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OPINION 6 DYNAMIC CONTOURS OF ELECTORAL POLITICS

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LUCKNOW, TUESDAY MAY 7, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

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MUST WIN GAME FOR DC 12 SPORTS

Poll battle enters crucial Phase III

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

With stakes being high for the BJP which had won an overwhelming majority of these seats, including all in Gujarat, Karnataka, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, in the 2019 general elections, political bigwigs Union Ministers Amit Shah, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Mansukh Mandaviya, Parshottam Rupala Congress stalwart Digvijay Singh, to NCP's (Sharad Pawar faction) Supriya Sule and Samajwadi Party's Dimple Yadav are amongst several others from ruling and Opposition side who are in the fray for the voting to be held in 93 constituencies spread over 12 States and Union Territories on Tuesday in the third phase of Lok Sabha polls.



cash and freebies. Strict surveillance has been kept at sea and air routes. With the BJP bagging Surat unopposed, 25 seats in Prime Minister Modi's home State of Gujarat will go to polls on May 7, besides 11 seats in Maharashtra, 10 seats in Uttar Pradesh, the remaining 14 of the 28 in Karnataka, seven in Chhattisgarh, five in Bihar, four each in Assam and West Bengal, and all two in Goa. The Union Territory of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu (2 seats) and nine seats in Madhya Pradesh, including Betul where elections were deferred, will also go to polls on Tuesday and over 11 crore people will be eligible to vote. Campaigning for the third phase witnessed the

Constitution and reservation issue dominating the poll discourse. The stakes are significant for the BJP and its allies, which had, in 2019, won 75 of the 93 seats going to polls on Tuesday, while the INDIA Bloc parties had won only 11. Four seats had gone to the undivided Shiv Sena, two were won by independents, and one by the AIUDF. With the first two phases registering a dip in voter turnout as compared to 2019, the question is whether the third phase will buck the trend amid hot weather and heat waves in these States. After the third phase, voting will be completed in 283 out of 243 seats in the Lok Sabha. The

next four phases will be on May 13, May 20, May 25 and June 1. Counting of votes is on June 4. Jammu and Kashmir's Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seats were also to vote in the third phase of polling. However, due to several connectivity issues, the Election Commission of India rescheduled it to May 25. During the campaign, the BJP had to face the ire of the Kshatriya community over a remark made by Rupala in Rajkot. He had claimed several rulers from the community had "roti and beti" (marriage and trade) relations with the British and other foreign invaders. **Continued on Page 8**

LG recommends NIA probe against Kejriwal

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Troubles seem to be mounting for the jailed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal as Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena recommended National Investigation Agency (NIA) probe against the AAP chief for allegedly receiving political funding from the banned terrorist organisation 'Sikhs for Justice' to the Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday. The LG claimed that Kejriwal "has received a staggering amount of \$16 million in funding from Khalistani groups between 2014 and 2022."



The move comes a day ahead of the Supreme Court considering granting Kejriwal interim bail in view of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. The AAP chief, who is in Tihar jail, was arrested on March 21 by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with an excise policy linked money laundering case. In a letter to the Union Home secretary, the Lieutenant Governor's secretariat said Saxena had received a complaint that the Kejriwal-led AAP allegedly received USD 16 million funding from extremist Khalistani groups for facilitating the release of Devendra Pal Bhullar. "Keeping in view, the sensitivity and seriousness of the allegations levelled in the complaint, the LG has desired that the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, may consider referring the matter to the NIA for conducting comprehensive investigation into the matter," the letter to the Home Ministry read. Bhullar, who is in Amritsar Central Jail, was convicted in connection with the killing of nine people in a bomb blast in 1993 in Delhi. He was sentenced to death by a designated TADA court on August 25, 2001 and is undergoing life imprisonment after the Supreme Court commuted his death sentence. Reacting to the development, senior AAP leader and Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj called it "yet another conspiracy against Kejriwal at the behest of BJP". "They are losing all seven seats in Delhi and are rattled by the fear of defeat in Lok Sabha polls," he claimed, adding that the LG is the agent of BJP and the party had done something similar before also in Punjab elections. The complaint was filed by World Hindu Federation's National General Secretary Ashoo Mongia. **Continued on Page 8**



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with NDA candidates and leaders at a public meeting ahead of Lok Sabha polls in Berhampur, Odisha, on Monday

BJP's all-weather ally in Odisha faces Modi heat

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI/BERHAMPUR

Less than two months before the announcement of Lok Sabha polls, when the BJP and BJD were discussing an alliance in Odisha and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik received praise from Prime Minister Narendra Modi at public rallies, the latter asserted on Monday that the expiry date of the BJD Government in Odisha is June 4, the day when Lok Sabha and Assembly election results will be announced. Addressing his first election rally in the State, Modi said, "Odisha mein BJD ast hain, Congress past hai aur log BJP per ashwast hai. Sirf BJP ummido ka naya suraj ban kar ubhri hain (in Odisha, the BJD is setting sun, the Congress is battered and people are sure of BJP. And the BJP has emerged as the only ray of hope for the people)." BJD leaders expressed dismay and complete shock over the PM's 'sharp attack' on the

party, as well as Patnaik, who left no stone unturned to support the NDA in Parliament. In February this year, he sent Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw to the Rajya Sabha under the BJD quota. Patnaik also regarded the BJP with a tacit strategy, as it never aligned with the Congress-led Opposition alliance or any Third Front, which was proposed a year ago by several non-BJP parties to challenge Modi in the Lok Sabha polls. Both parties were working to forge an alliance after breaking ties 15 years ago, though they cooperated in tandem on legislative matters. In an apparent dig at Naveen Patnaik, the Prime Minister said, "Odisha needs a CM who understands Odia language and culture." "The BJP will form a double-engine Government here after the ongoing elections. The expiry date of the BJD

Government is June 4, 2024," Modi said at the Berhampur rally. When the talks were ongoing until they proved futile at the end of March, both Modi and Patnaik acknowledged each other's contributions, despite not being partners in Governments. The pact was formed in 1998, orchestrated by senior leaders Bijay Mohapatra and the BJP's stalwart strategist late Pramod Mahajan. In 1998 Patnaik was Minister of Steel and Mines in the Vajpayee Cabinet. "Naveen Patnaik always regarded the BJP as a party of late PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The alliance was successful and even when in between there were no trucks, the BJD was tacitly with the Opposition side," said a BJD leader also quoting Patnaik's reaction post Modi's speech. **Continued on Page 8**

Spotlight on Samajwadi Party's first family

VIRENDRA NATH BHATT ■ LUCKNOW

The stage is set for the third phase of elections in 10 Lok Sabha constituencies which will go to polls on Tuesday, with all eyes on the first family of Samajwadi Party founder Mulayam Singh Yadav who are in the electoral fray. While SP chief Akhilesh Yadav's wife Dimple is aiming to retain the Mainpuri Lok Sabha seat which she won in the bypolls following the demise of her father-in-law Mulayam, Akshaya Yadav, son of Ram Gopal Yadav, the national principal general secretary of SP, will try to reclaim the Firozabad seat, which he had won in 2014.



Besides, Aditya Yadav, the son of SP national general secretary Shivpal Singh Yadav, is making his electoral debut from the Budaun Lok Sabha seat which was represented by his cousin Dharmendra Yadav in 2014. The 10 constituencies in UP that will vote in the third phase on Tuesday are

Sambhal, Hathras (SC), Agra (SC), Fatehpur Sikri, Firozabad, Mainpuri, Etah, Budaun, Aonla and Bareilly. In the earlier two phases of elections, polling was held in 16 out of the total 80 Lok Sabha constituencies in UP.

Besides the Yadav family members, polling will be held to seal the fate of Union Minister SP Singh Baghel, UP Tourism Minister Jaiveer Singh, Minister of State for Revenue Anoop Pradhan Balmiki, Baghel, Jaiveer Singh, and Balmiki are

contesting from Agra (SC), Mainpuri, and Hathras (SC) Lok Sabha constituencies respectively. Rajveer Singh, son of former Chief Minister of UP and Bharatiya Janata Party stalwart Kalyan Singh, is looking to score a hat-trick from the Etah parliamentary constituency, which was also represented in 2009 by Kalyan Singh as a candidate of the Jan Kranti Party. In Bareilly, the main contest has narrowed down to the BJP's Chhatrapal Singh Gangwar and Praveen Singh Aron of the SP after the nomination paper of Bahujan Samaj Party candidate Master Chhotey Lal Gangwar was rejected. **Continued on Page 8**

Capital sees 67 per cent surge in wrong side driving prosecutions

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

A staggering surge of almost 67 per cent in the number of prosecutions for 'wrong side driving' was witnessed in the national Capital in 2024, during the period from January 1 to April 30, compared to the same period in the previous year. While in the earlier year, a total of 18,047 violators of traffic rules were caught by the traffic police in the city, the number saw a considerable jump, taking the total to 30,062 in 2024. A Delhi Traffic Police official said in response to the alarming increase in incidents of driving against the flow of traffic in the Capital city, the Delhi Traffic Police has launched a robust crackdown campaign to ensure road safety and discipline. "Over the past few months, there has been a noticeable surge in the number of vehicles violating traffic norms by

driving against the designated flow of traffic. This reckless behaviour not only endangers the lives of the offenders but also poses a significant threat to other road users, leading to a rise in accidents and traffic congestion," said the official. The police have intensified its measures in order to curb this dangerous practice. Special teams have been deployed across key intersections and thoroughfares to monitor traffic flow and identify violators. Strict legal action, including hefty fines and penalties, is being taken against individuals found driving against the established traffic direction," said the authorities. Further, top 10 traffic circles have been identified by the police with

Najafgarh area topping the list with 1,329 violators. Sarita Vihar stands at the second number with 1,333 violators, followed by 1,133 in Bhajanpura, 1,093 in Punjabi Bagh, 1,062 in Kalyan Puri, 1,056 in Kotwali, 1,041 in Dwarka, 998 in Sangam Vihar, 968 in Rajouri Garden and 966 in Kamla Market. "The Delhi Traffic Police has also conducted a comprehensive analysis of the top ten traffic circles with the highest number of challans issued in 2024. This study makes it possible to target enforcement operations to improve road safety and adherence to traffic regulations by identifying the areas with the highest prevalence of these types of offences," a senior police

official said. In a bid to raise awareness and make citizens understand the importance of adhering to traffic rules and regulations, the traffic police is collaborating with various stakeholders, including civic authorities and educational institutions. "Public outreach programmes, awareness campaigns, and educational initiatives are being conducted to instil a sense of responsibility and civic duty among all road users," the police said. Further, they urged citizens to prioritise safety and compliance with traffic laws while commuting on the city's roads. "It is imperative for every individual to respect traffic regulations, follow designated traffic flow directions, and contribute towards creating a safer and more orderly environment for all," the statement by the traffic police said.



Marine heatwave scorches pristine coral reefs of Lakshadweep

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

The vibrant corals of the picturesque Lakshadweep sea nestled in India's smallest union territory off the coast of Kerala are losing their sheen as it is experiencing prolonged marine heatwaves since late October 2023. These marine heat waves, characterised by extended periods of abnormally high ocean temperatures, have pushed the Degree Heating Week (DHW) indicator above

4 °C-weeks, posing a severe threat to coral health, said scientists at the ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) as they observed alarming levels of coral bleaching, indicating significant stress on marine ecosystems in the region. Coral bleaching occurs when the water temperature becomes excessively warm, causing corals to expel the microscopic algae residing within their tissues. Experts say bleached corals are not



dead but are at risk of starvation and disease. "Such heat stress levels signify

a severe threat to coral health, leading to extensive bleaching where corals lose the symbiotic

algae (zooxanthellae), compromising their survival by depriving them of essential

nutrients. If the DHW continues to rise, reaching beyond 12 °C weeks, it could

precipitate an unprecedented biodiversity crisis due to multispecies mortality," KR Sreenath, senior scientist at CMFRI, said on Monday. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), this level of DHW poses a substantial risk of coral bleaching, threatening the region's diverse marine ecosystems. Corals are living organisms that make up the reefs and provide the ecosystem for

marine life to thrive, especially fish. Coral reefs are a natural barrier, protecting these islands against the swelling of the seas, and keeping salt water out of the limited freshwater sources in the region. Shelton Padua, another senior scientist, identified the primary causes of these marine heat waves as excessive heat atmospheric transfer coupled with shifts in ocean currents, leading to unusually high water temperatures. **Continued on Page 8**

ICSE, ISC results: Keeping off social media was crucial

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

There was a considerable amount of enthusiasm amongst the students when the ICSE (Class 10) and ISC (Class 12) results were declared on Monday morning.



Solving last year's question papers is important. One should solve questions not only from the syllabus book but also from other books as well," she said, adding she kept away from social media all this while.

mantra is hard work and commitment. I am planning to do engineering." She also said that she kept away from social media while preparing for the exams.

Talking about his strategy for preparations, he said he consulted reference books and went by the notes given by the teachers.

edge," he said. He added that he wants to appear for CLAT. Meanwhile, the students of Colvin Taluqdars' College performed well in the ISC 2023-24 Board Examinations.

ment marks while Drishaan Trivedi bagged the fourth position with 91.7 per cent marks. Career Convent Girls' College Class 10 students Kaljal Rajpoot secured 90 per cent marks.

Toppers aspire to crack Civil Services exams

SHARMILA KRISHNA ■ LUCKNOW

The toppers of ICSE and ISC are aspiring to crack the Civil Services examinations. The students were euphoric after the results were declared on Monday morning.

according to a timetable. "I dedicated more time to subjects where I needed improvement and practised relevant questions, while revising those where I excelled," she explained.

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NOTICE

I have changed my name from AMEENUDDIN to AMINUDDIN S/O MUINUDDIN R/O 105/619.GANDHI PARK FAHIMA BAD, KANPUR UP

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Vidhi Kureley to Pranavi Kurele.Pranavi Kurele D/O Sanjay Kumar kurele. R/O 15/M/20 Dabouli kanpur nagar

NOTICE

I, Vinay Kumar Dwivedi S/O Govind Prasad Dwivedi Residence of Vill.- Khandehev, po. & thana Banthara, Disst. Lko, U.P. Due to lack of good conduct, I evict my son Anshum Dwivedi alias Vishmay, aged 26 years, address above from all my movable and immovable property.

NOTICE

I am Kharag bahadur Ex HAV-ILLDAR army no. 7122097 S/o late Shashi Ram address H.no.-9/486 sector 9 indira nagar Lucknow (PPO no.-S/Corr/6CPC/43954/2012) am from. In my army discharge book and PPO my wife age 1951 is marked which is wrong. Correct DOB is 16/04/1954. Please note the correct DOB 16/04/1954 in the discharge book and PPO.

NOTICE

Due to mistake in school records of my daughter miss Quamar Jahan my(mother's) name is written as Rehana Parveen whereas my correct name is Rehana Khatoun. Please correct accordingly. Mrs. Rehana Khatoun W/O Mr.Aftab Alam R/O Kadi Pura ,Mau Nath Bhanjan Distt.Mau Uttar Pradesh 275101

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Mohammad Israr Siddiqui To Israr Ahmad S/O Mohammad Husain R/O 11/26-C, Civil Lines Kanpur for future purpose

NOTICE

It is inform that my Daughter,s name is Keri Rajbhar is in my service record. But I want to change my daughter name Srishti Rajbhar in my service record. Now known as, Brijesh Rajbhar S/O Narotham Rajbhar Vill.-Pandey Atarkusha, Thana-Tarwa, Azamgarh Army No, 1702046P Rank, Sep Name Brijesh Rajbhar Unit 4 Corps Zonal Work Shop C/o 99APO misamari Assam.

