



CITY 3 'AB JALDI HI KARNI PADEGI', RAHUL ON MARRIAGE

OPINION 6 REGIME CHANGE ON CARDS IN NEPAL?

WORLD 8 PRO-PALESTINIAN PROTESTS DWINDLE ON CAMPUSES

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FOCUS ON KL RAHUL AS LSG FACE DC 12 SPORTS

Voter fatigue deepens in Phase IV

VOTER TURNOUT OVER 63 PER CENT IN PHASE IV POLLS SRINAGAR IMPROVES THREE DECADES VOTERS SCORE

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The intense voters' awareness programmes for increasing the turnout remained futile as the phase four general elections on Monday saw the average plummeting to over 63 per cent till 8.30 pm on Monday. The voter turnout in the first three phases was 66.14 per cent, 66.71 per cent and 65.68 per cent, respectively. Interestingly the good news came in from Jammu and Kashmir which saw voting after abrogation of Article 370. Srinagar recorded 36.88 per cent voter average. This figure is higher than Srinagar's turnout in 2019 when it saw a turnout of 14.43 per cent. The figures for 2014, 2009, 2004 and 1999 are 25.86 per cent, 25.55 per cent, 18.57 per cent and 11.93 per cent respectively. Elections were held in 96 constituencies spread over 10 States and UTs amid incidents of violence between Trinamool Congress and BJP workers in West Bengal, while YSRCP and TDP cadres came to blows at multiple locations in Andhra Pradesh as well as reports of poll boycott in some Uttar Pradesh villages. Besides, there were also



Voters display identity cards while standing in queue to cast their votes during the phase IV of general elections, in Berhampur, Odisha, on Monday

Pradesh 58 per cent. In Telangana, Hyderabad which is considered a stronghold of Asaduddin Owaisi, witnessed 39.17 per cent polling which is lowest in the State. In Bengal, where violence marred previous rounds of voting, a Trinamool Congress worker was killed in a crude bomb attack. The incident took place in the Bolpur Lok Sabha constituency, mere hours before polling was scheduled to begin. Amid claims of West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer that voting has been peaceful so far, clashes broke out between supporters of TMC and BJP in Monteswar's Susunia area of Bardhaman-Durgapur Lok Sabha seat around noon, as BJP candidate Dilip Ghosh was on his way to a polling booth following complaints of booth jamming. Ghosh was allegedly heckled by the TMC activists, sources claimed. BJP candidate in Telangana's Hyderabad Lok Sabha seat K Madhavi Latha was booked by election authorities after a video clip surfaced online in which she was purportedly seen asking burqa-clad women voters to show their faces to compare with the photo identity cards.

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THE PIONEER REPORTS FROM GROUND ZERO

WEST BENGAL

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Stray incidents of violence marked the fourth-phase polling in West Bengal's eight constituencies that went to the polls on Monday, with a little more than 75 per cent voter turnout reported by the Election Commission of India. The EC said the polling percentage could increase by a few percentage points in the final count. While Behrampur — from where Pradesh Congress president Adhir Chowdhury is contesting against TMC's Yusuf Pathan — Krishnagar, Ranaghat and Burdwan East was comparatively peaceful with a couple of incidents of "stick-fighting" being recorded from Krishnagar. Some areas of Burdwan-Durgapur seat from where former BJP State president Dilip Ghosh is contesting against TMC's Kirti Azad witnessed sporadic violence, sources said. A Trinamool Congress supporter at Monteswar in Burdwan-Durgapur seat was hurt after he was allegedly beaten up by the Central forces guarding the booth. A similar incident took place at Burdwan city when Ghosh rushed to a polling booth hearing that the booth had been blocked by the TMC men. After he was returning from the area, local TMC workers resorted to brick-battling. In the melee the back windshield of one of the vehicles in his convoy got smashed and a CAPF jawan sustained injuries, sources said. He was rushed to the hospital. "The TMC goons do it every year ... they capture booths and chase away voters ... they do not allow people to



vote year after year ... as they are being stopped from doing so this year they are getting hostile," Ghosh said. At Tehatta in Krishnagar, the BJP men fought with their TMC counterparts with bamboos, in which several saffron workers were injured. Elsewhere a CPI(M) worker got a fractured forehead in a clash with TMC men, sources said. Reports from Palashi Para surfaced of defective EVMs where every vote pressed for the TMC was reportedly going to the BJP, sources said. Subsequently the machine was changed but 255 votes that had already been polled would be counted, ECI sources said. A total of 1,45,30,017 voters were eligible to exercise their franchise in 15,507 polling stations. A total of 75.66 per cent voters exercised their franchise till 5 pm. According to latest reports while Bolpur Lok Sabha constituency registered 77.77 per cent, neighbouring Birbhum saw 75.45 per cent voter turnout.

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MAHARASHTRA

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Amid a complaint by the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) about the alleged use of money to "purchase" votes in three constituencies, an average 52.75 per cent of 2.28 crore voters exercised their franchise till 5 pm in eleven Lok Sabha constituencies in the fourth phase of polls held on Monday. Except that the tribal-dominated constituency of Nandurbar constituencies in north Maharashtra witnessed 60.60 per cent voting till 5 pm, the polling in other ten constituencies ranged from 43.80 per cent to 58.65 per cent, a percentage that was in line with similar pattern of voting witnessed in the first three phases of Lok Sabha polls in the State. Apart from Nandurbar where high polling percentage was expected considering that the constituency had witnessed 66.77 per cent 68.65 per cent polling respectively in 2014 and 2019 polls, the other ten constituencies recorded the following polling percentages till 5 pm: Ahmednagar (52.27), Aurangabad (55.38), Beed (58.37), Jalgaon (51.98), Jalna (59.44), Maval (46.03), Pune (44.90), Raver (56.16), Shirdi (55.27) and Shirur (43.89). The low polling percentages in constituencies like Pune, Shirur and Maval were a cause for worry for all the political parties. In a related development, the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi leaders made a sensational allegation that large amount of cash were



reportedly being transferred to and fro, ostensibly to buy votes in the Lok Sabha elections. Shiv Sena (UBT) spokesperson Sanjay Raut, NCP (Sharad Pawar) MLA Rohit R Pawar and Congress MLA Ravindra Dhangekar who is contesting from Pune, targeted the ruling BJP-led MahaYuti and alleged that the money might be used to "purchase" votes in Pune, Ahmednagar and Nashik LS constituencies. Putting out a purported video of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde alighting from a helicopter in Nashik with two security personnel lugging at least two heavy bags, Raut demanded to know why the CM travelled with such bulky luggage for just a two-hour long poll campaign trip. Rohit Pawar posted another video showing bundles of cash lying on a road in the Ahmednagar LS constituency and claimed that it contained 'prasad' for disbursing among the voters.

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UTTAR PRADESH

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A voter turnout of 58.9 per cent was recorded till 6 pm in the 13 Lok Sabha constituencies of Uttar Pradesh where polling was held in the fourth phase of the parliamentary elections on Monday. The polling commenced at 7 am and concluded at 6 pm. Uttar Pradesh's Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said here on Monday that 58.9 per cent turnout of voters was recorded by 6 pm. He said the voter turnout would marginally increase after final tabulation of the data which would be available by Tuesday morning. Polling for the by-election to Dadraul Assembly constituency in Shahjahanpur was also held on Monday. The constituencies where polling was held on Monday included Shahjahanpur, Kheri, Dhaurahra, Sitapur, Hardoi, Mirrikh, Unnao, Farrukhabad, Etawah, Kannauj, Kanpur, Akbarpur and Bahraich. With the conclusion of the fourth phase of polling, 39 of the State's 80 Lok Sabha constituencies have voted, while polling for the remaining 41 seats will be held in fifth, sixth and seventh phases.

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BIHAR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA

Over 54 per cent of around 95 lakh voters in five Lok Sabha constituencies in Bihar exercised their franchise till 5 pm on Monday, the officials said. Voting was held in Begusarai, Ujjarpur, Samastipur, Munger and Darbhanga constituencies in the fourth phase of the Lok Sabha elections. Union Minister Giriraj Singh is seeking re-election from Begusarai where his primary opponent is CPI's Awadhesh Rai. Singh had defeated former JNU Students' Union president Kanhaiya Kumar in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls in the same seat. In Ujjarpur, which has the lowest number of voters at 17.48 lakh but hosts the maximum of 13 candidates, Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai aims for a third consecutive term. His principal rival is Alok Mehta, a senior RJD leader and a former State Minister. Samastipur, formerly known as Rosera, presents a battleground for two debutants — Congress' Sunny Hazari and Shambhavi Choudhary of IJP (Ram Vilas) — both offspring of senior JD(U) leaders and Ministers in the Nitish Kumar Cabinet.

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Modi shows the road to 2024 conquest

RAMESH K SINGH ■ VARANASI

The ancient holy city of Kashi witnessed a sea of crowds on the five-kilometre-long route from Malviya statue near Banaras Hindu University main gate (Lanka) to Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham, parallel to river Ganga, during the roadshow of Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on Monday evening, a day prior to his nomination from Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency, seeking a hat-trick of victories as a Bharatiya Janata Party candidate. Modi reached Malviya statue around 5 pm as his helicopter landed at the BHU helipad. Attired in saffron kurta and a white half jacket, Modi paid floral tributes with folded hands to BHU founder Bharat Ratna Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and then, responding to

the cheers of followers present in thousands, he along with UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and BJP state president Bhupendra Chaudhary took out his roadshow almost from the same route as it was taken out in 2019, the only difference being the culminating point as this time he went straight to Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham to offer prayers whereas five years ago, Modi had turned right from Godowlia crossing to Dashashwamedh Ghat for Ganga aarti. The roadshow was a reflection of unity in diversity as Banaras from various regions welcomed the prime minister by presenting their traditional folk dances, wearing traditional costumes. For more than a century, thousands of families of Tamils, Gujaratis, Marathis, Bengalis, Marwaris, Sindhis, Punjabis, Khattris, Biharis,



Nepalese and others are living here and most of them have their separate localities located close to the river Ganga. Realising the attachment of the local people with the river Ganga, when in 2014 Modi began his parliamentary inns from Varanasi he had said 'Maa Ganga ne bulaya hai'. Passing through the densely populated localities like Saint Ravidas Gate, Assi, Shivala, Sonarpura, Pandey Haveli, Madanpura, Jangambadi, Godowlia and Bansphatak of this ancient city, Modi reached Kashi Vishwanath temple amidst the sound of shehnai, conch shell, drums, damru and many other traditional musical instruments as the

people crowded on roadsides and rooftops showered flowers and welcomed him with the slogans of 'Har Har Mahadev', 'Har Har Modi, Ghar Ghar Modi'. At about 100 places, the artistes of different regions presented their folk musical shows to welcome Modi. Throughout the route there was not an inch of space left and due to the heavy rush. It was a tough time for the security personnel to control the crowds despite elaborate arrangements and barricading on roadsides. On the route, the reflection of the rich cultural heritage was also seen apart from the hoardings of great local personalities. The entire route was flooded with saffron flags. The atmosphere was festive, showing the unmatched popularity of Modi in his parliamentary constituency.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during a road show for Lok Sabha elections, in Varanasi, on Monday

'Ab jaldi hi karni padegi', Rahul on marriage

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Amidst political heat and fighting the prestigious battle to save the family bastion Rae Bareilly, former president of Congress, Rahul Gandhi, on Monday, once again tried to strike a familiar chord with the people of his mother's constituency when faced with a familiar query; When is he getting married? He responded 'soon'.

