to 16 points and somewhere in the middle of the points table - not necessarily challenging those who have been consistently good.



Jasprit Bumrah (14 wickets) and Gerald Coetzee (13) have been MI's best bets with the ball but despite their impressive showing, the batters' collective failure has resulted in the team's underwhelming season. Tilak Varma has been MI's best batter with 343 runs, including three fifties this IPL, but his performances have not been enough to hide the failings of others. Ishan Kishan has struck the ball well but severely lacks consistency at the top and losing wickets in heaps in the powerplay has been one of MI's biggest woes in this season. India skipper Rohit Sharma's (315 runs at strike rate of 158.29) selfless approach with the bat has not given him big scores consistently but his form will be in focus given the T20 World Cup is now just one month away. All eyes will also be on Suryakumar Yadav who has two fifties in seven IPL games this season, but it is not the consistency which is expected from the batter of his calibre. Mumbai Indians' under-fire skipper Hardik Pandya has neither dazzled with the ball nor the bat after a long injury lay-off. But the fact that he

finds himself in the Indian side as vice-captain for the World Cup should motivate him to turn things around.

TEAMS (FROM):

Mumbai Indians: Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan (wk), Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kwen Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Harvik Desai (wk), Nehal Wadhara, Luke Wood.

Kolkata Knight Riders: Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat (wk), Rahmanullah Gurbaz (wk), Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Varun Chakravarty, Sunil Narine, Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Gus Atkinson, Allah Ghazanfar, Phil Salt.

SRH pip Rajasthan Royals by a run

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Bhuvneshwar Kumar did the star turn with a sensational final over as Sunrisers Hyderabad pulled off a heist, stunning Rajasthan Royals by just one run in a last-ball thriller to keep their IPL playoff hopes alive, here on Thursday. Needing two to win off the last delivery, Bhuvneshwar (3/41) trapped Rovman Powell (27) with a full toss to leave RR stranded at 200 for seven while chasing a target of 202. Opting to bat, Nitish Reddy (76 not out) and Travis Head (58) produced explosive fifties, while Heinrich Klassen made an unbeaten 19-ball 42 to power Sunrisers Hyderabad to 201 for three. Things were looking up when Bhuvneshwar removed Jos Buttler and Sanju Samson for

third over when he carted Bhuvneshwar for two fours and a six. Jaiswal then blasted Marco Jansen for two boundaries after Cummins spilled a straight forward catch. Parag, who was dropped on 24 by Abhishek Sharma, hammered Cummins for another maximum, before carting Jansen for two more fours. Cummins finally introduced spin into the attack but Jaiswal smashed Shabbaz Ahmed for a four to complete his fifty. Three balls later, Parag produced a reverse sweep four to reach his milestone in 32 balls. Jaiswal then played a T Natarajan delivery onto the stumps, while two overs later Parag was holed out at long-on. Earlier, Head forged a 96-run stand off 57 balls for the third wicket with Nitish, who also added another 70 off 32 balls with Klassen to take SRH across the 200-mark for the fifth time this season. Head, who was dropped by Parag in the first ball of the innings, hit six fours and three sixes, while Nitish smashed eight maximums and three fours during his brutal assault. Playing his 300th game, Yuzvendra Chahal, who has been picked for the T20 World Cup, was on the firing line as he conceded 62 in his quota of four overs.



Avesh Khan (2/39) produced the first breakthrough, having Abhishek (12) caught at deep midwicket. Sandeep Sharma (1/31) then claimed a first-ball wicket, removing Anmolpreet Singh (5) as SRH scored 37 for 2 in the powerplay, their lowest this IPL. The spin duo of Chahal and R Ashwin (0/36), however, disappointed as the batters milked them for runs to set SRH on the road to recovery. Chahal had a horrible night as Head smashed him for two sixes and a four during an 18-run over after he came on to bowl immediately following the powerplay. The leg-spinner was then taken apart by Nitish, who plundered him for two sixes and two fours to accumulate 21 runs. Nitish, who also clobbered Ashwin and Avesh for two maximums, then sent Sandeep sailing over extra cover, while Head pulled Avesh for another six in the 15th over. The Australian, however, played the pacer onto his middle stump as SRH slipped to 131/3. New man Klassen then joined the party, sending Chahal into the orbit with back-to-back sixes. When Trent Boult was back, Klassen picked him for two fours, while blasting another six off Sandeep. Parag broke the shackles in