NOTICE

I Adhija Mishra D/o Lalit Mohan Mishra, Vill. Lohcha, Pargana Haraha Tehsil & Dist. Unnao. Notify that my mother's name written in my BA LL.B mark-sheets as Manisha Mishra whereas her correct name is Garima Mishra. Manisha Mishra and Garima Mishra both are the names of one and same person.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from SHABANA JABI to SHABANA JABIN W/O AMINUDDIN FOR ALL FUTURE PURPOSE R/O 105/619.GANDHI PARK FAHIMA BAD, KANPUR UP

NOTICE

I have changed my daughter name from RIDHIMAA BHARTI to RIDHIMA TARUN BHARTI D/O TARUN BHARTI R/o-Villa No-1, Harmony 12/480, MacRobert ganj Kanpur Nagar-01. In future I would be known & recognise by this name only.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from Jaya Singh to JAY SINGH S/o Ram Nath R/o Ummer Kheda PO. Hafijabad Distt. Unnao for all future purpose

NOTICE

I have changed my daughter's name from MANYA TIWARI to MANIKARNIKA TIWARI and henceforth my daughter shall be Known as MANIKARNIKA TIWARI for all purposes. Ajai Kumar Tiwari S/o P.D.Tiwari R/O 109/31, Nehru Nagar, R.K.Nagar, Kanpur

NOTICE

I, Lal Bahadur Sharma S/o Ram Chandra, my property is Plot No. M/13/A.P.D. Nagar, Unnao Area 115.50 Sqmts., the original chain deed registered in S/R Office, Doc. No. 2405, dt. 02.06.2000 Unnao, was lost, I have not used the said sale deed in any financial institution. FIR/LAR No. 20240000355314 Dt. 06.05.2024

Information

My name is ASUTOSH SINGH and date of birth is mentioned as 12/02/2000 in Army records which is wrong. According to high school mark sheet and other records my correct name is ASHUTOSH SINGH and date of birth is 7/08/2000. This should be corrected and read. Ashutosh Singh son of late Raj Nayak Singh, village Madhukarpur, police station Lalganj, district Raebareli

Bank duped of ₹8 lakh

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A fraudster duped the State Bank of India branch office of over Rs 8 lakh by impersonating a businessman who purportedly had an account at the bank's Vikas Nagar branch.

Hosp owner alleges fraud by officials of tile company

LUCKNOW (PNS): A senior official, a representative, and two associates of a tile company have been accused of defrauding the owner of a hospital in Hasanganj of Rs 5 lakh on the pretext of supplying tiles.

The complainant, Moni Gaud of Thakurganj, who is a promoter and shareholder of the hospital, filed a complaint against the accused identified as Ashish Kumar Gupta (regional head of Somany Ceramics Limited), Punit Tiwari (company's representative), and Neeraj Agrawal, whose bank account received the fraudulently transferred money via NEFT.

December 20, 2023, to Neeraj Agrawal's bank account, expecting the goods to be delivered within 10-12 days," the complainant stated.

Impersonator arrested for extorting ₹85L from woman

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The cyber crime police arrested an accused on Sunday for digitally extorting Rs 85 lakh from a woman by impersonating a CBI officer and falsely accusing her of involvement in illegal activities.

psychotropic substance known as MDM. He then digitally "arrested" the woman by coercing her over the phone.

that the accused was apprehended at Mandakini Apartment in Gomti Nagar Extension, and that he admitted to the crime during interrogation.

Milk vendor killed in road mishap

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 45-year-old milk vendor was killed in a road mishap in Dubagga police station area on Monday morning. Reports said Ashraf of Dubagga was going towards Joggers' Park when a speeding tractor hit his motorcycle. He died on the spot. The errant driver took to his heels soon after the incident.

house in Jankipuram Colony in Gumbaha police station area on the intervening night of Sunday and Monday. The deceased, identified as Krishna of Sector H in the area, was found hanging from the ceiling with a saree tied around her neck.

crane driver fled the scene after the incident, CO Singh said, adding that the crane has been taken into custody and investigations are underway.

Prof Verma takes charge as acting VC of BBAU

LUCKNOW (PNS): Prof Neel Mani Prasad Verma assumed office as the acting Vice-Chancellor of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University on Monday, following approval from the University's Visitor, President Droupadi Murmu.

Sanjay Singh formally transferred the responsibilities to Prof Verma, who previously served as the acting vice-chancellor of the university from August 2018 to February 2019.

Rajnath underscores Sardar Patel's role in uniting India

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Defence Minister and Lucknow MP Rajnath Singh said here on Monday that every child in India knows that Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel played an important role in uniting India.

Speaking at a programme organised in Niralanagar, Singh said: "The India that you are seeing may not have been the same. There were some princely states not ready to merge. The result of Sardar Patel's policy was that India could become a united country."



people from every village of India. "All the governments have contributed to India's development in some way or the other but the kind of work done under the leadership of PM Modi has never been done before.

Today, when India speaks on international forums, the whole world listens," he said.

economy, but under the leadership of PM Modi, India has jumped 11 places to reach the fifth position. "Not only this, experts of economics also claim that India will soon be included in the world's top 3 economies.

He urged people to go out and vote on May 20. "By 2047, India will become a developed country. We want to make India a superpower not to attack or occupy any country but for the welfare of the world," he added.

Opposition echoing voice of Pakistan: BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI



The BJP on Monday highlighted a series of statements made by INDIA Bloc leaders that it said were against the nation's interest, as the ruling party accused the Opposition of echoing the voice of Pakistan and asked people to be wary of such "traitors".
BJP spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi cited Maharashtra Congress leader Vijay Wadetiwar's allegation that an RSS-affiliated police officer and not terrorist Ajmal Kasab killed the then anti-terrorism squad chief Hemant Karkare and former Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi's claim that the attack on IAF personnel in Jammu and Kashmir was a poll stunt to slam the party.
He cited five other instances, including Pakistani leader Chaudhry Fawad Hussain's criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and praise of Rahul Gandhi, and Farooq Abdullah's reference to Pakistan having nuclear weapons, to allege that these INDIA Bloc leaders are echoing the neighbouring country's stand.
What the National Conference leader has said is very "astounding, revealing and shocking" as so far only a few Pakistani leaders considered reckless or radicalised religious leaders have made such comments, he claimed.
Replying to a question related to Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir, the former J-K chief minister

had said that Pakistan is not wearing bangles and has nuclear weapons. Such remarks are also an insult to women, the BJP leader said.
Noting that Congress leader Shashi Tharoor has written a column in a Bangladeshi newspaper slamming Modi while analysing the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, Rajya Sabha MP Trivedi said while elections are being in India he is building public opinion in another country.
The Congress leader has also referred to the Valley as India-administered-Kashmir, he alleged.
One INDIA Bloc leader is giving "cover fire" to Pakistan on Mumbai terror attack, another is speaking about its nuclear weapon while somebody is describing the martyrdom of a soldier as a poll stunt, he said. Modi had said the Congress manifesto carried Muslim League's imprints, he noted, adding that every work spoken by its leaders echoed Pakistan's stand. The Left parties want the country's nuclear stockpiles removed, he said.

All these development are not merely a coincidence but a deliberate and dangerous experiment, Trivedi said. "In whose hands these leaders are playing," he asked, telling people to be wary of "traitors" hiding within the country. Various kinds of powers outside are attempting to halt the rise of a proud and confident India, he said.
At the press conference, the BJP leader also took a swipe at Rahul Gandhi over the recovery of a huge amount of cash from the house of a domestic help allegedly linked to the secretary of Jharkhand minister and Congress leader Alamgir Alam.
He said Rahul Gandhi speaks about doing an economic survey and dividing the country's wealth and the Enforcement Directorate's raid has shown the way assets are being divided in Jharkhand when so much of money, between Rs 20 crore and 30 crore, is with the help of a minister's PA.
After looking at so much amount of money, nothing is left to explain, he added.

VCs, scholars slam Rahul for varsity appointment claims

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI



As many as 181 academicians, including Vice Chancellors (VC) and former VCs, have accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of spreading "falsehood" regarding the appointment process for university heads and sought lawful action against him.
In an open letter, they said the Congress leader has alleged that vice chancellors are appointed solely on the basis of affiliation with some organisation rather than merit as they slammed his claims. The process by which VCs are selected is characterised by stringent and transparent rigorous procedure grounded in the values of meritocracy, scholarly distinction and integrity, they claimed.
Jawaharlal University Vice Chancellor Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit, Delhi University VC Yogesh Singh and AICTE Chairman T G Sitharam are among the academicians who have signed onto the letter.
The selection has been completely based on academic and administrative prowess and with a vision to take universities ahead, they said. Though they did not quote Rahul Gandhi's specific claims, the Congress leader has in the past alleged that affiliations with the Hindutva organisation RSS is often the guiding factor in appointments to academia.
Among the signatories to the letter are Vinay Pathak, VC, CSJM University, Kanpur, Bhagwati Prakash Sharma, Chancellor, Pacific University,

Udaipur, N C Gautam, former VC, Mahatma Gandhi Gramodaya Vishwavidyalaya, Chitrakoot, Alok Chakkarval, VC, Guru Ghasidas Central University, Bilaspur and Vinay Kapoor, former VC, BR Ambedkar National Law University, Sonapat.
Universities in India have undergone a significant transition as evident in their ascent in global rankings, prominent accreditations, world class research and innovations, curriculum facelift narrowing the industry-academia gap and higher placement prospects reaffirming their commitment to academic quality and societal relevance, they asserted.
They said, "The array of academic disciplines and professional experiences represented amongst us stands as evidence of the unbiased and inclusive nature of the selection procedure."
It reflects their dedication to cultivating an atmosphere that values and promotes diversity, encourages inde-

FIR against Nadda, Malviya in Karnataka over social media post

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI/BENGALURU



An FIR has been registered against BJP president JP Nadda, the party's IT cell head Amit Malviya and Karnataka unit chief BY Vijayendra in connection with a social media post allegedly intimidating members of SC and ST community not to vote for a particular candidate, police said on Monday.
On the other hand Congress alleged that professionals working for its social media department are being "harassed" and "intimidated" by police at the behest of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah.
The action on BJP leaders was taken following a complaint lodged by the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) with the Election Commission and police on Sunday alleging violation of model code of conduct, they said. They were booked under the sections of Representation of People Act and section 505 (2) (Statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes) of the Indian Penal Code, a senior police officer said.
In the complaint, the KPCC cited a video uploaded on the social media platform 'X' by the official account of Karnataka State BJP which, it alleged, is operated by Malviya, on instructions of Nadda, Vijayendra and Social Media incharge — Karnataka BJP, on May 4.
"The said video posted on social media featured animat-

ed characters of (Congress leader) Rahul Gandhi and (Chief Minister) Siddaramaiah. In the clip, the SC, ST and OBC community are portrayed as "eggs" in a nest and it also suggested Rahul Gandhi planting a big egg labelled as Muslim community. It is projected as though funds are being fed to the chick depicting the Muslim community, which then kicks out SC, ST and OBC communities," it alleged.
Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete alleged that people of the Congress' social media team are being "harassed". The opposition party's assertion came days after the Delhi Police's Special Cell arrested a national coordinator of the Congress' social media team for allegedly uploading and circulating online a doctored video of Shah.
"Professionals are being intimidated" at the behest of Narendra Modi and Amit Shah. These professionals are the people who chose the ideology of Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Bose and stood with the Congress.
The BJP is scaring those who chose truth and justice and rejected your false worship," Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete said.

Rapid infrastructure development aiding destination weddings in India: Ministry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI



The Union Tourism Ministry on Sunday said the rapid infrastructure development happening across the country, especially improvement in accessibility due to number of airports getting doubled in last few years besides improvement in digital and physical connectivity are aiding destination weddings across the world.
Speaking during the inauguration of First Wed in India expo at Rambagh Palace in Jaipur, Manisha Saxena (IAS) Director General, Ministry of Tourism, said along with cultural aspects of India the holistic development is a boon for destination wedding which also is a booster to the economy as well as employment.
An initiative of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, the 'Wed in India' expo is being organised jointly with Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan and

Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) alongside the Great India Travel. It is also supported by Hotel and Restaurant Association of Rajasthan (HRAR), Indian Heritage Hotels Association (IHHA) and Rajasthan Association of Tour Operators (RATO).
"With its unique blend of natural beauty and cultural traditions which can actually invoke magic in weddings, Rajasthan along with Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Haryana,

Kerala, and Goa are favourite destination for Wed-in-India. The Northeast is also fast emerging as a preferred destination especially the tea gardens of Assam, Darjeeling, Siliguri, Mizoram, and Manipur," Saxena added.
Citing the experience of one of the G20 Tourism Group meetings held in Goa during India's G20 Presidency, Saxena said, "We catered to all the ministerial delegates in a 500-year old house which keeps its 200 years old cutlery. India has several such kinds

of assets. We, in the Ministry of Tourism, are in process of documenting this repository of assets both tangible and intangible."
Delivering her address in the inaugural session, Gayatri Rathore, IAS, Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan said, "Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan is delighted to hold first ever 'Wed in India' expo. Rajasthan has long been a preferred destination for celebrity weddings due to its luxurious and opulent settings. The state's magnificent palaces forts and havelis converted into luxury heritage hotels provide a regal backdrop for extravagant celebrations.
Rajasthan's world-class hospitality, traditional cuisines and vibrant entertainment create unforgettable experiences for the couples and their guests. " Setting the tone of the expo, Chetan Vohra, Chair, FICCI Wedding Tourism Taskforce & Managing Director, Wedding

Line said, "Hospitality runs in the veins of every Indian and we were raised with one belief, to open our hearts and our homes to every guest as if they were God - something we call 'Atithi Devo Bhavo'. The Wed in India summit is a testament to our commitment in making this dream a reality," Dr. Jyotsna Suri, Past President, FICCI & CMD, Lalit Suri Hospitality Group said, "This expo is going to be a long way towards making it international. Besides Rajasthan, India has a lot of enticing wedding destinations which are equally beautiful and appealing."
Policymakers, key players from the tourism and hospitality industry and tour operators from over 50 countries are participating in the 'Wed in India' expo. Representatives of Tourism Boards from various states, including Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, too are participating alongside stalwarts from India's tourism, travel, and hospitality sectors.

Congress targets Modi Government over Chinese transgressions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI



The Congress on Monday targeted the Modi Government on the issue of Chinese transgressions, and asked whether it has "surrendered" thousands of square kilometres in Depsang and Demchok to China or is it still trying to return to the status quo ante before May 5, 2020.
On the fourth anniversary of the clashes between Indian and Chinese troops at Pangong Tso in eastern Ladakh that culminated in the fatal engagement in Galwan on June 15, 2020 in which 20 soldiers were killed, the Congress also asked the Prime Minister when he will take responsibility for the "abysmal failure" of his China policy.
"Has anyone been held accountable for India's biggest strategic and intelligence lapse in several decades," AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh asked in a post on X.