During a rally in Rae Bareilly, Congress candidate Rahul Gandhi, accompanied by party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, addressed various issues concerning the constituency. Amidst the fervour of political discourse, an unexpected question arose about Rahul Gandhi's marital status, to which he responded with a light-hearted remark. When someone in the crowd asked about his marriage, Rahul Gandhi quipped, "Now I will have to do it soon (Ab jaldi hi karni padegi)." This response added a moment of levity to the serious political discussions that dominated the event.

Speaking at the rally, Rahul Gandhi also took the opportunity to reflect on his family's long-standing relationship with Rae Bareilly. He highlighted the historical ties dating back a century, mentioning the pivotal role Rae Bareilly played in shaping the political landscape of India. He stated, "Rae Bareilly and my family have a very old relationship. This relationship of ours is 100 years old. My great grandfather Jawaharlal Nehru ji had come here earlier. I can say that the people of Rae Bareilly taught politics to Jawaharlal

Nehru ji. Then when Jawaharlal Nehru became the prime minister of the country, he laid the foundation of the country. That is, the political foundation of the country was laid by the people of Rae Bareilly. Then Indira Gandhi ji and Sonia Gandhi ji came here, they did many big works and now I have come here."

The Member of Parliament from Wayanad asserted that he was contesting from Rae Bareilly as this was the 'karma bhoomi' of his grandmother and mother. "...Ours is a 100-year-old relationship with Rae Bareilly. A few days ago, when I was sitting with my mother, I told her that I said in a video that I have two mothers - Sonia ji and Indira ji. My mother did not like this, but I explained to her that a mother is the one who shows the path to the child and also protects her. Both my mother and Indira ji did this for me. This is the 'karma bhoomi' of both my mothers. This is the reason I have come to contest from Rae Bareilly," the Congress leader said.

Rahul Gandhi said his family had always worked for the people of the Rae Bareilly parliamentary constituency, unlike Prime Minister Narendra Modi who works in the "interest of Adani and Ambani".

Hitting out at the Modi government, he claimed that loans amounting to Rs 16 lakh crore, which is equal to 24 years of money allotted under the MGNREGA, have been waived for 22-25 top industrialists. He outlined his vision for addressing economic disparities, promising financial support to economically disadvantaged



Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections in Rae Bareilly on Monday

PTI

families, Rahul Gandhi articulated, "There are 22 people who own the money of 70 crore people. Their loans are being waived. The prime minister's salary is Rs 2.5 lakh. How does he wear suits worth lakh rupees every day? Who is buying suits for him? I asked farmers, youths during the Bharat Jodo Yatra what are the issues in the country? I got three

answers - youths said unemployment, farmers said inadequate price for crops, labourers said inadequate money. We decided to make crores of lakhs. We will make a list of poor families. One woman from the family will be given one lakh rupees. Crores of people will be getting money on July 1 morning. It will continue every month."

"If Narendra Modi can create 22 millionaires then Rahul Gandhi can create millions of millionaires. We will create a list of economically weak families and from each family, we will select one woman and her account will be created with Rs 1 lakh annually (Rs 8,500 per month)," he asserted.

He further assured that if Congress-INDIA bloc comes to

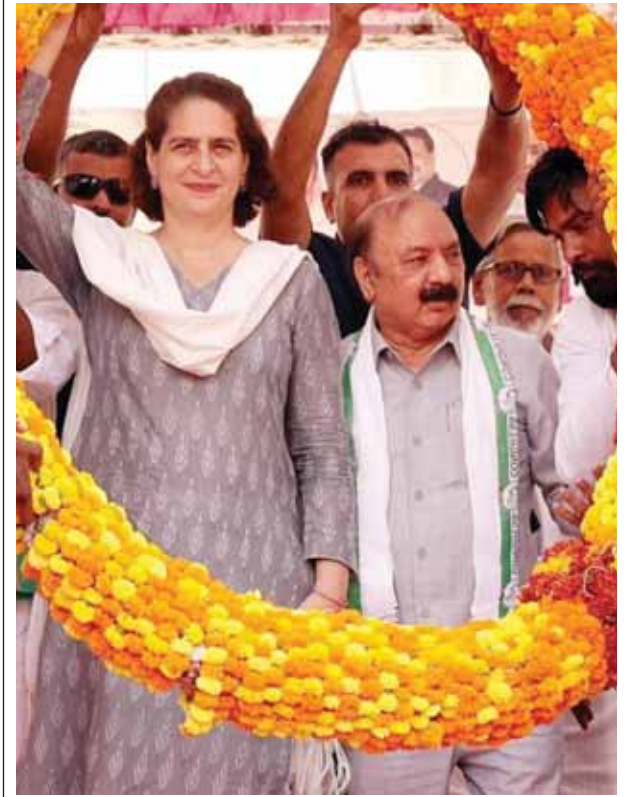
power, he will waive loans to poor farmers. "I promise that if the Congress-INDIA bloc comes to power at the Centre, then my first job will be to waive the loans of poor farmers," the Congress leader said.

He reiterated that the Agniveer scheme of short-duration recruitment in the defence forces would be done away and youngsters would be provided permanent jobs in the armed forces with pension provisions. Rahul Gandhi said youngsters would get one year of apprenticeship in public sector organisations and later, based on their merit, permanent government jobs.

During the rally, Rahul Gandhi also attacked the Bharatiya Janata Party and said that the people of the saffron party and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh want to end the Constitution. "First time in the history of our country, the BJP-RSS people want to end our Constitution. Their leaders have clearly said that if they come to power they will change the Constitution," he said. In the Lok Sabha election 2024, Rahul Gandhi is contesting from Rae Bareilly which has been the parliamentary constituency of his mother, Sonia Gandhi, in the past along with his existing Wayanad seat in Kerala. He is facing BJP's Dinesh Pratap Singh.

The Rae Bareilly constituency goes to the polls on May 20 in the fifth phase. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Congress leader Sonia Gandhi won the constituency by securing 5,34,918 votes. Her closest rival, Dinesh Pratap Singh, put up a formidable challenge, gathering 3,67,740 votes.

Rahul won't ever deviate from path of truth: Priyanka



Rae Bareilly/Amethi: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Monday said Rahul Gandhi has embarked on the path of truth, and will always walk on this path. Addressing an election rally on the mela ground in Maharajganj, Priyanka praised her elder brother and said, "In politics and in life, the person who speaks the truth and does not shy away from the truth, always has importance in the society. People look at him with respect."

Speaking in his presence on the stage, Priyanka said, "My brother will always speak the truth... Even in childhood, if while playing any kid would say bad words to someone else or do injustice, he would always fight for him. My brother has always fought for justice. Never backed down."

It would be difficult to find such a "fearless and big-hearted" person in the country, "especially in politics," she said about her brother. The Congress general secretary, who was campaigning for Rahul, who is contesting from Rae Bareilly seat, said, he is the only leader in the country who walked 4,000 kilometres from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, during his Bharat Jodo Yatra.

"After that, he travelled from Mumbai to Manipur to give a message to the country that every person of the country is a brother, development will come to the country only when the unity of the country remains intact," she said.

In another rally in Amethi,

Priyanka attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying he has nothing to do with unemployed youths, farmers, women, and the poor and accused him of selling the job-creating establishments to Ambani and Adani.

"He has nothing to do with people but keeps worrying about his clothes. He is worried about keeping his clothes clean so that no mud sticks to them. I don't understand what the prime minister applies to his face that it keeps shining. You will not see mud stains on his clothes anywhere," she said.

When it comes to waiving the loans of farmers, the prime minister says that the country does not have money, but his government managed to waive loans of industrialists, she alleged.

Priyanka also criticised the Agniveer scheme for soldiers, saying that under the scheme, if they die in the line of duty, youths don't get the status of martyrs and they get unemployed after four years. "This is a big joke with the youth and a fraud," she said that under the Modi government, 70 crore people became unemployed and 30 lakh posts are lying vacant in government jobs.

Rae Bareilly and Amethi will go to polls in the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections in the state on May 20. Amethi, a Congress bastion, fell in 2019 when BJP's Smriti Irani defeated Rahul Gandhi. Congress has fielded KL Sharma from the constituency this time. PTI

Brij Bhushan voices opposition to UP's 'bulldozer policy'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bharatiya Janata Party's Member of Parliament Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh voiced his opposition to the "bulldozer policy" of Uttar Pradesh government during a rally in Gonda district.

He expressed his concerns regarding the challenges faced in building homes under this policy while seeking support for his son, Karan Bhushan Singh, who is contesting on a BJP ticket from Kaiserganj.

Speaking passionately to the crowd, Brij Bhushan emphasised the difficulties encountered in constructing homes under the current policy regime, stating, "I am against the bulldozer policy; it is very difficult to build a home."

He portrayed himself as someone who empathises with the public's struggles, asserting, "Brij Bhushan Singh is the kind of person who understands your pain and sorrow." In a move aimed at garnering wider support, Brij Bhushan also appealed to the Muslim



community for their votes, claiming that "Muslims have also made up their minds" to support the BJP in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls.

It is worth noting that Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, the incumbent MP from Kaiserganj, was replaced by his son as the BJP candidate for the Lok Sabha polls from the same constituency.

Earlier also he opposed the policy of the government and had once given a memorandum to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

When Sharma can defeat Irani what's the need for fielding Rahul: Gehlot

Amethi: The Congress fielded Kishori Lal Sharma from Amethi as part of its political strategy and since he can defeat Bharatiya Janata Party's Smriti Irani, "then what is the need for fielding a big national leader" like Rahul Gandhi, party veteran Ashok Gehlot has said.

Gehlot, who is here as the senior AICC observer for the Amethi parliamentary seat in Uttar Pradesh, also exuded confidence that the Congress will win both Amethi and Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha seats by big margins.

While former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi is contesting against BJP's Dinesh Pratap Singh in Rae Bareilly, Gandhi family aide Sharma is taking on BJP's Irani in Amethi.

On no Gandhi family member contesting from Amethi for the first time in 25 years, Gehlot said the situation is such that there are five assembly segments in this parliamentary constituency and if one asks anyone in each of these segments, one would know that this is a "one-sided" election in favour of the Congress.

"The Congress is fighting the polls from here, our candidate is fighting, but the people have taken it upon themselves to fight this election," the former chief minister of Rajasthan said.

Asked about Irani, who defeated Rahul Gandhi here last time, claiming that he ran away to a safer seat, Gehlot said, "We have already answered - when K L Sharma ji is sufficient to take on Smriti Irani then why are people talking about Rahul Gandhi?"

"This is part of the Congress' political strategy and he (Sharma) has been given a ticket after much thought going into it. So they can say whatever they want to. When we

know that KL Sharma ji can make us win the election here then there was no need of fielding Rahul Gandhi," Gehlot argued.

Noting that Sharma had been a Congress worker for 40 years, Gehlot stated the Congress has sent out a message to the whole country by giving him a chance to contest elections.

"A message has gone out in the whole country and the decision of fielding him is being welcomed. When he can defeat Smriti Irani ji, then Rahul Gandhi is a big national leader, and there is no need of fielding him," the veteran Congress leader said.

On "Priyanka Gandhi's clerk" and "Gandhi family's peon" jibe at Sharma by BJP Rae Bareilly candidate Dinesh Singh, Gehlot said such statements had not been liked by the people of Amethi and there is a reaction to it. "All these comments will increase the margin of victory," he added.

Gehlot exuded confidence that the Congress will win in both the constituencies.

"There is a reason for it. Smriti Irani after losing in 2014, worked to mislead people for five years. Rahul Gandhi kept on working in people's interest and raised issues of unemployment and price rise. They (the BJP) kept misleading people and in the elections in 2019, an environment was created post-Balakot... the BJP won everywhere, there was 25-0 in Rajasthan, in Madhya Pradesh also they won big and won all seats in Gujarat. That environment was different," he said.