Füllkrug fires Dortmund to 1-0 win over PSG

AP ■ DORTMUND

Niclas Füllkrug scored and Borussia Dortmund earned a 1-0 win over Paris Saint-Germain in the first leg of their Champions League semifinal. Dortmund defender Nico Schlotterbeck sent a long pass over the top for Füllkrug to control brilliantly with his first touch before firing it past PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma with his next in the 36th minute on Wednesday. "It's not the first time that I've tried to stick the ball in at the near post this season. This time it worked out and I'm even happier that it's in such an important game," Füllkrug said. The win gives Dortmund a narrow advantage before the teams play again in the second leg in Paris next Tuesday, when the French champion will need to overturn the result if it's going to capture Europe's biggest prize before Kylian Mbappé leaves the club. PSG is under pressure to finally win to the Champions League to justify more than a decade of huge investment from its Qatari owners. Dortmund's win ensured it qualified for the tournament next season and it gives the Bundesliga five teams in the expanded tournament. Dortmund is assured of finishing at least fifth. Roared on by most of the 81,365 fans present, including the famed "yellow wall" behind one of the goals, Dortmund made the busier start and maintained its intensity for the whole game. The home team ran 119.7 kilometers - almost 10



more than the visitors. Defender Lucas Hernández went off injured after trying to stop Füllkrug from scoring. It looked like Hernández suffered a left leg injury. PSG pushed hardest early in the second half, when Mbappé hit the right post before Achraf Hakimi struck the left post. Gregor Kobel saved Mbappé's next effort and Dortmund survived the pressure. Füllkrug went on to miss further good chances for the German team, while Marquinhos made a crucial block to deny Julian Brandt late on. "It would have been nice if we could have made our counterattacks count to get a second goal at the end," Dortmund veteran Mats Hummels said. "But now we have to come through in Paris." The visitors missed chances, too.

Ousmane Dembélé should have scored on his return to Dortmund when he blazed a shot over late, then Vitinha flashed a shot wide of the left post. "We tried to keep the ball from them but it's so difficult because they have a lot of quality," PSG coach Luis Enrique said. "They are a great team on the ball and off the ball. Today in that environment they were great in both aspects of the game. I think we had maybe a lack of intensity in the first half, but in the second half we created clear, clear chances. But we couldn't score." Dortmund coach Edin Terzic only made his first substitution in the 83rd, when he sent on veteran Marco Reus for the exhausted Karim Adeyemi. The winner of the two-leg tie will play either Real Madrid or Bayern Munich in the final in London on June 1.

Real Madrid can clinch Spanish league title

AP ■ BARCELONA

Chasing another Champions League crown, Real Madrid already has its fingertips on the Spanish league title. The 14-time European Cup winner could clinch the Spanish league on Saturday when Madrid hosts Cadiz and Barcelona visits Girona if everything goes its way. Madrid can lock up title No. 36 with four games left in two scenarios: If Madrid beats Cadiz and Barcelona fails to beat Girona, or if Madrid draws with Cadiz and Barcelona loses at Girona. Madrid leads Barcelona by 11 points and has the tiebreaker with Barcelona in its favor entering the round. Madrid has been the runaway favorite since it beat Girona,



then its top challenger, in February and quashed a half-hearted rally by Barcelona in a clásico victory last month. With the domestic title apparently a question of time, Madrid's priority is its Champions League semifinal with Bayern

Munich. Madrid earned a 2-2 draw in Germany thanks to Vinicius Júnior's brace on Tuesday, Bayern comes to Madrid next Wednesday to decide who will face Paris Saint-Germain or Borussia Dortmund in the June 1 final. Led by Jude Bellingham, Vinicius and veteran midfielder Toni Kroos, Carlo Ancelotti's side has lost only once in 33 league games in this campaign. Ancelotti rotated his starting lineup for the last round where Madrid won at Real Sociedad, so it is likely that he will also rest some key players against a Cadiz side that is in danger of relegation. The team from southern Spain is in 18th place, inside the drop zone, and five points behind Celta Vigo, the last team clinging to safety.