Posing questions to the Prime Minister, he asked, "Do you still believe your 19 June 2020 statement, made after 20 of our soldiers gave their lives in Galwan, that 'Na koi hamari seema mein ghus aaya hai, na hi koi ghusa hua hai' was a profound insult to our fallen soldiers and became the legitimisation of Chinese control over 2,000 square kilometres of land in eastern Ladakh."
Despite 21 rounds of military talks over four years, the situation remains unfavourable. Le's Superintendant of Police has clearly shown that our troops were unable to reach 26 out of 65 patrolling points that they could access prior to May 5, 2020, Ramesh claimed. China's aggressive build up and intrusions are not restricted to Ladakh, he said, adding that along Arunachal Pradesh, the Chinese continue to build forces and infrastructure that pose a direct threat to India's Siliguri Corridor, which connects northeast India with the rest of the country.

asked. Taking on Modi, he charged that, "The PM's clean chit to China four days later when he said 'Na koi hamari seema mein ghus aaya hai, na hi koi ghusa hua hai' was a profound insult to our fallen soldiers and became the legitimisation of Chinese control over 2,000 square kilometres of land in eastern Ladakh."
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Baghel, Gehlot appointed AICC senior observers for Rae Bareilly, Amethi constituencies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI/RAEBARELI



Congress on Monday appointed former Chief Ministers Bhupesh Baghel and Ashok Gehlot as AICC senior observers for Rae Bareilly and Amethi Parliamentary constituencies, respectively. Party leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra reached Uttar Pradesh to spearhead the campaign in Rae Bareilly and Amethi, and camp in these Parliamentary constituencies from Monday to ensure the party's victory in the two high-profile seats.
She met party workers in Rae Bareilly to bolster Rahul Gandhi's campaign from the family bastion. Rahul is pitted against BJP leader Dinesh Pratap Singh from Rae Bareilly. Rae Bareilly and Amethi will go to vote in the fifth phase of election on May 20.
Priyanka Gandhi will be holding hundreds of 'nukkad sabhas', meetings and door-to-door campaign programmes, the sources said. "The centre will be Rae Bareilly where she will be stationed at a guest house. From booth management to outreach, everything would be handled by her," the

source said. Strong foundations that Feroze Gandhi laid in Rae Bareilly were later nurtured and strengthened by his wife and former prime minister Indira Gandhi, who won the seat in 1967, 1971 and 1980, followed by friends and members of the Gandhi family. In Amethi, a non-Gandhi family member is in the fray after 25 years to take on incumbent BJP MP Smriti Irani. Irani had defeated Rahul Gandhi by more than 55,000 votes in 2019 in Amethi, while in Rae Bareilly Sonia Gandhi defeated BJP's Dinesh Pratap Singh by more than 1,67,000 votes. Sharma was the key person who had looked after the two prestigious constituencies and been a representative of the Gandhis in the two key seats.

Coast Guard detains Iranian fishing vessel with six Indians

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) detained an Iranian fishing vessel, with six Indian crew, west of Beypore off the coast of Kerala late Sunday, Defence Ministry said here on Monday adding the swift sea-air coordinated operation involved the ships and aircraft of the ICG.
After intercepting the boat, an ICG team boarded the vessel and thoroughly investigated it to check the involvement of any anti-national activity. Initial investigation revealed that the owner of the boat was an Iranian sponsor who had contracted these Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu, and issued them Iranian Visas for fishing off the Iran coast. The crew alleged that the sponsor ill-treated and deprived them of basic living conditions, besides confiscating their passports. The crew said that they had decided to escape from Iran to India using the same boat. The detained vessel was safely brought to Kochi on Monday for further investigation.

NTA dismisses reports of NEET-UG question paper leak

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI



Even as the National Testing Agency (NTA) on Monday dismissed reports of a question paper leak in the NEET-UG medical entrance exam as "completely baseless and without any ground" on Monday, the main Opposition Congress party criticised the BJP-led Centre over the incident, denouncing it as a betrayal of students' aspirations and an indication of the government's incompetence. Taking the Government to task on the issue, the Congress on Monday said this trend has been going on for the last 10 years and that is why unemployment and corruption in jobs are the biggest issues of this election. This criticism came in response to the NTA's assurance that every question paper had been properly managed and that images circulating on social media were unrelated to the actual exam paper.
"It has been ascertained from NTA's security protocols and Standard Operating Procedures that the social media posts pointing towards any paper leak are completely baseless and without any ground."
"To put rumours to rest, it is also stated that every single

question paper has been accounted for," said Sadhana Parashar, Senior Director, NTA. She added that no external person or agency can access the centres once the examination starts. "After the gates of the examination centres are closed, no one from outside is permitted access inside the halls, which are under CCTV surveillance."
However, taking the NTA clarification with a pinch of salt, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi said the news of the NEET exam

paper leak is a "betrayal" of the dreams of more than 23 lakh students and their families.
In a post in Hindi on X, Gandhi said, "Be it the students who dream of getting admission in college after passing 12th or the promising youth who are struggling for government jobs, the Modi government has become a curse for everyone."
"The youth and their family, who have been paying the price of the BJP government's incompetence for the last 10 years with the destruction of

their future, have now understood that there is a difference between speaking and running the government," he said.
Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra took the X platform to criticize the government. "Once again there are reports of a NEET paper leak. The future of 24 lakh youth of the country was again at stake. This trend, which has been going on with crores of promising youth for the last 10 years, is showing no sign of stopping. Will the Prime Minister of the country say anything about this?" she said.
Noting that a law against paper leaks was passed in Parliament, the Congress general secretary asked where that law is and why it is not applicable.
Congress general secretary, in-charge communications, Jairam Ramesh, said news of NEET paper leak has come to light in Bihar. "Apart from this, there have also been complaints from Rajasthan about wrong sets of question papers of NEET exam being distributed at the examination centres," he said.
"In the last 7 years, more than 70 papers have been leaked. Due to this, the future of more than 2 crore candidates has been ruined. Despite there being laws regarding

paper leaks in many states, papers are being leaked," he said.
Citing some examples, Ramesh said 3.75 lakh candidates had participated in the teacher recruitment examination in Bihar on March 15 but within a few days, the exam had to be cancelled due to paper leak.
"60 lakh candidates took part in the UP Police examination on February 17 and 18 February. On February 24, the Yogi government had to cancel the examination due to paper leak," he said.
Ramesh pointed out that one of the five 'Yuva Nyay' guarantees is 'Paper Leak Se Mukti'.
"Our laws will ensure the highest standards of honesty and fairness at every stage of the examination process -- from paper setting, printing, transportation, administration and inspection -- for paper-based and computer-based examinations," he said.
The entrance exam was conducted on Sunday at 4,750 centres in 571 cities including 14 cities abroad.
The NTA had on Sunday claimed that the distribution of wrong question papers at an exam centre in Rajasthan led to some candidates walking out with the papers. The agency had denied any leak of the question paper.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Holding up the mirror

The roots of Khalistani extremism in Canada run deep; S Jaishankar just made it public

In a recent critique of the Trudeau administration, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar accused Canada of granting visas to individuals linked to organised crime, despite warnings from New Delhi, while also legitimising extremism, separatism, and advocates of violence under the guise of free speech. Regarding the escalation of pro-Khalistani activities in Canada and the recent arrest of three individuals in connection with the killing of India-designated terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar, Jaishankar remarked that certain individuals have organized politically, influencing politicians to believe they hold sway over community support, thus carving out a space for themselves in the politics of democratic nations. This has been the Indian answer to Canadian charges of killing a Canadian Sikh on its soil. S Jaishankar has effectively retorted to the Canadian charges by saying that the Canada government gives visas to dubious people from India despite the Indian government's warnings. The roots of Khalistani separatism gained significant traction in the 1980s culminating in violence and the tragic events of Operation Blue Star and the anti-Sikh riots of 1984. The wounds inflicted during this period continue to fester, providing fertile ground for extremist ideologies to thrive, particularly among Sikh diaspora communities. Canada, with its sizable Sikh population, became a hub for Khalistani activists and sympathisers, offering refuge to those fleeing persecution in India while inadvertently providing a platform for the propagation of separatist ideologies. The liberal immigration policies and multicultural ethos of Canada provided a conducive environment for the Khalistani movement to gain momentum, with several prominent figures finding sanctuary and support within its borders. However, the issue transcends mere ideological sympathies and delves into the realm of organised crime and terrorism. Over the years, there have been numerous instances of Khalistani elements in Canada being implicated in activities ranging from fundraising for militant outfits to carrying out targeted attacks against perceived enemies of the movement. India has repeatedly raised concerns about Canada's perceived leniency towards individuals with ties to Khalistani extremism. Minister for External Affairs, S Jaishankar's criticism reflects India's growing unease over the role of certain segments within the Canadian establishment in enabling and even legitimizing Khalistani activities. He has done the right thing in showing the mirror to the Canadian government which had accused India of a Sikh Canadian on its soil. Canada, on its part, has taken some steps to address these concerns but the fact is Canada's Govt has been largely sympathetic to such elements. Only a couple of days back Khalistani slogans were raised in the presence of Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau. Canada must strike a delicate balance between upholding its commitment to freedom of speech and association while preventing its territory from being used as a staging ground for violence and terrorism.



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PICTALK



Polling officials travel via a boat to reach their respective polling booths, a day before the voting, in Kamrup. PTI

Dynamic contours of electoral politics

In a nation where election season seems perennial, the traditional distinction between campaign fervour and governance blurs into a continuous political landscape



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

The election season is here. The reaction to the statement could well be that election season is now almost there around the year. There are some elections in some parts of the country going on constantly. In short, almost every season has become an election season. It would be tempting to ask oneself if this is a good thing or a bad thing. It's normal to be judgmental in matters which appear to be significant. However, it would not matter which way the judgment goes because the judgment would not affect the actual run of the situation.

That may be another matter. However, the present election fever is unique in its type because it affects every part of the country and is not confined to a small region or another. The concern of the day is national rather than regional, as it often is. This makes the issues of national significance to figure out a choice in the fray. National issues could come up in many areas, such as defence, taxation, education and interstate movements. The special entry provisions that govern certain regions of the country, or indeed the kind of inter-regional transportation structure, including waterways, as it affects human movement, trade, or commerce. The list enumerated itself is loud and can be added to. However, it makes a basic point. The issues in this election are issues that cut across states, have pan-India bearings, or affect the identity of citizens in the country. All this adds to the exclusivity of the election. Conceptually, what has been set in the preceding few lines is correct.

But operationally, there are many other shades and colours. A dominant theme affecting these elections seems to be religion, whereas worship is always a private thing. In India, methods of worship have often served as a method of aggregation of identity. This is a particularly unique gift of the way independence was achieved in this country. No country in the world in the post-colonial era was ever partitioned based on religion, as India was, as a prerequisite for independence. How this helped anyone or any



cause is not quite clear. If the basis of partition was religion, there was something strange about one country proclaiming its identity to be one religion and another country emphatically proposing that it would not have any religious identity. That, however, was the choice of August, 14 and 15, 1947, by the two countries that brought into existence freedom, or more technically, the withdrawal of colonial rule. The British were particular in pointing out that they were giving back power from where they had taken it when they started the rule of then-unified India. The rest has to say is history. But post August 15, 1947, saw an experience throughout the subcontinent that was unique and has been termed by some historians as the 'unification of India'. There was a British India and a princely India. The British India territories would have elected government, yet the princely India would have their choice of secession to India or Pakistan. The rest, as they say, is history. Barring Multan, North West Frontier territory, Jammu and Kashmir, Junagarh and Hyderabad, the merger issues were largely smooth and without too much contention. Even the territories named above had a choice exercised sooner than what seemed most like-



THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN ELECTORAL PROMISES, THE ISSUES THAT WIN VOTES AND HOW THE ELECTED PARTY ACTUALLY GOVERNS AND IMPLEMENTS THEIR AGENDA ONCE IN POWER LEADS TO MANY UNEXPECTED AND PERPLEXING OUTCOMES

ly possible. The result was the emergence of a unified India and a unified Pakistan. Jammu and Kashmir remained the only state in which a deliberate contention was kept alive. Indeed, there was no contentious issue if the terms of the Freedom Act were followed, but in one way or another, the matter continues to evoke emotions, in a unique way, in several people. It is not just religion at play, there are several factors, including geopolitical ones. It is also possible not to recognize how the matter has been made increasingly complex by an unnecessary play of force, some of whom have no locus standee at all in the case. One would have thought that elections held at a national level, so often, so regularly and so fairly across the length and breadth of the country, would have rendered the whole issue of controversy in Jammu and Kashmir needless. Alas, that is not the case. Elections have a certain pattern in this country: give and take a few arguments here and there. However, choices have to be exercised and the numerical outcome of those choices determines how the country is governed. So the question arises as to what the net findings of the propositions thrown up as electoral issues are. In many states, local

issues seem to be inclined to determine the balloting that would take place for national representation. This appears to be the case, especially in Karnataka, Bihar, Manipur and some other states. The essence of the matter is that choices have to be exercised and the arguments of the choices need only to be commensurate in terms of the strength that the community appears to endorse in the legislature. It is worth remembering that, at the end of the day, once the election results are announced, there is no accountability for the correlation between how choices made on issues during elections will be exercised when the party concerned, which wins the election, administers the issue. It may well be said that elections as a process still await better mellowing and maturing to make them an internally consistent one. At the moment, it is satisfying to note that by and large, the process of exercising choices, its panning out in the legislature and its administrative implementation are increasingly becoming worthwhile efforts and, a coherent method of administering, sensibly, a large country, such as India. (The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

Climate startups: Innovative climate crisis warriors

Startups, pivotal in the shift to a net-zero future, can revitalise economies and communities while providing innovative solutions

Deus ex machina is a technique often deployed by writers to solve a seemingly hopeless situation by external, magical and often unimaginable intervention. It is debatable if Deus ex machina exists in real life, nonetheless, Startups being creatures with innovation, disruption and problem-solving in their DNA can offer faster, creative and localised solutions, for the increasingly hopeless real-world crisis of Climate Change. Be it a startup supplying an animal feed supplement that can cut down bovine emissions significantly, another one using Biotech and robotics technologies for developing GMO seeds and seaweeds that act as powerful carbon sinks, a climate tech company developing agro-forestry at a global scale or simpler everyday solutions that aim to greenify consumer finance or track individual efforts to reduce emissions, they can consolidate as a powerful force against climate change. World Economic Forum estimates that startups create value, nearly on par with the GDP of a G7 economy and the



OECD suggests that young firms create almost half of the new jobs, suggesting their burgeoning economic power and potential to create impact at scale. The race to net zero is propelled by energy and technology transition which on one hand is an opportunity for startups and a threat to local economies and livelihoods on the other. Take the case of coal being phased out; this might result in the currently bustling mining centres turning into silent junkyards. The modern world's triumphs in Silicon Valley or a Shanghai SEZ may guide the establishment of new climate innovation hubs. Brain port Eindhoven in the Netherlands is one such example showcasing the transition from conventional industries to futur-

istic setups. The questions on the proliferation of such a model 'Can' be addressed by a few suggestions of 'How': Blended Finance for Climate Innovation Hubs Practical experience suggests that 'Impact Capital' often expects social impact plus commercial returns. For startups social impact then becomes an additional responsibility and not an opportunity to improve margins or a business avenue to seriously pursue climate-positive opportunities over the long term. Blended finance can incentivise climate startups to agglomerate within the Climate Innovation Hubs. Monetising Sustainability — Startups should have opportunities to monetise their efforts on reducing emissions, either in the form of reduced taxes and lower cost of capital or claim premiums for climate-positive brand value. Reputation Capital — Unless climate-positive efforts are rewarded by markets in the form of valuations or additional capital or brand value, climate-positive behaviour will continue to be talk and no walk. Research &

Development (R&D) Support — While large corporations have reserves that can be deployed for R & D, startups have only access to highly demanding capital that usually funds sales for growth and rarely for investments for innovations (unless the startup is incubated in a technical university). While the existing carbon economy still grapples with the issues of just transition, the political economy of climate change signals shifts in geo-political equilibrium and technological leapfrogging in climate solutions is yet to emerge, startups as business organisations are only going to achieve greater proportions of power, prosperity and influence in the world. With focused support from policymakers, development finance institutions and international researchers, the global startup ecosystem can be geared up to take on threats of climate change head-on. Who knows we may have a Deus ex machina in the real world of climate change. The writer is a Chevening Scholar and an International Development expert; views are personal