Gehlot claimed that after five years of her term as an MP here, Irani could neither bring any investments nor institutions that would benefit people, and Amethi remained

deprived.

"I heard IIT was coming but went to Prayagraj. The hospital here was closed and then reopened only after high court orders. Wherever I go, I hear about allegations against her (Irani) that work was not done and she did not meet people," Gehlot said.

He said people expect three things from an MP - that he or she stays amongst people, stands by them in their happier or sad times, and does development.

Gehlot claimed that Irani had failed on all the three counts as an MP. "There is so much reaction among people. There will be very few candidates against whom such opposition would be there," he said.

Asked about Union Home Minister Amit Shah's remarks in Rae Bareilly that the Gandhi family did not do development in the constituency and did not stand by people in their happiness and sorrows, Gehlot said, "Amit Shah has no knowledge of these things. He only makes comments without giving it any thought."

"Someone should ask him, I came here in 1981 for a by-election and stayed for one month in Rae Bareilly and Amethi. I have come now and one cannot recognise the place, it has transformed," he said.

"All this talk that nothing has happened in 70 years, these 'jumbas' Shah has borrowed from PM (Narendra Modi). What all has not happened? Roads have been constructed, water, electricity, education, health, airport...all this development was done here under Gandhi family's period. So no one believes in their talk," the Congress leader said.

"We will win Amethi and Rae Bareilly by a big margin. The Congress and INDIA bloc is

winning in the whole country, so you can imagine the scale of victory here. Everyone is awaiting June 4," he said, referring to the date of counting of votes.

Gehlot also claimed that the Congress is going to win parliamentary seats in double digits in his state and exuded confidence that an INDIA bloc government would be formed at the Centre as "winds of change" were blowing in the country.

Along with Gehlot and former Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel, who is senior AICC observer for Rae Bareilly, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra is camped in Rae Bareilly and Amethi till polls are held in the two seats on May 20. She is addressing back-to-back corner meetings in various villages of Rae Bareilly and Amethi. PTI

After 4 phases, BJP left with 0% chance: Akhilesh

Lucknow: Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Monday said that after the four phases of election, BJP is left with "zero per cent" chance to form the government.

"After 4 phases, the public has made 4 disappear from BJP's claim of 400 and now only double zero is left for the double-engine people. BJP's chances of forming the

government are 00 per cent," he said in a post on X.

"In the upcoming three phases also, people will vote with more enthusiasm than in the four phases to defeat BJP and form the INDIA bloc government. The public will vote against BJP till the last phase on June 1st. The public making INDIA bloc win," he said. PTI

BJP leader shot dead, couple found dead

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Unidentified motorcycle-borne assailants, on Monday morning, shot dead Bharatiya Janata Party leader Ashutosh Srivastava in Sabharhad market in Kotwali area of Jaunpur district.

According to reports, Ashutosh Srivastava (45), a journalist and BJP worker, had gone out on a motorcycle in the morning for campaigning. Around 9 am, an unknown motorcycle rider stopped him and four others came and shot him. Ashutosh was taken to Shahganj community health centre where the doctors pronounced him dead.

After the incident, Shahganj MLA Ramesh Singh and other BJP leaders reached there. Circle Officer Ajit Singh Chauhan said that a murder case had been registered and was

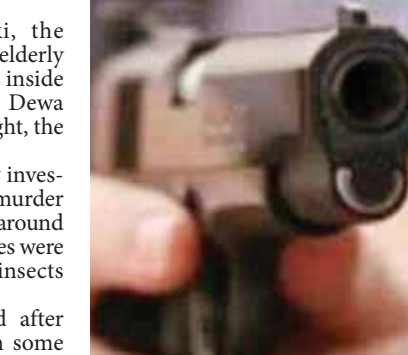
being investigated. Meanwhile in Barabanki, the decomposed bodies of an elderly couple were found lying inside their locked house under Dewa police station on Sunday night, the police said on Monday.

Police said that preliminary investigations suggested that the murder might have been committed around five days back since the bodies were badly decomposed with insects breeding on them.

The couple was murdered after being hit on the head with some blunt object.

Barabanki Circle Officer Jagat Ram Kannaujia identified the deceased as Majid Hussain Warsi, 65, and his wife Mashrat Jahan, 62, both natives of Budaun. They had been living in Dewa after having purchased a house eight months ago.

The CO said Majid initially ran a



business dealing in mattresses and covers but had also entered the real estate business for the past few years. Kannaujia felt it was a clear case of double murder and that the assailants might have been known to the victims as there was no sign of any forced entry. He added the

assailants would have locked the door from outside after murdering the couple.

The CO said the couple's three sons - Arif, Javed and Naved - stay in Delhi while the fourth one Parvez lives in Faridabad. Their daughter Tabassum along with her husband Sageer lives in Aligarh. He added that Sageer was the first to inform the police that he was unable to reach out to his in-laws. After this, the police went to check up at the elderly couple's residence but returned on seeing a lock on the door. He said the police again went to the house after being informed by locals about a foul smell emanating from the house. Subsequently, the police personnel forced their entry after breaking the door lock to find Majid lying dead near the staircase and his wife Mashrat lying dead on the bed.

लखनऊ विकास प्राधिकरण
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सार्वजनिक सूचना

सर्वसाधारण को सूचित किया जाता है कि प्राधिकरण की आवासीय / व्यावसायिक / रेंट / नजूल / इम्प्लूमेंट-ट्रस्ट योजनाओं के निम्नलिखित आवेदकों द्वारा उनके नाम के सामने अंकित सम्पत्ति का हस्तान्तरण / नामांकरण किये जाने हेतु प्राधिकरण में प्रार्थना-पत्र प्रस्तुत किया गया है :-

क्र. सं.	मूल आवेदी का नाम	भवन/भूखण्ड संख्या	योजना का नाम	मृत्यु दिनांक	मूल आवेदी के उत्तराधिकारी अथवा आवेदक का नाम	उत्तराधिकारी के पक्ष में अनापत्तिकर्ताओं के नाम	मूल आवेदी से (मृतक) का सम्बन्ध
1	श्री दीपक अवस्थी पुत्र स्व० आर०एन० अवस्थी	दुकान सं०-जी०एफ०-33, उदयन-2, रक्षा खण्ड	शारदा नगर योजना	04.11.2023	श्री शिक्तिज अवस्थी	रजिस्टर्ड वसीयत के आधार पर	पुत्र
2	स्व० हनुमान प्रसाद श्रीवास्तव (मृतक)	भूखण्ड संख्या-386	बशीरतगंज योजना	27.05.1998	श्री अतुल श्रीवास्तव पुत्र स्व० सतीश चन्द्र श्रीवास्तव पुत्र स्व० हनुमान प्रसाद श्रीवास्तव		पौत्र
3	श्री कौशल किशोर टंडन	भूखण्ड संख्या-एम-4/74, विपुल खण्ड	गोमती नगर योजना	05.01.2009	श्रीमती निशि टंडन, श्रीमती स्वाती टंडन, श्रीमती स्मृति टंडन		पत्नी, पुत्री
4	स्व० रवीन्द्र नाथ वर्मा	भवन संख्या-01/271, विराम खण्ड	गोमती नगर योजना	27.06.2014	श्रीमती सोहिनी वर्मा, श्री अरविन्द कुमार, श्री अनिल कुमार, श्रीमती अर्चना लाल		पत्नी, पुत्र, पुत्री
5	स्व० लोकेन्द्र यादव	भूखण्ड संख्या-2/162, विकल्प खण्ड	गोमती नगर योजना	17.07.2015	श्रीमती ज्योत्सना यादव, श्रीमती अविनाश रानी यादव, श्री विपिन यादव		माता, पुत्र

उपर्युक्त नामान्तरण के आवेदन के सम्बन्ध में यदि किसी भी व्यक्ति को कोई आपत्ति हो तो वह साक्ष्य सहित प्रकाशन तिथि से 30 दिनों के अन्दर अधोहस्ताक्षरकर्ता के कार्यालय में प्राप्त करा दें। निश्चित तिथि तक कोई आपत्ति प्राप्त न होने पर प्राधिकरण अमिलेखों में कॉलम-6 पर लिखित व्यक्ति का नाम दर्ज कर लिया जायेगा तथा उसके बाद किसी आपत्ति पर विचार नहीं किया जायेगा।

सचिव



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Frenemies

India seeks to neutralise China's economic hold but it beats US to become India's biggest trading partner

In the realm of global economics, the dynamics of trade relationships often override geopolitics. India's growing trade affinity with China is a living example of that: China has become India's largest trading partner in 2023-24. This development brings little joy to the nation aspiring to become an alternative to China and striving to bolster its manufacturing sector, with the Prime Minister's 'Make in India' call. Despite the Indian Government's rhetoric urging caution in dealings with China, economic imperatives seem to be reshaping the contours of bilateral trade. Their trade relationship has long been characterised by a mix of competition and cooperation. Both nations are regional powerhouses with vast consumer markets and burgeoning manufacturing sectors, though China is much ahead of India in terms of economy and infrastructure size. Over the years, China has emerged as a crucial supplier of goods to the world, including India, ranging from electronics and machinery to pharmaceuticals and textiles. Concurrently, India



has also found a receptive market for its exports in China, particularly in sectors like raw materials, agricultural products and IT services. But the real problem is the lopsidedness of the trade. We are a net importer of Chinese goods, that too at the cost of our local industry.

Most traders take the easy import route, often standard but cheap, and make decent profits. This leads to job losses and closure of several MSME manufacturing units. Besides, the nations are not the best of neighbours; relying on China in this scenario is indeed fraught with danger. But where wealth flows, interests follow and that explains India's rising trade ties with

China. The trajectory of bilateral trade has been influenced by several factors. One, the sheer size and harmony of their economies create natural synergies to drive trade volumes. Despite occasional border disputes and geopolitical issues, economic pragmatism often prevails, fostering trade ties. Two, China's manufacturing prowess and cost competitiveness have made it an attractive destination for Indian importers, especially in sectors where domestic production struggles to meet demand. Moreover, the persistent trade deficit with China underscores India's reliance on their goods and highlights the challenges in achieving more equitable trade ties. The geopolitical dimension of India-China trade cannot be overlooked either. The Indian Government must emphasise the need for strategic autonomy and self-reliance in key sectors. Initiatives such as 'Make in India' and Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) must be given further fillip. Additionally, efforts to diversify trade partnerships by nurturing ties with countries like the US, Japan and Australia must be accorded priority and a diversified trade portfolio maintained. Achieving a fundamental rebalancing of India-China trade dynamics is a multifaceted challenge that requires nuanced handling and necessitates a calibrated and pragmatic policy approach.

PICTALK



Flamingoes at the Thol Bird Sanctuary in Mehsana district

Regime change on cards in Nepal?



ASHOK K MEHTA

Amid strained India-Nepal relations, speculation swirls around a potential regime change in Nepal

Nepal's late Foreign Minister Rishikesh Shah would say that Kathmandu is the rumour capital of the world and also the fount of speculation. Our own Madhuri Dikshit once hailed Nepal as a beautiful country adding: "We're lucky it is part of India". This created a furore but the story appeared with tasteful embellishments in Nepal. Delhi's Chief Minister Madan Lal Khurana waxed eloquent about the sterling qualities of Nepalis working in India and what great servants they made. This led to fireworks in Nepal and bush telegraphy produced several ugly distortions. Hrithik Roshan never said he did not like Nepalese but Indian films were banned and other collateral damage followed. India is usually at the receiving end of Nepal's woes and wrath.