WOMEN HOCKEY TEAM



Salima replaces Savita as skipper

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mid-fielder Salima Tete on Thursday replaced veteran goalkeeper Savita Punia as captain of the 24-strong Indian women's hockey squad for the Belgium and England legs of the FIH Pro League starting later this month. Navneet Kaur has been named her deputy for the tour. "I am happy that I have been appointed to lead the team. It is a big responsibility and I am looking forward to this new role. We have a strong squad and it's a mix of experienced and young players," Salima was quoted as saying in a Hockey India press release. "In the upcoming Belgium and England legs of the FIH Pro League 2023-2024, we look to put our strong foot forward. We have worked on areas where we needed to improve," she said. Savita had captained India during the failed Olympic qualifying campaign and the pro league matches at home after that. Barring three changes, the squad was the same that took part in the Bhubaneswar and Rourkela legs of the Pro League in February this year. Defender Gurjit Kaur, mid-fielders Sonika and Nisha and

striker Beauty Dungdung have been dropped and were replaced by Mahima Chaudhary, Manisha Chauhan, Pretti Dubey and Deepika Soreng. The matches in Belgium will begin on May 22 and end on May 26, while the England leg will commence on June 1 and conclude on June 9. India will play against Argentina, and Belgium twice during the first leg, starting May 22 against Argentina. During the London leg, the team will take on Great Britain and Germany. India are currently placed sixth in the FIH Pro League table with eight points from as many matches. Salima was recently honoured with the prestigious Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr Award for Player of the Year in the women's category at the sixth Hockey India Annual Awards. The goalkeeping responsibilities will rest with Savita and Bichu Devi Kharibam, while the defensive line-up includes Nikki Pradhan, Udita, Ishika Chaudhary, Monika, Jyoti Chhatra and Mahima. The midfield will be marshalled by Salima, Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Navneet, Neha, Jyoti, Baljeet Kaur, Manisha and Lalremsiami.

Alcaraz loses to Rublev in Madrid Open quarterfinals

AP ■ MADRID

Carlos Alcaraz's bid to win a third straight Madrid Open title ended with a three-set loss to Andrey Rublev in the quarterfinals. The second-seeded Spaniard got off to a good start but then was outplayed by the seventh-seeded Rublev, losing 4-6 6-3 6-2 at the Caja Mágica centre court on Wednesday. Alcaraz, who had already struggled in a three-set win over Jan-Lennard Struff on Tuesday, looked out of sorts and was mistake-prone toward the end. It was his first tournament after missing Monte Carlo and Barcelona because of a right forearm injury. The 20-year-

old Alcaraz had arrived in Madrid saying he would be happy to play three or four matches in the Spanish capital. Already in a hole in the third set, Alcaraz pressed the forearm during a stopover. He was wearing a long sleeve over the injured arm. "Today probably I felt more in the forearm than yesterday's match. I mean, playing three hours yesterday, I knew that I'm going to feel something or I'm going to think about it even more," the third-ranked Alcaraz said. "Playing someone like Rublev that I couldn't push him to the

limit in every point is tough," Alcaraz plans to play in Rome to continue his preparation for the French Open later this

month. "I'm going to go to Rome. I'm going to work to be close to 100% or in a good way to play Rome, but I'm going to decide these days. But I think I'll be OK," he said. "I have to work hard if I want to go to Rome with good feelings, without pain, without thinking about my forearm, but it's going to be a slow process, I guess. I have to be patient in that way." Alcaraz was trying to become the first player to win the clay-court tournament three straight times. He hadn't lost on Spanish soil since 2021. Rublev, seeking his second

ATP 1000 title after winning Monte Carlo last year, will play Taylor Fritz in the semifinals. The world No. 8 was solid from the start and overpowered Alcaraz with 30 winners. "The serve saved me a lot of times today," Rublev said. "The key was I was completely calm the whole match. I did not say one word, even if I was losing. That was the key and I was able to serve even better near the end. In the beginning, I was served by little, after set one, I served better and better and finished really well."

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