SAIRAM SUBRAMANIAN

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SAFFRON: A BLOSSOMING OPPORTUNITY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Saffron cultivation: Replicate Poonch's success story," published on May 4, this is my response. The story of saffron cultivation in Poonch, Jammu and Kashmir, is not just about agriculture; it's a narrative of resilience and transformation. Ajaz Ahmad's journey exemplifies a shift from traditional farming to embracing the potential of saffron. His vision of Poonch becoming a saffron hub reflects the region's evolving agricultural landscape. However, challenges loom large. Environmental shifts, like erratic rainfall and untimely snowfall, threaten saffron production in Kashmir. Such concerns emphasise the need for sustainable farming practices and governmental support, not just in terms of subsidies but also in ensuring security and mitigating wildlife threats. Yet, amidst these challenges, saffron's allure persists. Its medicinal properties and premium market value make it a lucrative venture for farmers. With initiatives like the National Saffron Mission, there's hope for revitalising saffron cultivation and uplifting Kashmir's socio-economic fabric. As saffron blooms in Poonch, it signifies not just a crop but a promise of prosperity for the region. Virat Chatterjee | Pune

PROGRESS, CHALLENGES AND HOPE

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Narendra Modi introduces India to its Ashtalakshmis," published on May 4, this is my response. Reading about the political landscape and developmental challenges across India, especially in the neglected North East, evokes a mix of emotions. From the perpetual promises of politicians during election seasons to the persistent issues of floods, droughts and insurgencies, it's a reminder of the complex tapestry of our nation's journey. The failure to address fundamental issues like water scarcity and regional development highlights systemic shortcomings that transcend party lines. However, amidst these challenges, there's

Call for transparency



Apropos the news article, "Covishield's Shield in Question," published on May 5, this is my response. The unfolding saga surrounding the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine underscores a pressing need for transparency and accountability in vaccine distribution and oversight. Alex Mitchell's harrowing experience, alongside numerous others, sheds light on the gravity of poten-

tial side effects and the imperative of informed consent. As legal battles loom against pharmaceutical giants, questions mount regarding regulatory diligence and corporate responsibility. The admission of rare but severe side effects prompts reflection on the balance between vaccine benefits and risks. The petition, led by advocate Vishal Tiwari, encapsulates the public's demand for rigorous scrutiny and redress mechanisms. Calls for expert medical panels and a vaccine damage payment system underscore a quest for justice and safeguarding public health. Amidst the cacophony of voices, from grieving parents to sceptical netizens, one message resonates: transparency breeds trust. As the global vaccination campaign continues, robust surveillance, thorough investigation and proactive communication remain indispensable in navigating the complexities of vaccine safety. Arnab Reddy | Hyderabad

a glimmer of hope. The efforts made by the current government, particularly in the North East, show a commitment to inclusive growth and infrastructure development. Mod's North East Story sheds light on the transformative changes underway, offering a narrative of progress and resilience. It's heartening to see dynamic leaders and policymakers taking proactive steps to uplift these regions while preserving their unique cultural heritage. The book's portrayal of the North East's beauty and potential serves as an invitation for all Indians to engage with and support the holistic development of these often-overlooked states. Ishika Verma | Jaipur

BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Leveraging NCERT textbooks for CUET," published on May 4, this is my response. The Common University Entrance Test (CUET) stands as a significant milestone for students aspiring to secure undergraduate admissions in India. Amidst the rigorous preparation for CUET 2024, lever-

aging NCERT textbooks emerges as a strategic move. These textbooks, integral to classrooms nationwide, offer more than just academic aid. They serve as a robust foundation, aligning seamlessly with CUET syllabi and offering structured content presentations. From basic principles to advanced concepts, NCERT textbooks provide a roadmap. Their clarity, supplemented by visuals and practice exercises, enhances comprehension and problem-solving skills. Moreover, their standardised content ensures equitable access to quality education, levelling the playing field for CUET aspirants. To optimise CUET preparation, students should adopt a subject-wise study approach, leverage visual aids, prioritise practice and revision and supplement with additional resources. By harnessing the potential of NCERT textbooks, students can bolster their confidence and maximise success in the CUET 2024 Exam. Sanya Khanna | Chandigarh

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FIRST COLUMN

RETHINKING ECONOMIC GROWTH

Excessive consumerism contradicts our spiritual values ingrained in our heritage



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

The US economy is very often seen as the engine of the world economy, and that is why any sign of slowdown in the US raises serious concerns about harmful spillovers to the other economies. Any keen student of current economics would know well that the economic policies of America, especially during the last few years, have not worked well. In fact, the defeat of the most powerful leaders in the presidential elections that were held in the past few decades is attributed mainly to the failure of their economic policies which created many problems for the country. However, most people do not realise that the economic problems faced there, emanate not merely from wrong policies, adopted recently.

Their roots are hidden in some wrong economic, political and cultural concepts and the models built on them over a period of time. For example, the mounting unemployment and the huge foreign debts are not the phenomena that have sprung up overnight and the phenomenon of estimated 11.5% Americans, living in poverty, also has not arisen in the short period of only one or two years. The roots of their sad economic state go at least to as far a period as the end of the World War-II when they adopted a very lavish life-style and an utterly consumeristic attitude and built their economy on militarism, giant industries, transactional and multi-national business corporations, import of raw materials at cheaper rates from the undeveloped countries and export of their goods to such nations and economic capture of foreign markets through their multinational corporations. In short, they thrived on the basis of this economic system as long as other industrial nations did not come up strongly to stand up to them or the weaker nations did not stand up against



their economic exploitation or injustice. Nevertheless, their economic system was not, based on some morally sound and enduring economic principles. As mentioned earlier, it was based on commercialism, competition, consumerism and exploitation of weaker nations and on hot or cold war with an adversary nation, or on considering their nation as the strong military-man of the world, ready for hot or cold war. Now, when some other industrial nations have grown stronger, they cannot compete with them and have, therefore, to close down or to retrench workers as was done recently by many industrial giants. Also, now when there is no war—hot or cold—they are forced by economic reasons to sell their military hardware as they recently sold fighter jets to many Asian countries in order to keep the workers in employment. Their country has had either the ills of recession, or inflation, or heavy taxation, or it had to resort to deficit budgets, foreign debts, protectionist policies, etc. to keep the economy going. It would have, therefore, been appropriate if developing nations like India had learnt some lessons from the failures of the so-called developed models of economy and had, instead, kept in mind their own national ethos and ancient heritage which suggests that a right system of economy is one which is based on social justice, and on economising rather than borrowing and deficit-financing. We should also keep in mind our own national situation which necessitates national and regional self-sufficiency and affords opportunities of full employment to its citizens and promotes balance between rural and urban economy, equitable distribution of income and wealth and prevention of the growth of very wide disparities in income and wealth. We must remember that unbridled consumerism and commercialism and also large-scale borrowing are against the value-system which is embedded in our spiritual heritage and will, sooner or later, lead us to grave economic crisis. So, let us all learn to lead a life of simplicity and frugality and be honest and just to all.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)

Reimagining Tagore's educational philosophy



RAJDEEP PATHAK

Rabindranath Tagore, the polymathic Nobel Laureate from Bengal, is celebrated not only for his literary brilliance but also for his visionary ideas on education

Rabindranath Tagore (May 7, 1861 to August 7, 1941), the polymathic Nobel Laureate from Bengal, is renowned not only for his literary brilliance but also for his progressive ideas on education. His philosophy of education, rooted in the principles of creativity, freedom, and humanism, continues to resonate with contemporary educational discourse. In today's rapidly changing world, where traditional educational paradigms are being challenged and redefined, Tagore's insights offer valuable perspectives for reimagining education in a manner that fosters holistic development and meaningful engagement with the world.

At the heart of Tagore's educational philosophy is the belief in the innate creativity and potential of every individual. He envisioned education as a process of nurturing this inherent creativity rather than imposing predetermined knowledge. In his seminal work, "Siksha: Herok Ek Jibon" (Education: A Continuum of Life), Tagore emphasized the importance of cultivating curiosity, imagination, and critical thinking skills in learners. He advocated for an education system that encourages students to explore, question, and construct their understanding of the world, rather than passively receiving information.

Further, central to Tagore's philosophy of education is the concept of "Shantiniketan," or the abode of peace - and later Sriniketan - which he established as an experimental educational institution in rural Bengal. Shantiniketan epitomized Tagore's holistic educational philosophy, integrating intellectual, artistic, and spiritual facets of human life. Education transcended traditional confines, embracing nature, arts, and community involvement. Tagore emphasized fostering reverence for nature, aesthetic sensibility, and interconnectedness with all life. He advocated for intellectual development through imagination, free thought, and perpetual curiosity. This personalized approach prioritized holistic growth, including physical development through exercises, yoga, and sports, echoing Tagore's belief: "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence."

According to Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, "A teacher can never truly teach, unless he is still learning himself. A lamp can never light another lamp, unless it continues to burn its own flame". In his essay 'Ashram Shiksha' (Ashram's Teaching), Tagore extolled the virtues of patience in teaching, advocating that only those imbued with affection for their students deserve the mantle of a teacher. He rejected authoritarian teaching methods, viewing them as indicative of governance inadequacy. K M O'Connell (University of Toronto, Canada) had written that Rabindranath Tagore stands with the pioneering educators, like, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, and Dewey Malcolm Knowles, who have striven to create non-authoritarian learning systems appropriate to the surroundings.

Furthermore, Tagore's educational philosophy emphasizes fostering a love for humanity and advancing universal brotherhood through recognizing the interconnectedness of all beings and promoting empathy across cultures. Central to his approach is establishing harmony



HIS NOTION OF FREEDOM IN EDUCATION EMPHASISES LINKING NATURE, SOCIETY, AND LEARNERS EXPERIENCES. HE ADVOCATES FOR LEARNING IN NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS TO NOURISH BODY AND SOUL, PRIORITISE CREATIVITY, AND ENGAGE CRITICALLY WITH TRADITIONAL VALUES AND BELIEFS

between individuals, nature, and the divine. Tagore advocates for freedom in education to unlock individuals' inherent potential and stresses the significance of moral and spiritual development alongside academic learning. His vision aims at cultivating well-rounded individuals capable of selfless service and social integration, ultimately contributing to a conscientious and harmonious society.

In today's context, characterized by rapid technological advancements, globalization, and environmental challenges, Tagore's emphasis on holistic education is more relevant than ever. The prevailing thought on standardized testing and rote memorization (read learning) often stifles creativity and critical thinking, leaving students ill-prepared for the complexities of the modern world. Tagore's philosophy, instead, calls for a shift towards a more student-centered, inquiry-based approach to learning that empowers learners to navigate uncertainty, think critically, and adapt to change.

Tagore's educational philosophy, as elucidated in his essay "The Centre of Indian Culture," emphasizes the imperative for education to reflect and engage with the socio-cultural milieu in which it operates, asserting that genuine education must be attuned to its contextual realities to foster healthy growth.

This sentiment resonates in Sunil Banga's (Lancaster University Management School) analysis - in his paper "The global relevance of Tagore's cosmopolitan educational philosophy for social justice in a post-Westphalian world" published in Journal of Philosophy of Education (August 2023, Oxford) - which underscores Tagore's cosmopolitan approach to education as a potent instrument for social justice and equity in today's

world. Banga highlights Tagore's commitment to societal transformation through education, evident in his advocacy for women's empowerment, condemnation of oppression, and advocacy for India's independence (read freedom). Despite emerging from the colonial era, Tagore's philosophy remains pertinent, particularly his emphasis on education as a catalyst for moral and social development, aiming towards societal harmony and integration to address contemporary global challenges.

Moreover, Tagore's emphasis on the integration of arts, music, and literature into the curriculum offers a counterbalance to the narrow focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education prevalent in many educational systems today. Arts play a crucial role in fostering creativity, empathy, and emotional intelligence, which are essential for navigating the complexities of human relationships and societal challenges.

Sunil Banga underscores Tagore's educational paradigm as an early advocate of global interconnectedness. Tagore posited that education's primary objective was the attainment of self-realization, which he termed 'Atma Shakti,' wherein individuals harmonize with nature and society. Drawing from Hindu literature, Tagore envisions a 'universal man' embodying faith in universalism and humanity. He further advocates for personality development through arts and music, leading to a transcendent understanding of human nature. He contends that humans, upon achieving self-realization, unite with 'God' or 'Manav Brahma,' thereby becoming the 'complete man' and 'soul.' Rabindranath Tagore's educational philosophy underscores the integral role of education in fos-

tering connections between individuals and humanity while promoting holistic development.

In essence, at the heart of Tagore's vision of cosmopolitan education is the idea of freedom - freedom to engage critically with traditional values and beliefs; and freedom to imagine citizenship in a globalized world, that enables an exploration and negotiation of multiple allegiances in sympathy with others. His notion of freedom in education emphasizes linking nature, society, and learners' experiences. He advocates for learning in natural environments to nourish body and soul, prioritize creativity, and engage critically with traditional values and beliefs.

Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of education provides a compelling framework for reimagining education in the 21st century. His emphasis on creativity, freedom, holistic development, and social engagement offers valuable insights for addressing the multifaceted challenges of today's world.

By embracing Tagore's vision, educators can create learning environments that empower students to become compassionate, critical thinkers capable of shaping a more just, sustainable, and humane society and boosting students' morale.

On the occasion of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's 163rd Birth Anniversary, we may well reflect on his philosophy advocating for an education that transcends mere impartation of knowledge, rather instills a profound harmony with all existence. Revisiting Tagore's principles may serve as a guiding light for Indian educational institutions in this globalised age.

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

Vision for India: A State-led roadmap for effective governance

Amid India's socio-economic shift, Karthik Muralidharan's new book shines as a guide for the nation's trajectory

It was during the mid-1960s that I had a first-hand experience with Kochi, popularly known as the Queen of the Arabian Sea. Other than Kochi Port, the small aerodrome and the star hotel of yore years Sea Lord and Malabar, there was nothing attractive about the city. Scavengers carrying night soil collected from homes and hotels on their heads were the first sight that welcomed people during the daybreak. Some discernible changes are there in Kochi and other cities in the State. Scavengers are gone and their places have been taken over by cycle rickshaws with the hoarding "For cleaning septic tanks, please contact us..." In the hinterland, farmers wearing loin-cloths plough their farmland with bullocks



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

despite India being one of the largest manufacturers of tractors of all kinds. The mention of the word farmer brings to mind the images of loin-clothed men beating their bullocks to force them to plough the fields. You go to Madurai in Tamil Nadu, which the DMK touts as a role model of Dravidian development. What welcomes you to the small towns and villages are thoroughfares and

ring roads being used as public comfort stations by the residents. Dravidian leaders do not like the idea of Swachh Bharat and insist that their followers use roads, rivers and beaches as public toilets. It is in these contexts that a book for the economic and social development of India has hit the shelves. Karthik Muralidharan, renowned economist and Tata Chancellor's Professor of Economics at the University of California, San Diego, has authored a book "Accelerating India's Development - A State-led Roadmap for Effective Governance", a blueprint for the Comprehensive Development of India. Productivity, competitiveness, the number of jobs created and the skill of the labour force are

some of the most important ingredients of the economic growth of a country. It is for the Central and State Governments to generate enabling conditions for speedy economic and social development, according to Muralidharan. The author says that land, labour, capital, policies on taxation, bankruptcy, environmental regulation and promoting competition are the enabling services that ensure speedy economic and social development. Muralidharan, who has no love lost for the Modi Government at the Centre, says the present Central Government is always ahead in resolving issues that retard economic progress. "India's public discourse on growth

mainly focusses on Central Government actions to promote it, though many of the key issues above are in the domain of State Governments. It is critical to analyze and improve the effectiveness of State level actions for boosting productivity and job quality. State-led initiative and innovations followed by rapid replication of successful ones can play a key role in accelerating both growth and development in India," writes Muralidharan in the chapter "Jobs, Productivity and Economic Growth". What makes the book interesting is Muralidharan's call for improving job quality rather than job quantity. It is not the number of jobs created but the quality of jobs that determines the welfare of the people, says

Muralidharan. "A job is not just a source of income. It also provides identity, dignity and social engagement. With over 95 per cent of India's population relying primarily on labour income for sustenance, improving job quality will directly improve the welfare of hundreds of millions of Indians," says the economist. This is an open call to finish once-and-forever jobs like scavenging, ploughing the land with bullocks and other mean works. The earlier we introduce Artificial Intelligence and robots for such jobs, the better. Instead of using this technology to deceive the public with deep fake videos and political rivals, it would be better if we use this technology to uplift the status of jobs. Millions of Indians are reliant

on casual wage labour for sustenance. An average income earner supports 2.7 dependents. "This is why improving living standards in India depends critically on improving worker productivity and creating more high-quality jobs to generate higher, more reliable incomes," Muralidharan writes. The skill development programme initiated by the present government should be invigorated and made compulsory for students and school dropouts. The Agniveer scheme is an innovation that inspires the mind. One need not go to engineering colleges or medical colleges to emerge as a skilled professional in high-quality jobs. There is a severe shortage of electricians,

plumbers and mechanics with expertise in household jobs. Even as the central and State governments can increase the number of medical colleges, no stone should be left unturned in increasing the number of ITIs and technical schools. Equal priority should be given to increasing the agricultural productivity in which India lags behind China Vietnam etc. The situation is favourable to India. Skill development, Agniveer and increase in agriculture productivity should be implemented with full vigour. There is hope for India to become the world leader by 2047.