China has begun to feature negatively only recently. India-bashing was at its peak following the economic blockade in 2015 and the rekindling of border dispute when Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura were incorporated into Nepal's map after India included Kalapani in a new map. Chinese Ambassador Hou Yanxi who made her mark rough-shodding Nepalese politicians was targeted by the Indian media. Yanxi became central to a duel between Indian and Nepalese media. How poorly informed political class, celebrities and even the media about Nepal were apparent. This longish backgrounder is a necessary prelude to describe last week's rumour and speculation about another attempt at regime change in Nepal. The report about the split in JSP (N) took place when its supremo, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Health and Population Upendra Yadav was visiting the US. The story goes that NC leader Sher Bahadur Deuba attempted to topple the Left coalition led by Prachanda by drawing out Yadav (12 lawmakers) and Madhav Nepal of Unified Socialists (10 lawmakers). 20 plus lawmakers are necessary for the NC-led Democratic Alliance to make a comeback. The attempt failed as UML's KP Oli preempted the plan by splitting JSP(N) by



getting former colleague and lawmaker Ashok Rai to walk away from Yadav with seven of 12 lawmakers. The inside story is different: Yadav had plans to overwhelm numerically the Hill Nepalese with Madhesis in the approaching party national convention. This upset the Hill and Madhesis members unhappy with Yadav. Rai approached the Election Commission and registered a new party JSP sans N for Nepal. Yadav has decided to fight the Rai faction in court. Rai has pledged support for Prachanda. Reports about Deuba's deal vary: offering Yadav Premiership and/or a shared term with Madhav Nepal. This deal too fizzled out as Unified Socialists were already divided between two former PMs, Nepal and Jhalanath Khanal. India figured in the regime change as having backed Deuba. Operation Topple requires either RSP (21 lawmakers) or JSP(N) and Unified Socialists together to desert the ruling dispensation. The kingmaker for this great game is the CPN Maoists with 31 lawmakers that both NC and UML would need to stay in power. The threat to the Prachanda-led coalition will lurk in the nooks and corners of Parliament posed by parties with double-digit strength. NC, the single-largest party is



MIND GAMES ARE REGULARLY PLAYED IN BOTH COUNTRIES AS UNILATERALISM HAS CREPT INTO NEIGHBOURHOOD DIPLOMACY. WHILE NEPAL HAS DONE A TIT-FOR-TAT OVER THE MAP, CHINA HAS UNILATERALLY CHANGED THE LAC

licking its wounds but will not declare a truce to infuse a modicum of political stability. It has been blocking parliamentary proceedings for more than a month over the cooperative fund fraud in which Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane, RSP is involved. It has demanded a parliamentary probe into the alleged wrongdoings of Lamichhane. Prachanda has agreed to an enquiry in which others involved in the scam are also investigated. Parliament resumed after a short recess but NC is not allowing it to function. The budget has to be passed shortly and maybe the government will be forced to take the ordinance route. In India too it is time for regime change but through the world's longest election process. The BJP excels in toppling opposition governments with Operation Lotus. India has played a pivotal role in introducing democracy and its restoration in Nepal. Foreign Minister Jaishankar who has become a rock star in the election campaign is sharing pearls of wisdom on every conceivable subject, especially India's Neighbourhood First Policy. He said that politics may go up or down in the neighbourhood but India is regarded as a friend by the people. Later, he admitted that in diplomacy as in business there are setbacks

— it's part of the game. The latest setback in India-Nepal relations is the resurfacing of the festering border dispute. Having incorporated it in its state emblem the government has ordered the new map to be printed on Rs 100 bank notes about which Jaishankar observed that Nepal unilaterally took some measures but they can't change reality on the ground, adding discussions are ongoing through an established platform. As far as is known, no discussion has taken place. For Prachanda and Oli, nationalism is the magic mantra. When Prachanda came to India on an official visit last June during the joint press statement, PM Modi said that the border dispute would be resolved through a joint mechanism. Strangely this fact was not mentioned in the press release of the joint statement. Mind games are regularly played in both countries as unilateralism has crept into neighbourhood diplomacy. While Nepal has done a tit-for-tat over the map, China has unilaterally changed the LAC with India (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ELECTION GUARANTEES

Madam — This election season in India is filled with a plethora of extended guarantees from different political parties and their renowned leaders. Initially, it was only PM Narendra Modi who extended oral guarantees termed as 'Modi ki Guarantee'. Now, to compete with him, recently released Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal has also presented his list of 10 guarantees to script a 'new India'. However, Mr. Arvind made it clear that he didn't want to be the Prime Minister of India. Nevertheless, his support for the INDIA bloc has grown stronger, especially after he was sentenced to Tihar Jail by the apex court.

Elections have a historic relationship with political guarantees and promises. But we all already know how many of these guarantees are actually fulfilled. The irony is that people don't need guarantees to survive and ensure their well-being; instead, we need commitment and actions for the actual general welfare of every section of our society. Since Mr. Kejriwal is on interim bail until June 1st, considering the short duration of time he is outside the jail, he is trying his best to reach out to the maximum public with his statements, social media posts, press conference conversations, and other personal interactions with the countrymen to challenge the BJP in general and PM Modi in particular for his arrest during this peculiar time of elections. Now that it is a fight between the guarantees of the two biggest political parties, it is up to the people to decide whom they will choose in the tough fight of the Lok Sabha elections.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

CONTROVERSIAL CONTEST

Madam — The Eurovision Western Music Contest has been held in various countries across Europe for the last 68 years. The youth there enjoy this competition, and spectators and music lovers are often seen in a dancing mood throughout the event. However, this year's event, which concluded late on Saturday night, can be termed as the most political, controversial, chaotic,

Every vote counts



Amidst the dynamic political landscape, where elections have been completed in some places and others are still pending, it's crucial to acknowledge that not all leaders hoist the banner of public welfare. Merely casting a ballot doesn't guarantee the orchestration of effective governance. Instead of succumbing to the illusion that voting alone resolves everything, let's dispel such notions. The real-

ity often reveals a different narrative, where power dynamics favour those with deep pockets and questionable tactics, leaving trust and resources in disarray. If you're still clinging to the belief that all politicians are solely motivated by altruism, it's a precarious innocence to maintain. However, rather than consigning voting to oblivion, let's approach it with discernment. Let's seek out candidates who sway to the tune of integrity and genuinely prioritize the welfare of the people. And let's not overlook the importance of advocating for electoral reforms, weaving a fabric of transparency, accountability, and fairness in the political sphere. Your vote, fellow citizens, carries weight, especially when interwoven with others who aspire to a more just and equitable society. Remember, in the intricate tapestry of democracy, every thread contributes to a brighter future for us all

Imdadullah | Hyderabad

KEJRIWAL'S ELECTIONEERING

Madam — This is with reference to your Editorial "Wild card" (May 13). The national convener of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Arvind Kejriwal will campaign in favour of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) candidates across the country, Sandeep Pathak, the party's national general secretary said in a statement on Sunday, 12 May. Kejriwal will campaign in Lucknow on May 15, in Jamshedpur on May 16 and in Mumbai on May 17, he added. Kejriwal, who came out of Tihar Jail earlier this week, said he will work tirelessly and campaign across the country to end the "dictatorship" of the Modi government at the Centre. All the INDIA bloc constituents want Kejriwal to visit their states and campaign for them.

The Supreme Court has granted interim bail to the AAP leader to participate in the Lok Sabha poll campaigning.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SC judgments have strengthened democracy

Democratic spectacle owes its strength and boldness to a series of landmark legal judgments that have fortified its foundations

Elections, serving as the cornerstone of democracy, offer a platform for citizens to voice their opinions, hold leaders accountable, and actively engage in shaping the future of their nation. In India, elections transcend mere political proceedings; they evolve into grand festivals, embodying the collective will and aspirations of over a billion people. India's electoral odyssey, marked by its vast scale, diversity, and intricacy, has been fortified by a series of seminal legal rulings. These decisions have been instrumental in shaping and reinforcing the democratic framework of India, ensuring fairness, transparency, and inclusivity in the electoral process. Among the plethora of cases that demonstrate the resilience of the legal system, five stand out as pillars that have fortified India's electoral journey.

Fundamental Right to Vote: At the core of India's electoral democracy lies the fundamental right to vote, enshrined in the Constitution. Over time, the judiciary has steadfastly upheld and safeguarded this right through



various legal pronouncements. In the landmark 1977 case of Mohinder Singh Gill v. The Chief Election Commissioner, the Supreme Court of India unequivocally affirmed that the right to vote is sacrosanct and any arbitrary deprivation of this right is unconstitutional. The crux of this case revolved around assessing the constitutional validity of electoral laws that might encroach upon the fundamental right to vote.

Electoral Reforms and Transparency: Ensuring transparency and accountability in the electoral process has been an ongoing endeavour, guided by judicial interventions aimed at curbing malpractices and fostering electoral integrity. The 2002 case of Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India marked a significant milestone in this journey. This case presented the chal-

lenge of reconciling the right to privacy of political candidates with the public's right to information, necessitating a delicate balance between transparency in electoral processes and individual privacy rights.

Inclusive Representation and Minority Rights: The diverse social fabric of India underscores the necessity for inclusive representation and safeguarding minority rights in the electoral arena. Legal judgments have played a pivotal role in upholding these principles and ensuring equitable participation for all segments of society. The 1991 case of Indra Sawhney v. Union of India, commonly known as the Mandal Commission case, stands as a testament to this commitment.

This case grappled with the challenge of affirmative action and reservation policies, striking a balance between equitable representation of marginalised communities and the principles of meritocracy enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The landmark judgment underscored the commitment to inclusive representation, empowering

marginalised communities and fostering social justice in the electoral process.

Effective Electoral Disputes Resolution: Efficient resolution of electoral disputes is indispensable for upholding the sanctity of elections and fostering public trust in the democratic process. This judgment bolstered the credibility of the electoral process, ensuring expeditious and impartial resolution of disputes.

Safeguarding Electoral Rights and Freedoms: Preserving electoral rights and freedoms is paramount for the integrity of the electoral process. Legal judgments have been instrumental in protecting these rights and holding authorities accountable for any infringements. The 2015 case of Mohd. Sattar v. State of Rajasthan serves as a poignant example. The judgment reaffirmed the principle of universal suffrage, ensuring that every citizen's voice is heard.

(The writer is corporate and legal advisor and founder of AU Corporate Advisory and Legal Services; views are personal)



AKSHAT KHETAN



FIRST COLUMN

THE RISE OF ROBOTS

Robots are emerging as the next frontier, but can they replace humans?



SHAINY SHARMA

Various research and studies have shown that the next frontier in Artificial intelligence is the Robots. Much more added to it are the big names- Jeff Bezos, Microsoft and many others who are investing in human robots according to people with knowledge of the situation, as part of a scramble to find new applications for the so-called AI Technology. Undoubtedly, robots have increasingly become an integral part of our lives in this century, impacting various aspects of society, industry and everyday activities. The robots have revolutionized in many key sectors be it industrial, healthcare, agricultural, transportation or any other. The science of robots is revolutionizing day by day and scientists are making innovations in robots. Research studies show that by 2050, robots will overcome human beings as they will develop strong intellects.

Many developing nations are involving the use of robots. In the industrial sector robots are performing the tasks such as assembling, welding, painting and packaging in factories thereby increasing efficiency, precision and productivity. In the healthcare sector, robots can perform tasks such as surgery, patient care, rehabilitation and medication dispensing with great precision and even provide support and assistance to elderly or disabled individuals. Talking about the automobile industry, autonomous vehicles- including cars, drones and delivery robots, are transforming transportation and logistics while self-driven car makers are promising to make transportation safer, more efficient and accessible to people who are unable to drive. In the agricultural sector, agricultural robots such as drones



and automated harvesters can help optimise farming practices by monitoring crops, applying fertilizers and pesticides precisely and thereby harvesting crops efficiently which ultimately improves yields, reduces labour costs and minimizes environmental impact. Not only these but the robots are doing jobs and servings in restaurants too. The robots have taken down the responsibility of the pizza boy in pizza shops and even are performing tasks such as customer service, cleaning, and inventory management. They enhance operational efficiency and provide novel experiences for customers. Robots are indeed reshaping various aspects of everyone's lives, from how individuals work to how they interact with technology and each other. Today, educational robots are gaining an advantage in classrooms over teachers, engineering, and other STEM concepts in a hands-on manner.

Overall, robots are transforming the way we live, work and interact with the world around us. With advancements in robotics technology continuing to expand their capabilities and applications, the question of whether robots will replace humans in various tasks and roles is a complex one. While robots and automation have the potential to replace humans in some repetitive and routine tasks, they also create new opportunities and roles for humans in other areas. However, many tasks and roles require human creativity, empathy, and problem-solving skills, which are difficult for robots to replicate.

There is no denying the fact that the evolution of robots will profoundly impact society, offering new opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and improving quality of life. However, it will also raise the important ethical, social and economic considerations that must be carefully addressed with time. As robotics technology continues to advance, it will further transform society and open new possibilities for innovation and human-machine collaboration.

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)

The plight of unwed mothers of Kolam tribe



TV KATTIMANI

The stigmatisation of 'Kumari Matas' in the Kolam tribe highlights their struggle for social acceptance and economic empowerment



Kolam, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) of the Dravidian race is known for its unique culture, language, indigenous knowledge and matrilineal society. They reside predominantly in the Yavatmal, Chandrapur, some parts of Amravati, Wardha and Nanded districts of Maharashtra and in some parts of Adilabad of Telangana. They have historical roots in Andhra Pradesh and later migrated to the regions of Vidarbha and Marathwada. This Proto-Australoid tribe is often highlighted for its unwed mothers. As per the reports of The Indian Express, there are at least 45 registered unwed mothers and over 450 unregistered unwed mothers only in the three blocks named Maregaon, Pandarkawada and JhariJamini of Yavatmal. Being a matriarchal society, the Kolams of Yavatmal have always celebrated womanhood. They celebrate the first menstruation of girls; they worship 'Gabhuri', the mother Goddess as their main deity to uphold their matriarchal societal roots.

However, the situation is changing. Though the unwed mothers have been renamed as the 'KumariMaata' due to their assimilation with mainstream society yet due to their rising inclination towards the male-dominated society, patriarchal tenets are growing in these traditions. Therefore, the position of women is also declining consequently and those unwed mothers who used to live a normal life previously are now considered 'Bad character women'. There are various case studies and stories of women of the Kolam tribe where the elite in the society or financially stronger like contractors, outsiders visit the areas for work purposes, establish physical interactions with the women in their communities and refuse to marry them when they are expecting a child. Women are frequently conned by marriage promises because they are socially, emotionally and economically vulnerable. The woman is held liable for the premarital pregnancy, whereas the responsible males are excluded



THE KOLAM TRIBE, CLASSIFIED AS A PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TRIBAL GROUP (PVTG), IS GRAPPLING WITH A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE OF UNWED MOTHERS, EMPHASISING THE URGENCY FOR INTERVENTIONS TO TACKLE THEIR COMPLEX SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL STRUGGLES

ed from this process.

Most of these Kolam women work as agricultural labourers, construction labourers and other low-wage activities due to which it becomes very easy for the traders and other outsiders to abuse them physically. For example, according to Deshpande (2016) "border districts of Maharashtra, such as Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Bhandara, Buldhana, Amravati, Nagpur and Gondia too have unwed mothers, the numbers in Yavatmal are higher because of its proximity to the chilli fields of Telangana, where work (for the poor) is available throughout the year. A number of unwed mothers say they were lured by neighbouring state's men who promise marriage but left when they became pregnant."

Some of them get pregnant while being a minor whereas others are due to their backwardness. Though in most tribal societies, giving birth to a child is a biological phenomenon and hence considered pious but yet due to the assimilation with the conventional societies they are also recognizing childbirth as a structural process where the consent of society, kin and kith is necessary. These structural changes are pushing unwed mothers toward various other socio-cultural and economic problems.

The most important among these is that unwed mothers are not accepted within the community nor do they find any other groom, as they are considered obscene. As a result, for the entire period of life, they serve as a single mother due to which the pressure of childbearing increases among them. The problems are more serious as being unwed mothers they often face disgrace in the newly constructed norms of patriarchal society. Sometimes they need to

leave the village and stay in the outskirts whereas in many cases the other women are not allowed to talk to them or join them for any occasion, as they are believed to be malignant due to their premarital physical relations. The consequences are economic and occupational also. As a daily wage labourer, their leisure time is very little but being single mothers they need breaks for breastfeeding and childcare due to which they face pay cuts. Sometimes they need to pay a fine to the panchayats also for their "misconduct". These unknown pregnancies among the women of Kolam are a crucial issue.

These indicate the lack of awareness about contraceptive measures, education, economic weakness and social vulnerability that often attract these women to fake marriage conversations and other luring proposals. As per the report of Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University (2018-2019) in Yavatmal, "28.84 per cent Kumari Matas are in the age range of 26 to 30 years. 36 per cent Kumari Matas having education up to Fourth standard, 67.30 per cent Kumari Matas are belonging to 'Kolam' caste, 82.69 per cent are homeless. 51.09 per cent are pregnant due to outsiders, 82.07 per cent children of Kumari Matas are admitted in the school by furnishing the name of mother only, 92.30 per cent had delivery at home, 61.63 per cent getting help from Government schemes".

The subject is more critical as many of them are uncounseled because most of them do not come forward to speak due to socio-cultural stigma and thus their stories remain untold. This has again a negative impact on them as their complete family details are not mentioned in the Government records like ration cards, Aadhar

cards, etc. which deprives them of getting the benefits of many Government schemes that can make their life easier.

As per the report of Pune Times Mirror, "a survey of such victims is conducted every year by a woman and child development (WCD) officer with the help of Anganwadi workers and a junior protection officer at the taluka level." Further, the Anganwadi workers help these unwed mothers by teaching them the methods of nutrition and hygiene. The Bombay High Court has already directed the state to the need for the rehabilitation of young unwed mothers among the Kolam tribe. The Government of Kerala is also running a similar kind of scheme called "Snehasparsham" which offers unwed mothers ₹1000/- per month to lessen the financial burden of these economically vulnerable unwed mothers. The need of the hour is to initiate some projects and schemes for them so the Kumari Matas of Yavatmal can be included in the parameters of Government benefits at a large scale.

The infrastructural facilities like schools and primary health care centres, are the basic needs of these regions. Endeavours should also be taken to open basic schools and training centres for vocational courses like sewing, beautician, etc. The awareness about Self-Self-help groups can make them financially independent through various micro-level businesses like horticulture, bee-keeping, jelly-making etc. Further, documentation of unwed mothers can give them a social identity and make them live a life of dignity and self-respect.

(The writer is Vice Chancellor, Central Tribal University of Andhra Pradesh; views are personal)

Kejriwal's bail: Unveiling political prophecies post-release

The Delhi CM's release sparks controversy with ominous predictions and bold political statements, fuelling nationwide debate on democracy's future

Persons accused of criminal cases getting arrested and the courts granting them bail is nothing new. Even if the person happens to be the reigning chief minister of a State or a former union minister of finance, the bail does not absolve the accused of the charges. The Supreme Court order that released the Delhi Chief Minister on bail from the custody of the Enforcement Directorate says it is a provisional arrangement so that he could participate in the election campaign as the Lok Sabha poll comes once in five years.

So far, so good. But what came after the Delhi Chief Minister was released on bail needs to be analyzed threadbare. On Saturday, he was shipped at Lord Anjaneya



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Temple and addressed a press meeting. What he said during the press meeting is shocking and capable of causing fear in the minds of the people. He said if the BJP wins the 2024 Lok Sabha election and comes back to power, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will send all Opposition leaders to jail. Kejriwal also claimed that Amit Shah is being groomed as the next Prime Minister as Modi is likely to retire in 2025

when he turns 75. Yet another disclosure made by the Delhi Chief Minister was that Yogi Adityanath would be removed as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh within two months of the BJP coming back to power.

The national and international media are celebrating Kejriwal's bail and his prophecies. A major section of the media forgot the fact that they were the ones to give running commentaries of Live events without joining the game as players. The media in Kerala and Tamil Nadu are on Cloud Nine reporting that there is going to be a change of Government at the Centre after 4 June 2024. Well, let's leave it to the voters who are in the process of electing their representatives. It is good to see

that doubts about tampering the electronic voting machines have taken a stage and the Opposition leaders have started working on the modalities of Government formation. Saturday's press meeting by the Delhi Chief Minister took one to 2019 when the same had claimed that if the BJP wins the General Election and returns to power, there would not be any more elections in India. "The 2019 General Election would be the last poll the country will see if Narendra Modi returns to power," these were the words of Kejriwal in 2019.

After the 2019 general election, Narendra Modi returned to power with a larger majority and the country saw regular elections to all the State assemblies that completed their

mandatory five-year tenure. Though the claim fell flat on all fours, neither the media that flashed Kejriwal's warning about the "last" general elections nor our political pundits remembered the same.

Once the results were announced and the BJP was returned to power, that became the news, and everything else was forgotten (at least till 2024). Yet another battlefield has been opened by the Opposition and that is the One Nation, One Leader concept, the brand new slogan coined by Kejriwal. Wasn't it George Santayana, the Spanish-American philosopher who said in 1863 that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"? Narendra Modi, I am sure

does know this adage quite well and hence there is no possibility of following the slogan coined by Kejriwal. The entire media in the country is unanimous in their opinion that elections are the festivals of democracy. But the festivals will certainly lose their charm if they are fueled by half-lies and full lies. One is at a loss to understand the logic behind the claim by certain leaders that the BJP government would subvert the Constitution! Who derailed the Constitution much against the order of the Supreme Court that the basic structure of the Constitution should never be tampered with. It was in 1976 that then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi altered the preamble of the Constitution by incorporating

the words secularism, socialism etc. India survived as a nation from 1947 to 1976 without the terms secularism and socialism in its Constitution. B R Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution, was totally against the inclusion of these terms when it was drafted for the first time. It was after the introduction of these terms that communal riots and terrorism peaked in India. Accusations and allegations are fine because they add to the intensity of the campaigning. But baseless allegations rob the beauty of the election process. Interestingly, the leaders named by the Delhi chief minister as potential victims of the Modi regime are not saints or beatified ones. Reports from Delhi say that Kejriwal

was summoned eight or nine times by the ED for questioning in connection with money laundering. The Chief Minister chose to ignore the same with contempt. He might not know the truth that the reigning Prime Minister cooperated with the Supreme Court-appointed Special Investigation Team under the chairmanship of R K Raghavan, a former CBI director to grill him about the Gujarat riots. For 19 hours, the then Gujarat Chief Minister sat through the grilling and answered all the queries they asked. That is what we call honesty and integrity. People still hope that Kejriwal too is honest.