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

Maharashtra readies to witness ripple effect of Sena, NCP splits

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The ripple effect of a political tsunami caused by the dramatic splits witnessed in the Shiv Sena and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in June 2022 and July 2023 respectively — which spawned two new breakaway parties in the state — will be felt for the first time, as eleven constituencies go to polls in the third phase of the Lok Sabha elections in Maharashtra on Tuesday.

The third phase of LS polling is very crucial, considering that at stake are seven politically influential seats in sugar-rich western Maharashtra — Baramati, Solapur, Madha, Sangli, Satara, Kolhapur and Hattkanangle, two seats in coastal Konkan region — Raigad and Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg, and two seats from Marathwada — Osmanabad and Latur.

The mother of all electoral battles in Maharashtra is being waged between the prominent members of the Pawar family



-- Sharad Pawar's daughter and three-time MP Supriya Sule and his estranged nephew and deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar's wife Sunetra Pawar -- in Baramati Lok Sabha constituency. This is the first-ever occasion in the Maharashtra political history that the two members of the Pawar family are pitted against each other in an election.

Two scions of iconic Maratha warrior Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj -- Shrimant Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj and Shrimant Chhatrapati Udaynaraj Bhosale — are trying their luck in Kolhapur and Satara constituencies respectively.

Senior BJP leader, former chief minister and current Union Minister Narayan Rane, who is seeking election to the Lok Sabha for the first time from Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg, and veteran Congress leader and former Union Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde's daughter Praniti Shinde (Solapur) are two other prominent con-

Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) from the front, has addressed rallies in all the eleven poll-bound constituencies, while NCP chief Sharad Pawar — who wields considerable influence among the people in western Maharashtra, has covered a majority of the poll-bound constituencies.

The BJP has maximum stakes in the third phase of polling as it is contesting six out of the 11 poll-bound seats, while the NCP (Ajit Pawar) has fielded candidates in three constituencies and the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena is in the fray in two seats.

From the Opposition MVA side, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena is contesting a maximum of five seats, while the NCP (Sharad Pawar) and Congress have put up candidates in three constituencies each. This is the first major election being held after the vertical split in the Shiv Sena, which has thrown up a new Shiv Sena headed by chief minister Eknath Shinde, and

EC warns parties against misuse of AI to create deepfakes

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid rising number of manipulated or deepfake videos taking a centre stage in the Lok Sabha elections 2024, the Election Commission (EC) warned the political parties against misuse of Artificial Intelligence (AI) based tools to create deep fakes that distort information or propagate misinformation and directed the political parties to remove the video clips and other content "within 3 hours of coming to their notice", emphasising the need to uphold the integrity of the electoral process.

Recently, a political slugfest erupted over a doctored video of Home Minister Amit Shah and notices were served to 17 persons, including Telangana Chief Minister and Congress leader Revanth Reddy. Arun Reddy, who handled 'Spirit of Congress' X account, was arrested in connection with

Amit Shah's doctored video case. Besides, Shah, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Bollywood actors Aamir Khan, Ajay Devgan, Kajol, Rashmika Mandana and Ranveer Singh posted on certain social media handles were taken down and criminal complaints were filed.

Additionally, EC wrote to political parties detailing the provisions of laws against misuse of such tools and said, "In view of the existing legal provisions, amongst other directions, the parties have been specifically directed to refrain from publishing and circulating deep fake audios/videos, disseminate any misinformation or information which is patently false, untrue or misleading in nature, to refrain from posting derogatory content towards women, to abstain from using children in campaigns, to avoid depicting violence or harm to animals".

One killed in bomb blast in Hooghly day before Phase III polling

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

A teenager died and his two friends injured on Monday after a bomb they mistook as ball exploded at Pandua in Hooghly district of Bengal triggering war of words between the rival political outfits. The incident occurred a day ahead of the State going to the third phase of polling in four minority-dominated seats of North and South Malda, Jangipur and Murshidabad. Three boys suffered grievous injuries when the bomb exploded but one of them passed away at the Chinsurah Imambarah Hospital, police said adding one person had been arrested in connection with the blast. The conditions of the other two injured persons was also said to be critical.

Even as intense war of words ensued between sitting BJP MP Locket Chatterjee and the Trinamool Congress with the former staging a dharna at Chinsurah demanding the arrest of the culprits and alleging that the "TMC is readying its bombs to scare away the votes," State Trinamool Congress vice president Jaiprakash Majumdar said it was a BJP plot to disturb the rally of his party's general secretary Abhishek Banerjee who was to address a meeting in



Hooghly on Tuesday. Bombs were also recovered by the security forces at Jangipur and Sagarpara in Murshidabad district where two parliamentary constituencies were going to polls on Tuesday. The bomb squad of the state police defused the socket bombs that were kept in a field at Jangipur. At Sagarpara in Jalangi block the police defused another bag full of crude bombs likely to have been kept for use in the elections, sources said.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission had arranged for a massive security bandobast for the third phase of polling in four constituencies in two districts of Bengal.

While about 7.3 million voters were likely to exercise their franchise — in 7,360 polling

Mass resignation in Kargil NC unit over diktat to back INC pick

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The Kargil unit of the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference Monday tendered mass resignation from the primary membership of the party after the party high command issued a diktat to them to support the official candidate of the Indian National Congress from the Ladakh Parliamentary segment.

The Kargil Unit of the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference and the Congress had unanimously supported the candidature of the independent candidate Haji Haneeza Jan much to the chagrin of the party high command.

On Monday, Party President Dr Farooq Abdullah directed the Kargil unit of the party to support the INDIA bloc candidate - T Namgyal in the Lok Sabha election for the Ladakh seat. Dr Abdullah also told his colleagues that failure to follow this directive would be seen as a serious breach of party discipline.

Reacting swiftly, Additional General Secretary Ladakh Qamar Ali Akhooon conveyed the unit's decision to party

Poonch terror attack: ₹20 lakh bounty placed on two Pakistan terrorists

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Security forces combing the strictly forested belt of Surankote in Poonch for the last three days on released sketches of two suspected Pakistani terrorists, believed to be behind the attack on the Indian Air Force (IAF) vehicles, on Saturday. One IAF personnel hailing from Madhya Pradesh sacrificed his life while four others received multiple bullet injuries.

The security forces while circulating these sketches also declared a reward of Rs 20 lakh for those providing information on these two terrorists.

As per the latest intelligence assessment Sajid Jutt, a dreaded terrorist operating from Pakistan and PoJK, may have masterminded the terror attack ahead of voting for Parliamentary elections in the Anantnag-Rajouri constituency. According to the poster released in the frontier districts of Rajouri and Poonch by the local officers, "A group of two to three terrorists were behind the attack on the IAF convoy near Shahsitar area in Surankote on Saturday. Anyone who will give fruitful and reliable information about the whereabouts of these terrorists leading to their arrest will be rewarded and identity will be kept secret."

The officials have also provided four mobile numbers on which people can contact and share information. The numbers are — 9541051982, 8082294375, 9541051982, and 8082294375.

Meanwhile, a joint team of security forces continued massive search operations in Surankote and Mendhar for the third consecutive day chasing these hiding terrorists.

The army has pressed elite para commandos to hunt down these terrorists. Sniffer dogs are also embedded with the teams of foot soldiers conducting cordon and search operations in the area.

The Army is also maintaining aerial reconnaissance with the help of drone cameras. So far the team of investigators have gathered inputs about some of the over-ground workers (OGW) who may have provided food and shelter to these terrorists before the attack took place.

The sketches were prepared based on the inputs shared by some of these OGWs.

10 schools in Ahmedabad receive hoax bomb threats

PNS ■ AHMEDABAD

On the eve of Lok Sabha Elections in Ahmedabad, as many as 10 schools received an email on Monday threatening bomb blasts, though a police statement said this was a hoax as searches failed to unearth anything suspicious.

After being alerted, police as well as bomb detection and disposal squad, dog squad and Crime Branch teams reached these schools and conducted a thorough search, a statement by Ahmedabad City Crime Branch informed.

"No explosives were found during the search operation. Our teams are patrolling these areas and technical surveillance has also been initiated about the sender of the email. We appeal to people not to panic and to stay away from rumours. This threat was a hoax," the statement said.

Ignore this email (sent to schools) and exercise your voting rights tomorrow without any fear, it asked citizens. The schools that received the threat email included DPS and Anand Niketan in Bopal, Udgam School on SG Highway, Calorex School in Ghatlodia, Kendriya Vidyalaya at Chandkheda and Army Cantonment on Airport Road.

BJP's all-weather ally in Odisha...

From Page 1 "BJP and Modi are day dreaming to capture Odisha, how foolish," the leader quoted their CM which later went viral late evening.

Responding to Modi's claim, senior BJD leader and Naveen Patnaik's close aide VK Pandian said, "Patnaik would take oath as the Chief Minister of Odisha for the sixth consecutive time between 11.30 am and 1.30 pm on June 9."BJD-BJP alliance saw success in two Assembly elections and three Lok Sabha polls in Odisha. The partnership, forged in February 1998, enjoyed a strong foundation, with both parties successfully contesting Lok Sabha elections in 1998, 1999, and 2004, as well as Assembly elections in 2000 and 2004. The strategic

importance of Odisha, with its 21 Lok Sabha seats and 147 assembly seats, is not lost on either party. In the 2019 elections, BJD and BJP secured 12 and eight parliamentary constituencies and 112 and 23 Assembly constituencies, respectively.

The alliance could not materialise this year because for the Assembly elections which is being held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha, BJD was pushing for a larger share of seats, proposing to contest 105 out of the 147 available seats, leaving the BJP with 42 seats. Simultaneously, in the Lok Sabha polls, the BJP expected to secure a significant portion of the seats. Of the 21 Lok Sabha seats in Odisha pressed for 13-14. Once considered the BJP's most reli

Poll battle enters crucial ...

From Page 1 The current phase is important for Mulaym Singh Yadav's family, with Dimple Yadav aiming to retain the Mainpuri Lok Sabha seat. Akshaya Yadav, son of Ram Gopal Yadav, is contesting from Firozabad, and Aditya Yadav is making his electoral debut from the Budaun Lok

Sabha seat. In Madhya Pradesh where Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia and former State Chief Ministers Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Digvijaya Singh are in the fray. At stake is the political future of Scindia, seeking to reclaim the home turf Guna which he lost in 2019 when he was in the Congress.

In Maharashtra, the spotlight is on the high-stakes battle in Baramati, where Sharad Pawar's daughter Supriya Sule is pitted against Sunetra Pawar, wife of the veteran leader's estranged nephew and Maharashtra deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar.

Spotlight on Samajwadi Party's...

From Page 1 In the third phase, the Bharatiya Janata Party has given tickets to five new faces — Chhatrapal Gangwar from Bareilly, Durvijay Singh Shaky from Budaun, Anoop Pradhan Balmiki from Hathras (SC), Vishwadeep Singh from Firozabad, and Jayveer Singh from Mainpuri

Lok Sabha seat. The first four replaced Santosh Gangwar, Sanghamitra Maurya, Rajveer Singh Diler, and Chandrasen Jadaun. Jayveer Singh is the sole candidate in this phase who replaced a losing candidate from BJP.

The saffron party retained the winning candidates from Etah, Agra (SC), Aonla, and Fatehpur Sikri. It also gave a ticket to Parameshwar Lal Saini from Sambhal Lok Sabha seat. The Congress has fielded one candidate - Ramnath Singh Sikarwar from Fatehpur Sikri - while its INDIA Bloc ally, the Samajwadi Party, has fielded candidates in the remaining nine seats in this phase.

LG recommends NIA probe against...

From Page 1 "I am directed to forward a complaint dated 01.04.2024 (in original) received from Ashoo Mongia National General Secretary (World Hindu Federation India), along with printout of posts on platform 'X' (erstwhile Twitter), made by Dr Munish Kumar Raizada, former worker of Aam Aadmi Party, referred to in the enclosed letter and a pen drive as received," the letter stated.

The LG further said "the complainant has requested for a comprehensive enquiry into the allegations regarding funding of Aam Aadmi Party by Extremist group Justice

for Sikhs". The complaint is made against a Chief Minister and relates to political funding received from a banned terrorist organisation, the letter stated.

Claiming that Kejriwal received millions in funding for facilitating the release of Bhullar, the letter stated, "The complainant has referred to the contents of a video (in enclosed pen drive), purportedly featuring Gurbatwar Singh Pannun, (Khalistani terrorist and founder of banned organisation Sikhs For Justice), wherein he has alleged that AAP-led by

Arvind Kejriwal has received a staggering amount of \$16 million in funding from Khalistani groups between 2014 and 2022."

"It has also been alleged that a clandestine meeting occurred in 2014 between Kejriwal and pro-Khalistani Sikhs at Gurdwara Richmond Hills, New York. During the said meeting, Kejriwal purportedly promised to facilitate release of Devender Pal Bhullar, in return for substantial financial backing from Khalistani factions to Aam Aadmi Party," the LG claimed.

Troubles seem to be mounting for the jailed Delhi

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal as Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena recommended National Investigation Agency (NIA) probe against the AAP chief for allegedly receiving political funding from the banned terrorist organisation 'Sikhs for Justice' to the Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday. The LG claimed that Kejriwal "has received a staggering amount of \$16 million in funding from Khalistani groups between 2014 and 2022."

The move comes a day ahead of the Supreme Court considering granting Kejriwal

interim bail in view of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. The AAP chief, who is in Tihar jail, was arrested on March 21 by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with an excise policy linked money laundering case.

In a letter to the Union Home secretary, the Lieutenant Governor's secretariat said Saxena had received a complaint that the Kejriwal-led AAP allegedly received USD 16 million funding from extremist Khalistani groups for facilitating the release of Devendra Pal Bhullar.

"Keeping in view, the sensitivity and seriousness of the allegations levelled in the complaint, the LG has desired that the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, may consider referring the matter to the NIA for conducting comprehensive investigation into the matter," the letter to the Home Ministry read.

Bhullar, who is in Amritsar Central Jail, was convicted in connection with the killing of nine people in a bomb blast in 1993 in Delhi. He was sentenced to death by a designated TADA court on August 25, 2001 and is undergoing life imprisonment after the

Supreme Court commuted his death sentence. Reacting to the development, senior AAP leader and Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj called it "yet another conspiracy against Kejriwal at the behest of BJP".

"They are losing all seven seats in Delhi and are rattled by the fear of defeat in Lok Sabha polls," he claimed, adding that the LG is the agent of BJP and the party had done something similar before also in Punjab elections.