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



INDIA Bloc leaders scared of Pakistan's nuclear power: Modi

PTI ■ MUZAFFARPUR/HAJIPUR/SARAN (BIHAR)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday lashed out at the opposition INDIA bloc, calling its leaders "cowards" who were "scared of Pakistan's nuclear power". Addressing three back-to-back rallies in Bihar's Hajipur, Muzaffarpur and Saran Lok Sabha constituencies, Modi made an apparent reference to a recent statement of National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah, without mentioning him by name. "The INDIA bloc seems to have leaders who are scared of Pakistan and have nightmares of its nuclear power," he said. The remarks come in the backdrop of comments by Abdullah about Pakistan having atom bombs and not

wearing bangles. "If Pakistan does not wear bangles, we will make the country wear these. I knew they did not have foodgrains. Now, I come to know they do not even have adequate supply of bangles," the PM said. "But, we must look carefully at the opposition which seems to be full of cowards and timid people, who give a clean chit to Pakistan on terrorism, raise doubts on surgical strikes... their Left allies even want our nuclear arsenal to be dismantled," he said. Modi maintained that the INDIA bloc had worked out a formula, which would allow five of its leaders, if the coalition came to power, to enjoy a year of premiership each. "Just imagine what type of a mess we would get to see if



the bloc's plan to have a different PM, every year, for five years, succeeds. However, they are a motley group that is bound to fail," he said.

"The current elections are for having a government that will give a further boost to the standing and clout enjoyed by the country," the PM said.

Modi also said the money recovered in raids against politicians "belonged to the country's poor". "I will tell you why they are

crying hoarse against the action of agencies like the ED. During the previous Congress regime, the ED seized only Rs 35 lakh, which could be contained in a school bag. Ever since we took over, the agency has recovered Rs 2,200 crore, which would require 70 small trucks to be carried," said Modi. The prime minister said unlike his opponents, who were concerned about promoting their offspring, "I have no 'waaris' (successor). The common people are my waaris". He reiterated the charge that parties like the Congress and RJD will "give away reservations" to Muslims "to pursue their vote bank politics", but added that "as long as I am alive, I will not let this happen". "Kidnapping and extortion flourished during the RJD

rule in Bihar... NDA fights for social justice, 60 per cent Union ministers from OBC/SC/ST categories," he asserted. "It has been several days since I challenged the Congress-led opposition to give it in writing that it will not give reservations on religious lines. They are yet to respond," Modi said. The PM also alleged that the opposition had plans to impose "inheritance tax" but "Modi would stand like a wall in their way, thwarting attempts to rob people of their wealth". He accused the opposition parties of "deliberately hurting people's sentiments by making obnoxious statements about the Ram temple in Ayodhya". Targeting RJD leaders Lalu Prasad and his son and heir

apparent Tejashwi Yadav, mentioning neither by name, Modi referred to the fodder scam, the "land for jobs scam" and "attempts to take credit for work done by our ally (Chief Minister and JD(U) president) Nitish Kumar". Speaking on a day when the fourth phase of Lok Sabha elections were underway, he urged the people to turn out in large numbers and vote for the NDA to enable formation of a strong government. In his speech, Modi also touched upon his government's track record on development, citing construction of highways at a rapid rate and underscoring commitment to social justice and empowerment, while accusing the opposition of trying to put hurdles in the way of measures like women's reservations.

Rahul did not visit Ram temple for fear of losing vote bank, says Shah

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi did not visit the Ram temple in Ayodhya as he feared losing his vote bank. Addressing a rally in Maharashtra's Dhule district, Shah also said Gandhi opposed the abrogation of Article 370, which provided special status to Jammu and Kashmir, and sought to know the views of Shiv Sena (UBT) head Uddhav Thackeray on the Congress leader's stand. The Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) are constituents of the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in the state and the INDIA alliance at the national level. The consecration of Lord Rama's idol was held at the Ayodhya temple in January this year. Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi not only helped in the resolution of the Ram temple issue but also facilitated its construction. "Rahul Gandhi was invited (for the Ram temple



inauguration), but he did not visit because he feared losing his vote bank. The BJP does not have any such fear," he said. The Congress did not remove Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir because of the same appeasement politics, the

senior BJP leader said. "Gandhi opposed the abrogation of Article 370. I want to ask his ally Uddhav Thackeray what are his views on Gandhi's stand. Gandhi and Congress insulted (Hindutva ideologue) Veer Savarkar. What does

Thackeray have to say about it?" he asked. "I also want a clarification from Uddhav Thackeray. One of the constituents of the opposition INDIA bloc is DMK led by M K Stalin, and his son Udhayanidhi Stalin has insulted Sanatan Dharma. Does Uddhav agree with them?" Shah sought to know. Further targeting the Congress and the Wayanad MP, the Union minister said 20 attempts were made to "launch and relaunch" Rahul Gandhi as a leader. "How can he (Gandhi) even launch Chandrayaan to the moon? Can he or his government ever give a befitting response to Pakistan? Can they end Naxalism or terrorism in the country? Can they make India prosperous?" he asked. Shah was campaigning for BJP's Dhule Lok Sabha seat candidate Subhash Bhamre, the former Union Minister of State for Defence. The Congress has fielded former MLA Shobha Bachhav against Bhamre in Dhule, where polling will be held on May 20.

Congress holding PM responsible for Nehru's mistakes: Jaishankar on China issue

PTI ■ MUMBAI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday said the Congress holds Prime Minister Narendra Modi accountable for the mistakes made by first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru when making comments on China while believing the party has no culpability for the past acts. On Chinese belligerence in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh, Jaishankar said Indian land was taken by China between 1958 and 1962, and some of it before 1958 as well. Attacking Rahul Gandhi, Jaishankar said it is "very very sad" to "gun down your own forces". "When you keep saying land taken by China, it was lost in 1962. I see efforts made to mislead the country," he said in response to a question at a news conference here. China and India have been witnessing an unease in ties, especially after the Galwan Valley incident of June 2020 when Chinese and Indian soldiers clashed, resulting in



casualties on both sides. Since then India-China relations have been in an "abnormal state", with both sides amassing its troops along the LAC. The External Affairs Minister said people are saying Chinese are building villages on the border, but it is in a place called Longju (along Line of Actual Control in Arunachal Pradesh), which the Chinese attacked and occupied in 1959. "If you look at the Google map, please look at that village and triangulate it with what Nehru said to the

Parliament in 1959," Jaishankar said. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and his party talk about a bridge being built by China in Pangong Tso in Ladakh but the bridge is being built at a place where the Chinese came in 1958 and then retook in 1962, Jaishankar asserted. A Congress spokesperson recently said the Chinese have built a road in Shaksgam Valley and claimed this has created concerns for Siachen, the EAM said. "Possibly it has concerns for Siachen. Shaksgam Valley was

Only Ramdrohis opposing Modi, claims Yogi



PTI ■ RAE BARELI/BARABANKI (UP)

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said Monday that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will again form the government, asserting that even Lord Ram wants his "ardent devotee" to win. He was addressing rallies in Barabanki and Rae Bareilly, from where Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is contesting the Lok Sabha elections. "Only 'Ramdrohis' or Pakistanis are opposing Modi ji," Adityanath said at a public meeting in Rae Bareilly constituency. "I cannot understand what is Rahul Gandhi's relationship with Pakistan. He lives in India, seeks votes in Rae Bareilly and gets support from Pakistan." He alleged that the voices from Pakistan and that of Ramdrohis have become similar. "A Pakistani minister was supporting the incident in which soldiers were martyred in Pulwama... Now he has made a statement in support of the Congress candidate from Rae Bareilly, Adityanath said. Taking a dig at Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi who has sought to know from PM Modi what he has done for Raebareilly in the past 10 years, the Uttar

Pradesh chief minister asked, "What has the Congress done in 65 years (of rule)?" In Barabanki, Adityanath said under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, everyone, irrespective of their caste and community, benefitted from the development schemes. "Our beloved Lord Ram also wants his ardent devotee to take over the reins of the country once again," the Uttar Pradesh chief minister said. With the fourth phase of voting underway, the "Modi wave has now turned into a tsunami," he said. Hitting out the Congress and Samajwadi Party, he said, "They have a history of scams. These people are making big claims, but the truth is that during their time people used to die of hunger, farmers used to commit suicide and youth used to migrate." "But we are all witnesses to the change that took place in the last 10 years under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. For the last four years, 80 crore people have been getting free ration, 12 crore farmers have got the benefit of Kisan Samman Nidhi," Adityanath said. Voting in Barabanki and Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha seats will be held in the fifth phase on May 20.

Electors cast vote fearlessly for first time at former Maoist hotbed Budha Pahad booth

PTI ■ BUDHA PAHAD (JHARKHAND)

Thirty-seven-year-old Halkan Kisan on Monday exercised his vote for the first time at his own booth at 'Budha Pahad'—a former Maoist hotbed, which falls under Palamu Lok Sabha constituency. Located along Jharkhand's Latehar and Garhwa districts, Budha Pahad was freed recently from the red rebels' control by security forces after over three decades. Kisan cast his vote at booth no 420 in government's Upgraded middle school, Hesatu, along with hundreds of voters from different villages fearlessly. "I have exercised my vote at my own booth for the first time in my life. Earlier, our booth used to be relocated,

around 13 km from my village, due to impact of the Maoist in the locality. Very few voters used to go to vote in relocated place. Now, the area has become free from Maoist activity and people are enthusiastically exercising their votes," Kisan, a resident of Hesatu village under Bargarh block, told PTI. Medininagar sub-divisional officer (SDO) Anurag Tiwary said that the voting at the polling station is being conducted amid deployment of heavy security. "The polling officials and security personnel were air dropped on Sunday at Budha Pahad to conduct the polls," Tiwary told PTI. A total of 771 electors are eligible to exercise their votes at the booth. By 1 pm, the booth has registered 68 per cent polling.



Vikram Yadav, 50, another voter, told PTI, "I have given my vote without any trouble. I came to the booth walking around 5 km from my village Saurat and I found no

security issue even on the way as there are deployment of security forces. Block programming officer, Bargarh, Md Hashim Ansari told PTI, "Several arrangements have been made for voters such as shed, drinking water and ambulance. Besides, vehicles have also been arranged for the elderly and physically challenged voters. The polling was conducted at booth no 420 after the visit of Jharkhand Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) K Ravi Kumar along with senior police officers on April 20. Kumar had then said that the voters here would exercise their franchise for the first time at their places after many decades. He gave credit to security forces for making this place terror-free.

However, excluding booth no 420, other three booths in Budha Pahad have been relocated due to security reasons, a senior official said. Voting is being held in four Lok Sabha constituencies in Jharkhand — Singhbhum, Lohardaga, Khunti and Palamu on Monday. The exercise to free Budha Pahad from left-wing extremists was carried out through three special operations that were launched since the beginning of April 2022. A total of 14 Maoists were killed, while 590 others were either apprehended or had surrendered during these operations, the officials said. Earlier attempts to drive out the red rebels from 'Budha Pahad' did not materialise due to its difficult terrain, another police officer said.

Union Minister Anurag Thakur, Congress candidate file nomination papers in HP

PTI ■ HAMIRPUR/SHIMLA (HP)

Union Minister Anurag Thakur and Congress candidate Vinod Sultanpuri filed their nominations for Hamirpur and Shimla (SC) Lok Sabha seat, respectively on Monday. Thakur was accompanied by senior BJP leaders and his brother Arun Dhumal, the chairman of the Indian Premier League as he submitted his nomination papers. The senior BJP leader is seeking a fifth term in the Lok Sabha from the Hamirpur seat in Himachal Pradesh. Before filing his nomination, Thakur paid obeisance at the temple of Maa Awahdevi and addressed people at several places. Hundreds of party functionaries and locals greeted him with garlands and wished him with luck. The Congress has fielded



Satpal Raizada, a former MLA of Una, as its candidate against Anurag Thakur. In Shimla, sitting MLA from Kasauli Vinod Sultanpuri filed his nomination from Shimla (SC) Lok Sabha seat. The Congress candidate was accompanied by Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, party's state unit chief Pratibha Singh and Cabinet

Minister Harshwardhan Chauhan, among others. Talking to media person after Sultanpuri submitted his papers, Sukhu said all four Congress candidates contesting Lok Sabha polls in the state have filed their nominations. "This is not a normal election. It is an election to save democracy and give the politics of the country a direction," the chief minister said and alleged that the BJP used money power to try to topple the Congress government in Himachal Pradesh. Polling in all four Lok Sabha seats in Himachal Pradesh will be held in the last of the seven-phase Lok Sabha elections on June 1. Bypolls to six assembly seats in the state, which fell vacant following the disqualification of rebel Congress MLAs, will be held simultaneously.

EC suspends two polling officials for dereliction of duty in Odisha

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Election Commission (EC) has suspended two polling officials in Odisha for dereliction of duty, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Nikunja Bihari Dhal said here on Monday. One polling official from Narla assembly constituency in Kalahandi district and another polling official in Ganjam district have been suspended for dereliction of duty, he said. "We are monitoring the poll process in our webcasting room. A minor group clash-like incident was reported from Chikiti area in Ganjam district. I have personally spoken to SP Berhampur and Ganjam Collector and asked them to ensure that the polling goes on smoothly in Berhampur LS constituency especially in the Chikiti area," Dhal told media persons. As voter turnout was a little low in the Berhampur Lok Sabha constituency, the CEO appealed to the voters to come out in large numbers and exercise their franchise. Some technical glitches were reported in EVMS in some places during initial hours. However, the situation has stabilised, the CEO said. Voting started at 7 am in Berhampur, Koraput,



Nabarangpur, and Kalahandi parliamentary constituencies along with 28 assembly segments within the jurisdiction of these Lok Sabha seats. Till 11 am around 23.28 per cent of the 62.87 lakh voters have exercised their franchise, officials said, adding that the highest voter turnout was recorded in tribal-dominated Kalahandi Lok Sabha seat at 25.38 per cent followed by Koraput (24.43 per cent), Nabarangpur (24.3 per cent) and Berhampur (18.99 per cent), he said. Lok Sabha and Assembly elections are being held simultaneously in Odisha.

Misery deepens in Rafah as Israeli troops press op

AP ■ RAFAH

Aid workers are struggling to distribute dwindling food and other supplies to hundreds of thousands of Palestinians displaced by what Israel says is a limited operation in Rafah, as the two main crossings near the southern Gaza city remain closed. The United Nations' agency for Palestinian refugees said 360,000 Palestinians have fled Rafah over the past week, out of 1.3 million who were sheltering there before the operation began, most of whom had already fled fighting elsewhere over the course of the 7-month war between Israel and Hamas. Israel has portrayed Rafah as the last stronghold of the militant group, brushing off warnings from the United States and other allies that any major operation there would be catastrophic for civilians. Hamas has meanwhile regrouped in some of the most devastated parts of Gaza that Israel had previously claimed to have

cleared with heavy bombardment and ground operations. Thirty-eight trucks of flour arrived through the Western Erez Crossing, a second access point to northern Gaza, Abeer Etefa, a spokeswoman for the UN's World Food Program, said Monday. Israel had announced the opening of the crossing on Sunday. But no food has entered the two main crossings in southern Gaza for the past week. The Rafah crossing into Egypt has been closed since Israeli troops seized it a week ago. Fighting in Rafah city has made it impossible for aid groups to access the nearby Kerem Shalom crossing with Israel, though Israel says it is allowing supply trucks to enter from its side.

For the past week, the Israeli military has intensified bombardment and other operations in Rafah, while ordering the population to evacuate from parts of the city. Israel insists it is a limited operation focused on rooting out tunnels and other mil-



Smoke rises following an Israeli bombardment in the Gaza Strip as seen from southern Israel, Monday. AP/PTI

itant infrastructure along the border with Egypt. Israeli forces were also battling Palestinian militants in Zeitoun and the urban Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza, areas where the army had launched major operations earlier in the war.

Etefa said WFP is distributing food from its remaining stocks in the areas of Khan Younis and Deir Balah further north to which many of those escaping Rafah have fled. Inside Rafah, only two organizations partnering with WFP were still able to distribute food, and

no bakeries were operating in the city. "The majority of distributions have stopped due to the evacuation orders, displacement, and running out of food," she said. "The situation is becoming increasingly unsustainable." Almost the entire population of Gaza relies on humanitarian groups' distribution of food and other supplies to survive. Amid Israeli restrictions and obstacles to aid distribution from violence, some 1.1 million Palestinians in Gaza face catastrophic levels of hunger, on the brink of starvation, and a "full-blown famine" is taking place in the north, according to the U.N. The director of the Kuwait Hospital, one of the last functioning medical centers in Rafah, said medical staff and residents living near the facility have been told to evacuate. Sohaib al-Hams warned that any evacuation of the hospital itself would have "catastrophic consequences." Israel has also ordered new

evacuations in northern Gaza, even after hundreds of thousands of people fled in the opening weeks of the war. Mahmoud Shalabi, the senior program manager for Medical Aid for Palestinians, a U.K.-based charity, said he was recently ordered to relocate from Beit Lahiya in the far north to Gaza City. "I have left my house several times now, along with my parents, who are both older than 70, my three children and my wife," he said. "The journey of terror and displacement is beyond words." The war began when Hamas and other militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking another 250 hostage. Militants still hold about 100 captives and the remains of more than 30 after most of the rest were released during a cease-fire last year. Israel's offensive has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distin-

guish between civilians and combatants in its figures. Israel says it has killed over 13,000 militants, without providing evidence. Israel marked an especially somber Memorial Day on Monday, with ceremonies across the country commemorating fallen soldiers, including the more than 600 killed since Oct. 7, most in the initial attack. During the day's opening ceremony at Mount Herzl cemetery on the outskirts of Jerusalem, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed once again to defeat Hamas. "We are determined to win this struggle. We exacted and will exact a high price from the enemy for their criminal acts. We will realize the goals of victory and at the center of them the return of all our hostages home," he said. At 11:00 A.M. on Monday, sirens announced two minutes of silence, and a formation of four fighter planes flew over Jerusalem and the surrounding areas.

3 charged under UK's National Security Act

London (PTI): Three men in the UK have been charged under the National Security Act with assisting the Hong Kong intelligence service and foreign interference. All three will appear in custody at Westminster Magistrates' Court later, the BBC reported on Monday. The Metropolitan Police said the Hong Kong investigation was not related to a separate case involving Russia. As part of the investigation, 11 people were detained under Section 27 of the National Security Act. The three men charged are Chi Leung (Peter) Wai, 38, of Staines-upon-Thames; Matthew Trickett, 37, of Maidenhead; and Chung Biu Yuen, 63, of Hackney. Commander Dominic Murphy, head of the Met's Counter Terrorism Command, said, "I want to reassure the public that we do not believe there to be any wider threat to them."

Trump's hush money trial arrives at pivotal moment

AP ■ NEW YORK

The star prosecution witness in Donald Trump's hush money trial, Michael Cohen, took the stand on Monday, and his testimony could help shape the outcome of the first criminal case against an American president. Cohen, Trump's former lawyer and personal fixer, is by far the Manhattan district attorney's most important witness in the case, and his appearance signals that the trial is entering its final stretch. Prosecutors say they may wrap up their presentation of evidence by the end of the week. Cohen is expected to testify about his role in arranging hush money payments on Trump's behalf during his first presidential campaign, including to porn actor Stormy Daniels, who told jurors last week that the USD 130,000 that she received in 2016 was meant to prevent her from going public about a sexual encounter she says she had with Trump in a hotel suite a decade earlier. He also matters because the reimbursements he received form the basis of the charges — 34 felony counts of falsifying



Michael Cohen

business records — against Trump. Prosecutors say the reimbursements were logged as legal expenses to conceal the payments' true purpose. Defence lawyers have teed up a bruising cross-examination of Cohen, telling jurors during opening statements that the fixer-turned-foe is an "admitted liar" with an "obsession to get President Trump." The testimony of a witness with such intimate knowledge of Trump's activities could heighten the legal exposure of the presumptive Republican presidential nominee if jurors deem him sufficiently credible. But politically, prosecutors' reliance on

a witness with such a checkered past — Cohen pleaded guilty to federal charges related to the payments and to lying to Congress — could be a boon for Trump as he fundraises off his legal woes and paints the case as the product of a tainted criminal justice system. Either way, his role as star prosecution witness further cements the disintegration of a mutually beneficial relationship that was once so close that Cohen famously said he'd "take a bullet for Trump." After Cohen's home and office were raided by the FBI in 2018, Trump showered him with affection on social media,

praising him as a "fine person with a wonderful family" and predicting — incorrectly — that Cohen would not "flip." Months later, Cohen did exactly that, pleading guilty that August to federal campaign-finance charges in which he implicated Trump. By that point, the relationship was irrevocably broken, with Trump posting on the social media platform then known as Twitter: "If anyone is looking for a good lawyer, I would strongly suggest that you don't retain the services of Michael Cohen!" Cohen later admitted lying to Congress about a Moscow real estate project that he had pursued on Trump's behalf during the heat of the 2016 Republican campaign. He said he lied to be consistent with Trump's "political messaging." Prosecutors are expected to elicit detailed testimony from Cohen about his past crimes in hopes of blunting the impact of defense lawyers' questioning and showing that they're not trying to hide his misdeeds. But it's unclear how effective that will be, given that defence lawyers will be prepared to exploit all the challenges that

accompany a witness like Cohen. Besides painting Cohen as untrustworthy, they're also expected to cast him as vindictive, vengeful and agenda-driven. Since their fallout, Cohen has emerged as a relentless and sometimes crude critic of Trump, appearing as recently as last week in a live TikTok wearing a shirt featuring a figure resembling Trump with his hands cuffed, behind bars. The judge on Friday urged prosecutors to tell him to refrain from making any more statements about the case or Trump. "He has talked extensively about his desire to see President Trump go to prison," Trump attorney Todd Blanche said during opening statements. "He has talked extensively about his desire to see President Trump's family go to prison. He has talked extensively about President Trump getting convicted in this case. No matter how his testimony unfolds, Cohen is indisputably central to the case, as evidenced by the fact that his name was mentioned in the jury's presence during opening statements more than 130 times — more than any other

person. Other witnesses, including former National Enquirer publisher David Pecker and former Trump adviser Hope Hicks, have testified at length about the role Cohen played in arranging to stifle stories that were feared to be harmful to Trump's 2016 candidacy. And jurors heard an audio recording of Trump and Cohen discussing a plan to purchase the rights to a story of a Playboy model, Karen McDougal, who has said she had an affair with Trump. During a massive rally on Saturday in the southern New Jersey resort town of Wildwood, Trump revived his criticism of the case, wrongly blaming President Joe Biden for orchestrating the New York charges, calling the case a "Biden show trial." That argument ignores the reality that the hush money case was filed by local prosecutors in Manhattan who do not work for the Justice Department or any other White House office. The Justice Department has said the White House has had no involvement in the two criminal cases against Trump brought by special counsel Jack Smith.