The complaint was filed by World Hindu Federation's National General Secretary Ashoo Mongia.

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The LG further said "the complainant has requested for a comprehensive enquiry into the allegations regarding funding of Aam Aadmi Party by Extremist group Justice for Sikhs".



Third phase of Assam polls to decide fate of 47 candidates in four seats

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The political fate of 47 candidates in four Lok Sabha seats will be decided on Tuesday when the third and final phase of the elections in the State will be held. Polling will begin at 7 am and conclude at 5 pm in the four constituencies — Kokrajhar (ST), Dhubri, Barpeta and Guwahati. All eyes will be on the prestigious Guwahati seat where both BJP and Congress have put up woman nominees — Bijuli Kalita Medhi and Mira Borthakur Goswami — respectively. The other prominent candidates are AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal who is seeking re-election for the fourth successive term from Dhubri, Congress MLA Rakibul Hussain, eight time Assam Gana Parishad legislator Phanibhushan Choudhury and CPI(M) MLA Manoranjan Talukdar. Barpeta has the highest of 14 candidates and Guwahati the lowest of eight in the fray while six women are contesting in the final phase. The BJP has put up only one candidate in this phase for the Guwahati seat, while its alliance partners AGP are contesting in two — Dhubri and Barpeta — and the UPPL in Kokrajhar. The Congress and the Voters Party International (VPI) are fighting in all four seats, while the BPF, the Trinamool Congress, Bharatiya Gana



Parishad, SUCI(C) and Republican Party of India (Athawale) are contesting in two each. The AIUDF, CPI(M), Gana Suraksha Party, Hindu Samaj Party, Assam Jana Morcha, National Road Map Party of India, Rashtriya Ulema Council, Ekam Sanatan Bharat Dal and Bahujan Maha Party are contesting in one seat each while 16 independents are also in the fray. A total electorate of 82.11 lakh including 41.27 men, 40.84 women and 112 belonging to the third gender will be eligible to exercise their franchise in 9,516 polling stations.

Polling will be held amid tight security with 60 companies of security forces deployed across the five constituencies. In Guwahati, held by the BJP, a direct contest is on the cards between BJP's Bijuli Kalita Medhi and Congress candidate Mira Borthakur Goswami, both debutants in Lok Sabha polls. The contest in Barpeta is expected to be triangular among NDA partner Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) candidate Phanibhushan Choudhury, CPI(M)'s Manoranjan Talukdar and Deep Bayan of the Congress. In Dhubri, 13 candidates are in the fray with AIUDF

strongman Badruddin Ajmal, seeking a fourth term, locked in a triangular contest with Congress MLA Rakibul Hussain and NDA partner AGP's Zaved Islam. In Kokrajhar (ST), a triangular contest is also on the cards among UPPL's Jayanta Basumtary, Congress' Garjen Mughahary and Bodoland People's Front's (BPF) Kampa Borgoyary. The sitting independent Kokrajhar MP Naba Kumar Sarania, representing the seat reserved for Scheduled Tribes since 2014, had filed his nomination papers which was rejected following the striking down of his Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. Assam Chief Electoral Officer Anurag Goel said that all arrangements have been completed for conducting the polls in a free, fair, safe and peaceful manner. In the first phase of polls held on April 19, 78.25 per cent of the electorate exercised their franchise to decide the fate of 35 candidates for the Kaziranga, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Sonitpur and Lakhimpur constituencies. In the second phase held on April 26, 81.17 per cent of the voters cast their votes to decide the fate of 61 candidates for Karimganj, Silchar(SC), Diphu (ST), Nagaon and Darrang-Udaluri. In the outgoing Lok Sabha, BJP held nine seats, Congress three, AIUDF and an independent one each from the state.

Polling in both LS seats in Goa today

PTI ■ PANAJI

More than 11 lakh voters are eligible to exercise their franchise in elections to both the Lok Sabha seats in Goa on Tuesday, where the Congress and BJP are locked in a straight fight. The coastal state has two Lok Sabha constituencies — North Goa and South Goa. "We are all ready with all the required facilities at polling stations. I appeal to all the voters to cast their ballots from 7 am to 6 pm," North Goa district collector Sneha Gitte said. The polling booths are set up as per the Election Commission's guidelines. Considering the hot weather conditions, voters will be provided refreshments and water at polling booths, she said. North Goa will see the BJP's sitting MP Shripad Naik take on Congress's Ramakant Khalap, while in South Goa, the saffron party has fielded entrepreneur Pallavi Dempo against Navy-veteran-turned politician Viriato Fernandes of the Congress. The South Goa Lok Sabha seat is currently held by Congress' Francisco Sardinha. Sixteen candidates, eight each in North and South Goa Lok Sabha constituencies, are in the fray. As per the data on the website of the office of Goa's Chief Electoral Officer, the state has 11,79,644 voters, including 5,80,710 in North Goa and 5,98,934 in South Goa, as on April 19. Of the total number of



voters, there are 5,71,617 men, 6,07,715 women and 12 members of the transgender community. Besides, there are 300 service voters, including 133 in North Goa and 167 in South Goa, the data stated. The run-up to the elections saw rallies by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah for the BJP, and the Congress roped in its senior leaders Shashi Tharoor and Pawan Khera for campaigns in Goa. A total of 1,725 polling stations have been set up across the coastal state, including 863 in North Goa and 862 in South Goa, state Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Ramesh Verma said in a media statement.

"Of these, 43 model polling booths have been identified in North Goa and 45 in South Goa. The move is aimed at streamlining the voting process and reducing the waiting time," he said. Medical camps will be held at eight model polling stations in urban areas where there is a higher percentage of elderly voters, Verma said. "After casting their vote, senior citizens can avail health checks by doctors from the Directorate of Health Services," he said. To empower women voters and promote gender equality, 40 dedicated polling stations, also known as 'pink booths', have been set up in both districts, the official said. "These polling stations will

be exclusively managed by women personnel, ensuring a safe and supportive environment for female voters to exercise their democratic right," he said. Verma said environment sustainability has been prioritised, and 40 'green' polling stations have been set up. "The eco-friendly booths are decorated using sustainable materials such as bamboo and coconut leaves sourced from local vendors, reflecting a commitment to reducing the ecological footprint of the electoral process," he said. Divyang polling stations have also been set up — five in North Goa and three in South Goa, he added.

Congress treated tribals as vote bank; BJP under Modi gave them respect: Arjun Munda

PTI ■ KHUNTI (JHARKHAND)

Union minister Arjun Munda on Monday claimed that the Congress and INDIA bloc converted tribals into "mere vote bank", while the BJP under Prime Minister Narendra Modi ensured that these people get due respect. Attacking the Congress, the former three-time Jharkhand chief minister claimed that the party believed that tribals who lived in jungles were criminals by nature and the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government first took interest in their welfare. "The Congress in its 60 years regime treated tribals as mere vote banks whereas the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is committed to ensure that they get due recognition and respect. This is why the Prime Minister chose Khunti to launch major schemes including a Rs 24,000 crore programme for PVTGs (Particularly

Vulnerable Tribal Groups) from Khunti," Munda said in an interview with PTI. Munda, Union tribal and agriculture minister, is contesting Lok Sabha elections from Khunti reserved seat that is identified with tribal icon Birsa Munda. In 2019, Munda won the Khunti LS seat, facing the problems of human trafficking, poverty, opium cultivation and Naxalism, with a slender margin of 1,445 votes, and is once again locked in a direct fight with Congress candidate Kalicharan Munda. "This is true that tribal society has been used as a vote bank only. There were no schemes, no policies for them. When their rights and systems were adopted later, Congress ensured that tribal issues came under the Home Department. They believed that those who resided in jungles were criminal by nature," he claimed. It was the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee

who took interest in their welfare and later Modi ensured justice to them, Munda said. He claimed the tribal society understood the game plan of Congress that it wanted to keep them away from development to reap the benefits of their innocence and now they are aware of their rights and understood who was working for them. "They will vote for BJP under a dynamic and visionary leader like Prime Minister Modi. We are confident to cross the 400 mark this time and in Jharkhand, we will win all 14 Lok Sabha seats irrespective of tribal or non-tribal seats," Munda claimed. To a question, he admitted that Khunti and Simdega are known for human trafficking, particularly of girls. "I have undertaken an innovative step to boost confidence and provide employment to girls here. I had initiated moves like learning while earning - a programme to ensure



employment for tribal girls. "I am happy that an unprecedented experiment is becoming successful as thousands of girls have been trained by Tata Electronics. Now mobile parts of mobile phones like Apple are being made by Khunti girls," he said. Massive horticulture initiatives are also being taken to bring youths engaged in drug trafficking and extremism to the mainstream, he said.

The minister said that despite witnessing record production of fruits and vegetables, Khunti is not able to reap the benefits as it lacks food processing units and market links. Munda said, "I admit that the eastern region lacks infrastructure and channelised agencies. The procurement of products from the region through minimum support price is also less. The governments in the past did not pay attention

to this. But we are now committed to ensuring a sound agriculture infrastructure in the belt for cash crops and horticulture so that these can be sent to the national market. Jharkhand will be accorded special attention." On lac and tussar silkworm cultivation, he said steps were being undertaken to promote these in national and international markets, while a large laboratory is being set up at Khunti under Honey Mission. On the opposition's promise to introduce MSP on all agro-produce, he said it may be a populist measure in the short term, but how much it will be beneficial in the long run is a matter of research. "They are promising this on the eve of this election whereas they were in power for 60 years. They would have done it long back," the BJP leader said. On the BJP's promise of providing ration for 80 crore people for the next five years,

he said "We have sufficient stock and there is no need for imports." Asked how confident he was of his win since the margin last time was only 1,445 votes, the minister said, "I accept the contest was close last time. But the people of Khunti are deciding the best for them." He listed the development measures that have taken place at Khunti, such as setting up Eklavya Model Schools and raising the number of students and teachers in existing ones. Hitting out at the JMM-led alliance in the state, Munda said that they deliberately delayed release of funds and implementation of central schemes to show the BJP in a bad light. Countering JMM-led alliance's accusation that funds were not released under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna and hence the state had to launch Abua Awas Yojan from their funds, he said the ground reality is different as

they failed to utilise Rs 5,000 crore funds properly for water supply. Likewise, the allotment of Adarsh Gram Yojana model project was pending for three years and was just released ahead of elections, he alleged. "Illegal transfer of tribal land is rampant in Jharkhand, it is a major issue and the state government should have checked it. Unfortunately, the former CM himself faces such charges of grabbing land," he said referring to an allegation against Hemant Soren. People have no sympathy for him, Munda claimed. On the INDIA bloc's accusation that the Centre has been using CBI and ED to harass opposition leaders, he said if they felt so, they could seek justice from the court of law. Munda attacked the state government for keeping control over sand, saying that it was a minor mineral and Gram Sabha has rights over minor minerals in the traditional system.

Congress dream to win elections on false promises will be shattered: Anurag Thakur

PTI ■ HAMIRPUR (HP)

Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur on Monday said the Congress leaders are living in a fool's paradise and their dream "to win the elections on false promises" will be shattered once the poll results are announced on June 4. The BJP leader also took potshots at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, saying he has forgotten his own slogan "daro mat" and running from one seat to another while fearing defeat in the Lok Sabha elections. "First he ran from Amethi to Wayanad and now he is contesting from Rae Bareilly and the Congress is sure to be wiped out from Rae Bareilly also," he told PTI. Thakur, who is contesting from the Hamirpur Lok Sabha seat, claimed that the people of the constituency were with him and his victory margin this time would be more than the previous margin of about four lakh votes. Thakur, a four time MP, expressed optimism that the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) would win more than 400 seats. Escalating his attack on the opposition, the BJP leader



said the Congress gave thousands of acres of India's land to foreign powers during its 60 years of rule. They gave Katchatheevu Island to Sri Lanka, while Prime Minister Narendra Modi strengthened the army in the past 10 years, he said. Thakur alleged the hand of foreign powers is clearly visible in the Congress manifesto. The limit was crossed when their evil eye fell on the ancestral property which belongs to your children and the Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge are yet to come out with a clarification on this issue, he said. Thakur further said the Congress leaders are spreading lies that the BJP would abolish reservation and the Constitution if it comes to power. "But the people of the country know who imposed the emergency and who changed the Constitution of the country 62 times," he said.

Shivaji descendant hopes to breach Pawar fortress in Satara

PTI ■ SATARA (MAHARASHTRA)

One is a descendant of Chhatrapati Shivaji underplaying that emotive connection, the other a close aide of NCP founder Sharad Pawar banking on the formidable leader. Both contestants vying to be MP from Satara say what matters is the common person and ground level issues such as jobs and education. The BJP has nominated Udaynaraje Bhosale, the 13th descendant of the Maratha warrior king, to take on former MLA Shashikant Shinde of the NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar). "I have never used Chhatrapati Shivaji's name in elections or in my life. I live in a democracy. If I am from that family, so be it. But I live as a common man," Bhosale told PTI. According to Shinde, voters in Satara want a common person to represent them. He is banking on Sharad Pawar, who remains a formidable political player and is still capable of checkmating rivals. "The new generation needs an industrial hub, better education, an IT park and health infrastructure. We have thousands of sugarcane farmers but the ban on sugar exports by the Centre has made them angry," he told



PTI. The parliamentary constituency of Satara, which goes to the polls in the third phase on May 7, derives its name from the seven forts in the area. It covers the assembly segments of Karad North, Satara, Karada South, Patan, Koregaon, and Wai. Satara has deep historical connections as the capital of the Maratha Empire under Shivaji. The region was also the site of many battles between the Marathas and foreign invaders. The past is glorious, the present troubling. Lack of jobs and poor industrial and educational infrastructure are key issues in the constituency, located in the state's sugar belt. Thousands of youth move to Pune or Mumbai for better education, say locals. In 2019, Bhosale won the Satara seat for the third consecutive time as a

candidate of the undivided NCP, but resigned within a few months and joined the BJP. In the ensuing bypoll, he lost as a BJP candidate to NCP's Shrinivas Patil. A photo of a rain-soaked Sharad Pawar, then 79, delivering a speech in Satara was said to have ensured Patil's victory and changed the NCP's fortunes in the Maharashtra assembly polls that year. A lot has changed since then, with NCP seeing a vertical split. One section of the original party, headed by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, is now a constituent of the BJP-led Mahayuti, which also has a section of the original Shiv Sena. Sharad Pawar, who now heads the NCP (SP), is a part of the opposition coalition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), which also comprises Shiv Sena (UBT) and Congress. Traditionally, Satara was a Congress stronghold, with Shiv Sena representing the seat for a few years. After Sharad Pawar broke ranks with the Congress and formed the NCP in 1999, it became his party's strong base. Bhosale, currently a Rajya Sabha member, rejected the suggestion that the Sharad Pawar factor might be behind his past victories. "I had won on my own

strength and not on anyone's name. You can ask anyone here. People ensured my victory because of the work I have done." He said he talks about the promises he has fulfilled when he meets people. "I have done work worth about Rs 10,000 crore in the last five years." The BJP's campaign in Maharashtra has been led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who draws massive crowds, and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. A few voters questioned the work done by NCP, expressing hope that Bhosale would be able to solve their issues. Many were reluctant to express their views. Most, however, agreed that Satara has a huge tourism potential due to its historical links though it is yet to be tapped. According to Shinde, a lot of the people from Satara are in the armed forces. "In some villages, every household has a member in the military. But no fresh recruitment is happening in the police or military. Our boys have no option but to enrol as Agniveers (who serve in armed forces for four years). So people are angry." Shinde represented the Koregaon assembly constituency in Sangli district in 2009 and 2014 as a member of the undivided NCP.

There will be jungle raj in country if INDIA Bloc comes to power: Shah

PTI ■ SAMASTIPUR (BIHAR)

There will be 'jungle raj' in the country if INDIA bloc partners - Congress and RJD - are voted to power, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said here on Monday. He also claimed that cash recovery in Jharkhand proves INDIA bloc leaders are corrupt. Addressing an election rally in favour of senior BJP leader and Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai, in Bihar's Samastipur district, Shah said, "The latest recovery of Rs 30 crore and more from the house of a minister in Jharkhand proves INDIA bloc leaders are corrupt." He also said, "If they come to power, there will be a complete 'jungle raj' in the country as well as in Bihar." Notably, the Enforcement Directorate on Monday claimed to have recovered a huge amount of "unaccounted" cash during searches at the premises of a domestic help allegedly linked to the secretary of Jharkhand minister Alamgir Alam. "Who will be the PM of the INDIA bloc? Will Sharad Pawar be the prime minister? Will Mamata Banerjee become (the PM) or MK



Stalin or Uddhav Thackeray? I will take another name. Please don't laugh. Can Rahul baba become the PM?" Shah said. He also alleged that leaders of the RJD and the Congress did not attend the consecration ceremony of the Ayodhya Ram temple because of vote bank politics. RJD's Lalu Prasad and Congress always opposed the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya, he claimed. Shah also said Congress has always opposed reservation to backward classes. Sarairanjan block comes under the Ujainpur Lok Sabha constituency where Rai is seeking reelection. Rai, who is the NDA nominee, is pitted against RJD's Alok Mehta, who is the candidate of Mahagathbandhan, the prototype of the INDIA bloc in Bihar.

Rublev overcomes fever and praises doctors after winning Madrid Open for the 1st time

AP ■ MADRID

Despite sleepless nights struggling with a fever, Andrey Rublev found a way to fight back and win the Madrid Open for the first time. Rublev was feeling sick all week but rallied to beat Felix Auger-Aliassime in three sets on Sunday and clinch his second Masters 1000 title. Rublev won 4-6, 7-5, 7-5 after Auger-Aliassime double-faulted on the last point of the final at the clay-court tournament in the Spanish capital. "I would say this is the most proud title of my career," Rublev said. "I was almost dead every day. I was not sleeping at night. The last three, four days I didn't sleep." Rublev gave "full credit to the doctors," who were "doing some tricky things" just to make sure he could play. "I have no words," the eighth-ranked Rublev said. "If you knew what I had been through in the past nine days you would not imagine that I would be able to win a title."



The 26-year-old Russian won his first Masters 1000 title at Monte Carlo last year. Auger-Aliassime was playing in his first final at this level. Rublev entered Madrid on a four-game losing streak after early exits at Indian Wells, Miami, Monte Carlo and Barcelona. One of his victories in

Madrid came in the quarterfinals against home-crowd favorite Carlos Alcaraz. He now has 16 career titles, and two this season after Hong Kong in January. He had arrived with a 5-1 record against Auger-Aliassime, including a win in their sole matchup on clay.

Auger-Aliassime's path to the final saw second-ranked Jannik Sinner withdraw because of an injury ahead of the quarterfinals, and Jiri Lehecka retired against the Canadian in the first set of the semifinals. Other injuries hit the men's draw in Madrid, starting with Novak Djokovic's withdrawal before

the tournament. Daniil Medvedev retired in the quarterfinals, while Alcaraz was hampered by a sore right arm and Rafael Nadal bowed out of what was likely his last appearance in his home country. Iga Swiatek won the women's title for the first time in her career on Saturday.

Klopp keeps the drama going to end as Liverpool beats Spurs 4-2

AP ■ LIVERPOOL

The smile is back on Jurgen Klopp's face - even if his Liverpool players seem intent on testing his nerves right to the end. The Premier League title may be all but beyond the Merseyside club, but that doesn't mean the drama is over for Klopp, who will step down at the end of the season.

Last week he was arguing on the sideline with Mohamed Salah as Liverpool effectively dropped out of the title race. And while Salah opened the scoring in a 4-2 win against Tottenham at Anfield on Sunday, it was Harvey Elliott who appeared to bring the broadest smile to Klopp's face with a wonderful long-range goal in what looked like being a cakewalk for Klopp's team. "What a goal," the Liverpool manager said. "In the game you only see it flying in and I thought, That was a good shot. The goal I saw afterwards, there was not a lot of space left or right. It went exactly where it should be. Top goal."

Elliott's strike, after goals from Salah, Andy Robertson and Cody Gakpo, fired Liverpool into a 4-0 lead before the game had even reached the hour mark. What followed was the unlikely of fightbacks from Spurs that might have made this another frustrating day in what has ultimately been a disappointing finale for Klopp at the end of nearly nine trophy-filled years.

Goals from Richarlison and Son Heung-min made it a much closer contest than it had ever looked like being. And it needed two outstanding saves from Alisson, a goal-line clearance from Joe Gomez and a VAR call to prevent it from being closer still. "It's a little bit of a mirror of the season. Really, really, really good until we were really rubbish and then, we were okay again," Klopp said. A nervy finish didn't stop the home fans from beckoning Klopp to produce his trademark post-match triple fist pump to the crowd after his penultimate home game in charge, with Feyenoord coach Arne Slot set to take over next season. Mathematically, at least, it is not over for third-place Liverpool, which sits five



points adrift of leader Arsenal with two games remaining. But, in reality, a late-season slump has killed Klopp's hopes of walking away with a second Premier League crown of his reign. His team had been heavily rebuilt over the past two seasons and was not expected to contend at the top so soon. But this season at one point offered Liverpool the hope of a quadruple of trophies. Now it feels like it is ending on an underwhelming note.

Still, Klopp, who delivered the English League Cup in February, will walk away from a team that is on the up and leave his successor with plenty of young talent to work with. The 21-year-old Elliott is a prime example and he showcased his ample potential with an assist and a goal as Liverpool threatened to run riot. His perfectly placed curling cross provided Gakpo with the simple task of heading in Liverpool's third and then he swept an unstoppable shot from around 20 yards (meters) into the top corner and beyond Tottenham goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario. "Harvey is exceptional. Still so young. So exceptional," Klopp said. "In the midfield position, it was probably one of the top three performances from him today. The goal was exceptional. Everyone needs moments to gain more confidence. It was a good moment. That helps definitely."

VILLA SLIPS: A bad week for Aston Villa got worse after a surprise 1-0 loss at Brighton. Unai Emery's team lost 4-2 at home to Olympiakos in the first leg of their Europa Conference League semifinal on Thursday. And on a day when it could have secured its

place in next season's Champions League, it suffered another setback when Joao Pedro headed home a rebound in the 87th after seeing his penalty saved by Robin Olsen. Only Spurs' loss at Anfield prevented it from being a bigger blow after the result at the Amex Stadium had given Ange Postecoglou's team hope in its pursuit of Villa in fourth. But Villa still missed out on the chance of making certain of a top-four finish.

CHELSEA ROUTS WEST HAM: Chelsea's troubled season could still end on something of a high after Mauricio Pochettino's team boosted its chances of European soccer next season with a 5-0 rout of West Ham. The win at Stamford Bridge moved Chelsea up to seventh in the standings and two points behind sixth-place Newcastle. Only the top six teams in the Premier League will be guaranteed a place in Europe next season.

"We need to keep this momentum and belief going," Pochettino said. While Chelsea's exorbitant spending under U.S. Owners Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital was supposed to put the 2021 Champions League winner back in contention for the biggest prizes, qualification for Europe would represent progress after finishing in the bottom half of the table last year and another season of struggle this term. After a morale-boosting 2-0 win against Tottenham on Thursday, Chelsea followed it up by thrashing West Ham. Nicolas Jackson scored twice in the second half after Chelsea had raced to a 3-0 lead by the break through goals from Cole Palmer, Conor Gallagher and Noni Madueke.

Mbappé plays his final CL game in Paris with PSG; defence back in spotlight

AP ■ PARIS

Mbappé plays his final CL game in Paris with PSG. But it's the defence that is back in the spotlight. No doubt Kylian Mbappé will be greeted with loud cheers and applause when he takes to the Parc des Princes pitch on Tuesday night. It will be his final Champions League match in the French capital in a Paris Saint-Germain shirt. Mbappé is leaving the club this summer after a seven-season stint, hoping the journey concludes with a Champions League triumph in Wembley on June 1. But first things first, as Mbappé tries to engineer a fightback in the second leg of their semi-final against Borussia

Dortmund, trailing 1-0 from the first leg in Germany last week. The France striker was a disappointment in the first leg and PSG now expects a strong reaction from the club's all-time leading scorer to overturn the deficit, especially after he failed to score in his last two appearances against Dortmund. "We're confident we'll come back from that score and qualify for the final," Mbappé said on Sunday, as quoted by French media. In support of Mbappé, PSG has plenty of firepower upfront, with Ousmane Dembele, Bradley Barcola, Goncalo Ramos or Randal Kolo Muani available. Coach Luis Enrique has more worries in defence after former



Bayern Munich defender Lucas Hernandez was ruled out for the remainder of the season with an anterior cruciate ligament rupture that required surgery. The injury was a tough blow for PSG, which has conceded 14 goals in the competition this season but finally stabilized the heart of its defence with the pairing of Marquinhos and Hernandez. After Hernandez came off injured last week against Dortmund and was replaced by Lucas Beraldo, the Brazilian substitute's lack of experience was obvious. Luis Enrique will, however, have to consider giving him a starting role or put his trust in

Milan Skriniar, who is back from injury and lacks both competition and rhythm. Another option would be to pair Danilo Pereira with Marquinhos to add strength and presence in the air, particularly on Dortmund's set pieces. Solid defending will again be crucial for PSG, which faces a team with great attacking qualities and 11 different scorers on the European stage this season. The winner will play Real Madrid or Bayern Munich in the final in London. The old rivals drew 2-2 in their semi-final first leg in Germany. PSG, which enjoyed a rest day over the weekend after wrapping up the Ligue 1 title, has never won Europe's top club competition.

Arsenal needs a favour from Tottenham in title race

AP ■ LONDON

Four straight losses — the team's worst run of results for 20 years. Two clean sheets since the end of October. Those looking at Tottenham Hotspur to provide a late twist in the Premier League title race are, given the current evidence, going to be disappointed. Manchester City's May 14 trip to the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium, for its next-to-last game of the season, appeared to many the last possible stumbling block for the champions in their bid to reel in Arsenal and secure an unprecedented fourth straight title. After all, not only have Spurs plenty to play for — they're still just about fighting for Champions League qualification — but they haven't lost, or even conceded a goal, against City in their four league meetings at Tottenham's new stadium

since it opened in 2019. Arsenal, though, is surely losing hope of a favour from its north London neighbour. Similarly, Tottenham fans might be starting to lose hope that Ange Postecoglou is the man to bring a winning culture to the club without a trophy since 2008. It all started well for the first-ever Australian to coach in the Premier League. Tottenham was top of the league in early November, unbeaten and playing the attacking football its supporters always crave. No manager had ever taken 26 points from his first 10 games in the Premier League before Postecoglou came along with a high defensive line and an aggressive, front-foot style. Postecoglou, it seemed, was the perfect antidote to Jose



Mourinho and Antonio Conte, pragmatic and defence-first coaches whose spells in charge of Tottenham promised so much but ended so sourly. Fast-forward six months and it feels like the season cannot end soon enough for Spurs, who are limping to the finish line, and Postecoglou, who is beginning to understand the

size of the task he took on almost a year ago. "We need change. Change has to happen," Postecoglou said ahead of Tottenham's 4-2 loss at Liverpool on Sunday. It was a fourth defeat in a row, something that hasn't happened since those grim final days of Jacques Santini at Spurs in late 2004. Over the past month, there has been a 4-0 loss at Newcastle, a 3-2 home loss to Arsenal when Tottenham was three goals behind at halftime, a 2-0 loss at Chelsea and then a defeat at Anfield that saw a lethargic-looking Spurs fall 4-0 down after 59 minutes. And, this is the team Arsenal hopes can halt the City juggernaut next week? Tottenham should still seal fifth place, and qualification for the Europa League,

because either side of the visit of City are matches against Burnley and already-relegated Sheffield United — the bottom two teams in the league. Spurs are seven points behind fourth-place Aston Villa and four ahead of sixth-place Newcastle. It raises the question of whether the first season under Postecoglou has been a success. Spurs fans likely would have taken a fifth-place finish after seeing England captain and record scorer Harry Kane leave for Bayern Munich last August. With Hugo Lloris and Eric Dier also departing during the season, a huge amount of experience was lost and it's in these tough final weeks of the season where that lack of senior leaders in the squad has been exposed.

It also seems that, as a whole, the fan base is still behind Postecoglou and his refreshing outlook, even if his insistence on sticking to his attacking principles can come across as naive as it is bold. "I believe what I believe down to my core. I'll stand on the highest ground, die a noble death, believing in what I believe," he said. "Maybe, the Premier League is a step too far. Who knows? Maybe, maybe - but I will still be on that hill, wounded, my dying breath saying, I believe, I do believe." Whether Postecoglou will bring more balance to his managerial philosophy next year remains to be seen. For the moment, Arsenal will just be praying that Tottenham — the team it wants to see lose any normal week of the season — can pull off an improbable victory over City to change the course of the title race ahead of the final round on May 19.



Frank Nsubuga set to become oldest player at this year T20 World Cup

PTI ■ KAMPALA (UGANDA)

Uganda off-spinner Frank Nsubuga is set to become the oldest cricketer to play in the upcoming T20 World Cup at the age of 43. On Monday, the Uganda Cricket Association announced a 15-member squad for the marquee event set to be held in the Americas from June 2, the nation's first-ever appearance in the main round of the competition. Brian Masaba will lead the side, while Riazat Ali Shah has been named his deputy. In the Africa Qualifiers, Uganda finished second in the Regional Final, behind

Namibia, to seal their berth. They will get their campaign underway versus Afghanistan on June 3 in Guyana, having been clubbed in Group C, which also includes New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and hosts West Indies. Uganda squad: Brian Masaba (c), Riazat Ali Shah (vc), Kenneth Waiswa, Dinesh Nakrani, Frank Nsubuga, Ronak Patel, Roger Mukasa, Cosmas Kyewuta, Bilal Hassun, Fred Achelam, Robinson Obuya, Simon Ssesazi, Henry Ssenyondo, Alpesh Ramjani and Juma Miyaji. Reserve players: Ronald Lutaaya and Innocent Mwebaze.

India's first ever hybrid pitch unveiled in Dharamsala

PTI ■ DHARAMSALA

India's first-ever 'hybrid pitch' was unveiled at the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association (HPCA) stadium in a grand ceremony here on Monday. The event was attended by IPL Chairman Arun Dhumal and cricket dignitaries including Paul Taylor, a former England cricketer and SIS's international cricket director. "The introduction of hybrid pitches is set to revolutionize cricket in India, following their success in iconic venues like Lord's and The Oval in England," said Dhumal, who hails from Himachal Pradesh. The hybrid pitch, which combines natural turf with synthetic fibres, promises enhanced durability and consistent playability, reducing the strain on ground staff and maintaining quality playing conditions. With only 5% synthetic fibres, the pitch ensures that the natural characteristics essential for cricket are preserved. Taylor expressed gratitude towards the HPCA for their collaboration on this pioneering project. "With the ICC's approval, we're excited to see the positive impact these pitches will have on the sport, starting with



installations in Mumbai and Ahmedabad next," he said. The 'Universal Machine', a critical component in installing the hybrid surface, was developed by SISGrass in 2017 and has been instrumental in the rollout of similar pitches across England's county cricket grounds. This innovation aligns with the ICC's recent sanctioning of hybrid

T20 and one-day international matches, with plans to expand their use in four-day county championships starting this year. The integration of technologies like SISAir, a root aeration system, further underscores the commitment to enhancing cricket infrastructure in India. This system improves the pitch's health and resilience, benefiting players with better and safer playing conditions.

Premier League referee to wear camera to offer insight into demands of being a match official

AP ■ LONDON

The referee for Monday's Premier League match between Crystal Palace and Manchester United will wear a camera on his head for a program that will be broadcast later this year offering an insight into the demands of being a match official. The league said the head-mounted device — or 'RefCam' as it is being called — worn by Jarrod Gillett at Selhurst Park will be integrated into the referee's usual communications system. The technology is being used on a one-off basis, the league said, as part of filming for a short program promoting match officials. The footage will not be broadcast live. "Fans will be able to view it later in the year as part of a program ... Aimed at offering further insight and education into the demands of officiating in the Premier League," the competition said.



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

MUST WIN GAME FOR DC

Delhi Capitals would require Rishabh Pant's killer instinct and Jake Fraser-McGurk's unbelievable flair in their bid to stay alive in the IPL playoff race when they square off against a rampaging Rajasthan Royals in a must-win game here on Tuesday. The Capitals have been inconsistent so far, winning five and losing six of their last 11 games. While winning the remaining three games is a must for Pant's men, even that will only take them to 16 points which might not be enough to qualify for the last four stage of the tournament. Apart from KKR (16 from 11 games) and RR (16 from 10 games), there are at least three teams, namely Chennai Super Kings (12 from 11), Sunrisers Hyderabad (12 from 10 games) and Lucknow Super Giants (12 from 11 games), who can go beyond the 16-point mark. Given the situation, DC's best

might not be enough for qualification, but Pant would look to only "control the controllables," a policy advocated by his mentor Mahendra Singh Dhoni. On a flat Feroz Shah Kotla deck, the challenge will be twofold for the DC skipper. At one end, he would want the Khaleel Ahmeds, Ishant Sharmas and Kuldeep Yadavs to restrict the Yashasvi Jaiswals, Sanju Samsons, and Riyan Parags to a manageable level but then with barely 60-metre boundary on one side, it will be a challenge to stop a team, whose jersey's colour (Pink) resembles their overall health. With 380 runs to his credit and three impactful half-centuries in his kitty, Pant would like to once again perform, especially when his team has been pushed to the wall. He will

All eyes on Fraser-McGurk and Pant against rampaging Royals



have new Aussie sensation Fraser-McGurk, who has gone off the boil in the last couple of games. These two batters can individually change the complexion of a game, but DC will be wary of the Royals' bowling attack, which will pose a very different challenge at the Kotla compared to Saiji Man Singh. Facing spinners of Yuzvendra Chahal and Ravichandran Ashwin's calibre isn't easy, and in veteran Sandeep Sharma, RR has a bowler, who can take pace off the deliveries. The Rajasthan bowling attack has been able to maintain a decent economy rate but for DC, only Axar Patel (ER of 7.24) and Kuldeep (ER 8.45) have shown the wherewithal to stop opposition batters on their tracks.

It is time that Khaleel (ER 9.47) and Mukesh Kumar (ER 11.05) also show more consistency. South African pacers Lizaad Williams (ER 12 in 2 games) and Anrich Nortje (ER 13.36) have simply not looked the part. The last time the two teams met was in Jaipur in March and DC then had lost control during the second half of their bowling innings with Riyan playing a superb innings. The Royals batters would be licking their lips after having a look at the surface which can't get flatter than what it is right now. Riyan, skipper Sanju Samson, the dashing Yashasvi, along with finishers Rovman Powell, Shimron Hetmyer and Dhruv Jurel give Royal a very scary look and DC bowlers can only pray that it doesn't turn out to

be 'Nightmare 2.0' for the hosts.

TEAMS:

Delhi Capitals: Rishabh Pant (c), David Warner, Abhishek Porel, Ricky Bhui, Yash Dhull, Shai Hope, Prithvi Shaw, Tristan Stubbs, Kumar Kishagra, Swastik Chikara, Ishant Sharma, Jhye Richardson, Rasikh Dar Salam, Vicky Ostwal, Anrich Nortje, Mukesh Kumar, Kuldeep Yadav, Praveen Dube, Khaleel Ahmed, Sumit Kumar, Axar Patel, Mitchell Marsh, Lalit Yadav, Jake Fraser-McGurk. **Rajasthan Royals:** Sanju Samson (c), Jos Buttler, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Riyan Parag, Donovan Ferreira, Kunal Rathore, Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Sen, Navdeep Saini, Keshav Maharaj, Sandeep Sharma, Trent Boult, Yuzvendra Chahal, Avesh Khan, Rovman Powell, Shubham Dube, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Abid Mushtaq, Nandre Burger.

SKY steers Mumbai to comfortable victory

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Suryakumar Yadav's special Shundred after a disciplined bowling effort set up Mumbai Indians' seven-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL here on Monday. Suryakumar smashed 102 not out off 51 balls for his second IPL hundred, taking his team to an emphatic win in 17.2 overs. SRH had recovered to post 173 for eight. The win lifted Mumbai Indians from the bottom of the points table to the ninth spot while SRH, despite the loss, remained fourth with 12 points in 11 games. Joining forces inside the powerplay with MI left reeling at 31 for three, the pair of Suryakumar and Tilak Varma (37 not out off 32) did a superb recovery job with 143-run unbeaten stand to script a comprehensive victory. Suryakumar's sensational knock included 12 fours and half a dozen sixes. For that matter, MI could have been reduced to 31/4 had a Bhuvneshwar Kumar delivery in the fifth over not



pitched outside the leg stump with the veteran seamer pinning Varma in front of the wickets. Ishan Kishan (9) perished early once again while Naman Dhir (0) endured a nine-ball duck. With their backs against the wall, Suryakumar picked Marco Jansen to attack as he collected 22 runs off the seventh over with two sixes and two fours to begin his job.

But shortly after he completed his fifty off 30 balls, Suryakumar was seen stretching and wincing in pain while looking to manage a strain, presumably to his groin — one of the reasons why he missed cricket for nearly four months from late last year. However, to his credit, the world No 1 T20 batter hung around till the end to take MI

over the line as he finished the game with a flurry of boundaries — two sixes and as many fours off his last four balls. Apart from Suryakumar's struggles while batting, the decline in Rohit Sharma's form also came to the fore with the India captain mistiming one to be dismissed for a mere four — his fourth score in single

digits this IPL in last five outings. Earlier in the first half, Pandya struck form before the T20 World Cup while veteran Chawla also bagged three wickets as Mumbai Indians restricted Sunrisers Hyderabad for a below-par total. Pandya found rhythm and momentum to return 4-0-31-3 while Chawla (4-0-33-3) produced an impactful performance to trouble the SRH batters. However, to his credit, SRH skipper Pat Cummins chipped in with a 17-ball 35 (2x4s, 2x6s) late in the innings to take them past the 150-run mark. In complete contrast to last time these teams met earlier in this IPL when SRH hammered 277/3, their usually free-flowing batters struggled for momentum and lack of initiative meant they could never really trouble the Mumbai bowlers. Travis Head top scored with 48 while skipper Pat Cummins made a quick 17-ball 35 not out.

Versatility of Jadeja makes him class act, says Finch

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former Australia skipper Aaron Finch has termed India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja a "class player" because of his versatility which brings in a lot of balance in all the teams that he represents. Jadeja scored 40-odd runs and took three wickets in Chennai Super Kings' victory over Punjab Kings on Sunday. "Ravindra Jadeja is such a versatile player, which makes him so effective. With the ball, he would have loved more wickets," Finch told Star Sports. "He's been economical, going at under eight per over throughout the tournament. Leading with three wickets today (Sunday), he showed he is an absolute class player." Finch was impressed that Jadeja returned with fine figures of 3/20 in his full quota of four overs while defending a not-so-big total of 169. "Three wickets for just 20 runs when the Punjab Kings were chasing a total of 170 odd runs



is just superb. It just shows why he's one of the best players in the world," the Australian said. Finch also spoke highly about Kolkata Knight Riders' Sunil Narine. The 2021 World T20-winning Australian skipper feels that it is extremely difficult to contain Narine for a long period of time. "It's truly remarkable, isn't it? I mean, seeing Sunil Narine stride out to open the batting. "Before this season, you're thinking, if we can just keep him quiet for a couple of balls,

he'll try and do something and play a big shot. But this season, he's not only getting off to explosive starts but also batting smartly and seizing control of the innings," Finch said. The 35-year-old Narine smashed 81 off just 39 balls to power KKR to a comfortable 98-run win over Lucknow Super Giants on Sunday night. In the process, Narine also became the fourth player to score more than 450 runs and take 10 plus wickets in a single IPL edition.

OTHER SPORTS



Jyoti to lead Indian junior women hockey team for Europe tour

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Defender Jyoti Singh was on Monday named the captain of the Indian Junior Women's team by Hockey India with midfielder Sakshi Rana as her deputy in a 22-member squad which will tour Europe from May 21 to 29. India will play six matches across three nations against Belgium, Germany and two club teams in the Netherlands — Bredase Hockey Vereniging Push and Oranje Rood — from May 21 to 29. "There's great camaraderie in the squad. All of us have gotten to know each other pretty well during the camp. Everyone here is very skilful and talented," Jyoti said in a HI release. "It will be fun and a good learning experience playing abroad against other top-quality teams." India will play their first match on May 21 against Bredase Hockey Vereniging Push in Breda before taking on Belgium at the same venue on May 22. India will then play Belgium a second time but with the latter

playing host on this occasion on May 24. This will be followed by consecutive games against Germany on May 26 in Breda and May 27 in Germany respectively. India will then return to Breda to play their final game of the tour on May 29 against Oranje Rood. "Playing against good teams from other countries helps in developing an understanding of different approaches to the game. An exposure tour like this provides all of us with a tremendous opportunity to take our game to the next level," vice-Captain Sakshi Rana said. **TEAMS:** **GOALKEEPERS:** Aditi Maheshwari, Nidhi **DEFENDERS:** Jyoti Singh (C), Lalthantluangi, Anjali Barwa, Pujja Sahoo, Mamita Oram, Niru Kullu **M I D F I E L D E R S :** Kshetrimayum Sonia Devi, Rajani Keretta, Priyanka Yadav, Khaidem Shileima Chanu, Sakshi Rana (VC), Anisha Sahu, Supriya Kujur **FORWARDS:** Binima Dhan, Hina Bano, Lalrinpuoi, Ishika, Sanjana Horo, Sonam, Kanika Siwach.

Indian women and men 4x400m relay teams qualify for Paris Olympics

PTI ■ NASSAU (BAHAMAS)

The Indian men's and women's 4x400m relay teams qualified for Paris Olympics after finishing second in their respective second-round heats at the World Athletics Relays here on Monday. In the women's competition, the quartet of Rupal Chaudhary, M R Poovamma, Jyothika Sri Dandi and Subha Venkatesan clocked 3 minutes and 29.35 seconds to finish second behind Jamaica (3:28.54) in heat number one to book a Paris Games ticket. Later, the men's squad of Mohammed Anas Yahiyah, Muhammed Ajmal, Arokia Rajiv and Amoj Jacob finished with a collective timing of 3 minutes and 3.23 seconds to also finish second in their heat, behind USA (2:59.95). The top two teams in each of the three heats in the second round were to qualify for the Olympics to be held



from July 26 to August 11. It was a sort of a surprise that the women's 4x400m team qualified for the Olympics as the focus was more on the men's 4x400m team which has broken Asian record in back-to-back global events — Tokyo Olympics and 2023 World Championships — as well

as winning 2023 Asian Games gold. The Indian women's team had finished fifth in the first-round qualifying heat on Sunday with a time of 3 minutes and 29.74 seconds. The men's team had failed to finish in the first-round qualifying heat after second leg runner Rajesh Ramesh

pulled out midway due to cramps. Arokia Rajiv took the place of Ramesh in the team and he ran the third leg after Anas and Ajmal. The Indian men's 4x400m team was on third position when anchor-leg runner Jacob took the baton from Arokia but the Delhi boy ran a fantastic race to overtake his Mexican opponent and finish second. It was not about the timing but more about Olympics qualification for the Indian men's team which ran 3:00.25 at the Tokyo Olympics for the then Asian record before bettering it during the 2023 World Championships with yet another Asian record of 2:59.05. Monday's timing was well below the team's best. India had even given a mighty scare to formidable USA during the heat race at the 2023 Budapest World Championships before settling for the second place. Meanwhile, India pulled out of the

mixed 4x400m relay second round heat races on Monday as Ramesh was not available after suffering muscle cramps while running the men's 4x400m first round heat on Sunday. Ramesh had run both the mixed 4x400m and men's 4x400m races on Sunday. India had featured in mixed 4x400m relay in the Tokyo Olympics where the event made its debut. The Indian women's 4x400m relay team will be returning to Olympics after missing out in Tokyo Games. The Paris participation will be the eighth time for the Indian women's 4x400m team, the first being in 1984 Games. For the men's 4x400m, this will be the fourth time India will be taking part in the Olympics, the first being in the 2000 Sydney Games. With this, India now have at least 19 Paris-bound track and field athletes and the list includes defending javelin throw champion Neeraj Chopra among others. The athletics events at the Games will begin on August 1. A total of 70 teams have qualified for relay events at the Paris Olympics following two days of thrilling action at the World Athletics Relays Bahamas.

Roma draws 1-1 against Juventus

AP ■ MILAN

Roma attempted to bounce back from European disappointment but could only draw 1-1 against Juventus in Serie A on Sunday in a result that did little to help its hopes of qualifying for next season's Champions League. Bremer canceled out Romelu Lukaku's first goal from open play against Juventus. Both teams also hit the woodwork as Juve's winless run continued. Third-place Juventus, which is winless in its last five matches, is six points ahead of fifth-place Roma with three rounds remaining. The top five in Serie A qualify for the Champions League after Italy earned an extra spot in next season's competition. Roma is just three points above sixth-place Atalanta, which has

Roma draws 1-1 against Juventus

also played two matches fewer. Roma was looking to recover from a 2-0 loss to Bayer Leverkusen in the first leg of the Europa League semifinals on Thursday, and started positively with Rasmus Kristensen's header coming off the crossbar in the 11th minute. The capital side took the lead just four minutes later in somewhat chaotic circumstances. Paulo Dybala pulled the ball back from the byline and Bryan Cristante's shot was blocked by Juventus defender Federico Gatti on the line but went straight to Lukaku for the tap in. It was his first goal against Juventus from open play after



netting from the spot against the Bianconeri for Inter. Juve leveled in the 31st minute when Federico Chiesa whipped in a cross from the right and Bremer headed it in

at the back post. Chiesa came close to firing his team in front right at the start of the second half but his effort went off the right post and across the face of goal.

MILAN PROTEST: AC Milan's hardcore fans protested during the team's 3-3 draw against Genoa. There was a strange atmosphere at San Siro as the Milan ultras — who also unveiled banners calling for more ambition, communication and a clear transfer strategy — remained silent during the match and left 10 minutes before the final whistle. Milan was leading 3-2 by then, after recovering from Mateo Retegu's early penalty, but conceded a comical third goal as Morten Thorsby's cross ricocheted off Retegu and home defenders Fikayo Tomori and Malick Thiaw. It

went down as an own-goal by Thiaw. It was a sixth straight match without a win for Milan, which nevertheless is second and mathematically assured of Champions League soccer next season. **RELEGATION BATTLES:** Hellas Verona boosted its chances of Serie A survival with a 2-1 win over Fiorentina as fellow strugglers Empoli and Frosinone played out a disappointing 0-0 draw. All three teams had been locked on 31 points ahead of the weekend, just two points above the relegation zone. Verona was helped by Fiorentina coach Vincenzo Italiano opting to rotate his team ahead of the second leg of the Europa Conference League semifinal on Wednesday. Fiorentina beat Club Brugge 3-2 in the first leg last week.

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