False narratives being created about India in West: Barai

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Misinformation and false narratives are being created about Indian democracy in the West in the middle of an election cycle in India, a prominent Indian-American oncologist has said, observing that some people in the West continue to have a colonial mentality. Chicago-based Dr Baharat Barai, in an interview on Sunday, hit out at Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for not taking action against Sikh separatists who are "openly planning and supporting violence inside India and Indian leaders." "The Khalistan problem is only in Canada, maybe a little bit in the US. If the US government wants to give them a piece of land, let them be happy. After all, they're foreign citizens. They're either citizens of the US or citizens of Canada. What right do they have to interfere in what is happening in India?" Dr Barai told PTI in an interview here. "If they want a separate land for them, let (Canadian Prime Minister Justin) Trudeau give it to them. If the US thinks that that's a good idea (let them do



so)...we are standing right in front of Abraham Lincoln (memorial in Washington DC). What did he do when the South (US) wanted to secede? We had a civil war. In Washington DC, he is being celebrated as the father of the nation," he said. "This (Khalistan) is not a problem of India. Indian Sikhs don't want to have anything to do with it. It is the foreign-born or foreign-living Sikhs and only a very tiny fraction of them," Dr Barai said. Referring to the number of news articles and commentaries appearing in the Western press, including that of the US, raising questions about democracy, freedom of expression, and human rights in India,

More bodies found after flash floods kill dozens in Indonesia

AP ■ PADANG

Rescuers recovered more bodies Monday after monsoon rains triggered flash floods on Indonesia's Sumatra Island, bringing down torrents of cold lava and mud, leaving 43 people dead and another 15 missing. The heavy rains, along with a landslide of mud and cold lava from Mount Marapi, caused a river to breach its banks. The deluge tore through mountainside villages along four districts in West Sumatra province just before midnight Saturday. The floods swept away people and submerged hundreds of houses and buildings, while forcing more than 3,100 people to flee to temporary government shelters in Agam and Tanah Datar districts, said National Disaster Management Agency spokesperson Abdul Muhari. Cold lava, also known as lahar, is a mixture of volcanic mate-



rial and pebbles that flows down a volcano's slopes in the rain. Rescuers on Monday recovered more bodies, mostly from villages that were worst hit in Agam and Tanah Datar districts, bringing the death toll to 43, Muhari said in a statement. At least 19 people were injured in the flash floods and rescuers were searching for 15 villagers reported missing, he said. Television reports showed relatives wailing as they

watched rescuers pull a mud-caked body from a devastated hamlet. It was placed in an orange and black bag and taken away for burial. Authorities struggled to get tractors and other heavy equipment to the area over washed-out roads after flash floods brought mud and rocks onto the hilly hamlets, said Abdul Malik, who heads the search and rescue office in Padang, the provincial capital.

Judge lifts ban on video of church stabbing

Melbourne (AP): An Australian judge Monday lifted a ban on the social media platform X showing Australians a video of a bishop being stabbed in a Sydney church. The temporary ban was put in place April 22, but the judge rejected the application from Australia's eSafety Commission to extend the court order that would have expired Monday. Australian Federal Court Justice Geoffrey Kennett said he would publish his reasons for imposing and lifting the order later. The decision was a win for the company rebranded by billionaire Elon Musk when he bought Twitter last year. X was alone among social media platforms in refusing to remove video of Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel being stabbed. Musk has argued that he is standing up for a freedom of speech principle. Australian lawmakers have accused him of arrogance and of lacking a sense of social responsibility.

"Not trying to win anything. I just don't think we should be suppressing Australian's rights to free speech," Musk posted on X after the ruling. X is also taking a separate court action against eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant, a former Twitter employee, that challenges the validity of her notice requiring the platform to remove video of the April 15 attack in an Assyrian Orthodox church. The judge is expected to consider setting a hearing date Wednesday. Assistant Treasurer Stephen Jones said the government might consider changing Australian law after reading Kennett's reasons for removing his order that required X to hide the video from users. "There's a fundamental principle at stake and that is, if you're a company or anybody operating in Australia, then you've got to abide by Australian laws," Jones said.

'Fires used as weapon of war in Sudan destroyed 72 villages'

AP ■ CAIRO

Fires resulting from the fighting in Sudan destroyed or damaged 72 villages and settlements last month, a UK-based rights group said Monday, highlighting the use of fire as a weapon of war in the conflict in the African country. Investigators from Sudan Witness, an open-source project run by the non-profit Center for Information Resilience, say that more blazes than in any other month since the war started in mid-April 2023. The number also brings to 201 the total number of fires in Sudan since fighting broke out between Sudan's military and the rival paramilitary force. The analysis didn't provide any casualty figures from the fires. In the war in Sudan, the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces have often used fire, setting

entire villages ablaze, especially in Sudan's western Darfur region. The war has wrecked the country and pushed its population to the brink of famine. More than 14,000 people have been killed and thousands have been wounded. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced. The Center for Information Resilience said the number of fires surged particularly in the north and west of el-Fasher, the capital city of North Darfur state that faces an imminent attack. El-Fasher saw intense fighting on Friday between the Sudanese military and the paramilitary RSF and their allies. At least 27 people were killed and dozens injured, said the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA. More than 800 were displaced. Sudan's military launched an

airstrike the next day that hit close to a pediatric hospital in el-Fasher, killing two children and a caregiver, according to Doctors Without Borders. In its analysis, the Center for Information Resilience estimated that 31 settlements — villages and towns — were affected by fires in April, with an over 50 per cent destruction rate. "We've documented the patterns of numerous fires and the continuing devastation to settlements around western Sudan, large and small," Anouk Theunissen, Sudan Witness project director, said in a news release. "When we see reports of fighting or airstrikes coinciding with clusters of fires it indicates that fire is being used indiscriminately as a weapon of war. The trend is worsening and continues to lead to the mass displacement of Sudanese people," Theunissen said.

Amazon's self-driving robotaxi under investigation

Detroit (AP): Amazon's self-driving robotaxi unit is being investigated by the US government's highway safety agency after two of its vehicles braked suddenly and were rear-ended by motorcyclists. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said in documents posted on its website Monday it will evaluate the automated driving system developed by Zoox. Both crashes happened during the daytime hours and the motorcyclists suffered minor injuries. In both cases, the agency confirmed that each of the Amazon vehicles was operating in autonomous mode leading up to the crashes.

Thousands protest in Georgia

AP ■ TBILISI

Georgia's parliament green-lit a final vote on a proposed law that critics see as a threat to media freedom and the country's aspirations to join the European Union on Monday, a day after police dispersed the latest protests against it. The bill would require media and non-governmental organisations and other non-profits to register as "pursuing the interests of a foreign power" if they receive more than 20 per cent of their funding from abroad. The opposition denounces the bill as "the Russian law" because Moscow uses similar legislation to crack down on independent news media, non-profits and activists critical of the Kremlin. The bill is nearly identical to one that the governing Georgian Dream party was pressured to



withdraw last year after street protests. Renewed demonstrations have rocked Georgia for weeks, with demonstrators scuffling with police, who used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds. The government says the bill is necessary to stem what it deems as harmful foreign influence over the country's politics and to prevent unspecified foreign actors from trying to destabilise it.

Huge crowds marched through Europe Square in the capital, Tbilisi, on Saturday, with demonstrators wrapped in Georgian and European Union flags and chanting "Georgia!" On Sunday, the protesters gathered in front of parliament for an overnight rally and tried to block entrances into the building, where a committee of lawmakers were expected to discuss the bill once again on Monday.

Cellphones of Indian crew on board seized as part of probe: Non-profit organisation

PTI ■ NEW YORK

The FBI has seized the cellphones of the mostly Indian crew on board a crippled cargo ship in Baltimore as part of the investigation into the deadly bridge accident in the US city, a non-profit organisation in touch with the personnel said. The 2.6-km-long, four-lane Francis Scott Key Bridge over the Patapsco River came crashing down on March 26 after the 984-foot ship 'Dali' collided against it. The crew on board Dali included 20 Indians and one Sri Lankan. The crew has been on the ship since the accident and has been cooperating with the investigation. Executive Director of the Baltimore International

Seafarers' Centre The Rev. Joshua Messick told PTI that he is working with all of the relevant organisations to make sure the crew has what they need and that their rights are being upheld. "They are well cared for with the sole exception that their cellphones were seized as part of the FBI's investigation and have not been returned," he said. Messick said he is in "contact with the crew to purchase some SIM cards for them and to plan trips ashore when they are able to have shore leave." The Baltimore International Seafarers' Centre is a non-profit organisation serving seafarers that call on the Port of Baltimore from all over the world. The mission of the organisation is to "facilitate the well-being of crew

members by offering transportation ashore," according to information on its website. Last month, US authorities opened a criminal investigation into the Baltimore bridge collapse incident that killed six construction crew workers, who were repairing potholes on the bridge when the collision occurred. The Washington Post had said that the FBI opened the criminal investigation "focusing on the massive container ship that brought down the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore last month — a probe that will look at least in part at whether the crew left the port knowing the vessel had serious systems problems." The Key Bridge Response Unified Command is sched-

uled to use precision cuts made with small charges to remove a large section of the Francis Scott Key Bridge wreckage from on top of the Dali. For safety reasons, the controlled demolition to remove the bridge section resting on the deck of the Dali has tentatively been scheduled for Monday. Due to weather conditions producing lightning within 10 miles of the M/V Dali, remaining daylight, and rising tide, Unified Command has moved the demolition to Monday. The Key Bridge Response Unified Command said in a statement that the safest and swiftest method to remove the bridge piece from on top of the Dali is by "precision cuts made with small charges."

NEERAJ CHOPRA, KISHORE JENA TO COMPETE DIRECTLY IN FED CUP FINALS

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Star Indian javelin throwers Neeraj Chopra and Kishore Jena have been given direct entry into the Federation Cup finals here on May 15, having already bettered the minimum qualification mark of 75m multiple times in their careers. Olympic and world champion Chopra is coming off a fairly good outing at the Doha Diamond League last week where he finished second with a throw of 88.38m. Asian Games silver-winner Jena's Diamond League debut, however, ended in disappointment as he was eliminated after three rounds with 76.31m being his best. DP Manu, who finished sixth in the 2023 World Championships and who is looking to qualify for the upcoming Paris Olympics by breaching the 85.50m mark, will also compete directly in the finals. "All those who have crossed 75m will not compete in the qualifying round on Tuesday.

There are nine of them from among those who had made entries, including Neeraj and Jena. They will directly compete in the final on Wednesday," Indian athletics head coach Radhakrishnan Nair said, quoting the Athletics Federation of India's qualification rules. "The remaining who have below 75m mark will compete in the qualifying round and the top three will join the nine above-75m throwers in the final." The AFI is quite looking forward to 26-year-old Chopra's first home competitive outing in three years. "The AFI is not at all surprised at Neeraj taking part in the Federation Cup. His participation in domestic event is no doubt a very good thing for Indian athletics," a top official of the AFI told PTI. It is learnt that the AFI wanted Chopra to compete in a domestic event after he won gold in Tokyo Olympics and before the Paris Games. He did not take part in any



domestic event in 2022 and 2023 as he was training or competing abroad. His last domestic event was the Federation Cup in March 2021. It is learnt that Chopra has reached India from Doha but will land here only on Tuesday. Asian Games medalist Jena is arriving here later on Monday. Nair played down the injury to men's 4x400m relay squad member Rajesh Ramesh who pulled out midway during the second leg of the first round qualifying heat in Bahamas earlier this month. Ramesh was replaced by Arokia Rajiv, who was also not fully fit, in the second round of the Olympic qualifying heat and the Indian team booked a Paris ticket. "Ramesh's injury is not a hamstring pull, it's related to tendon in thigh. So, it is not a major injury. He is expected to start training in 10-15 days. Rajiv will also be alright soon," Nair said. "There should not be any problem in Olympics preparation." A total of 19 track and field

athletes have qualified for Paris and Nair said the team will train in Spala in Poland for four weeks before travelling to Paris for the Olympics. Track and field events starting on August 1. "The team will train in Spala before Olympics and we will reach Paris three or four days before the competition starts," he said. Indian athletes have trained in Spala many times in the past. Nair also said the AFI is still hopeful of the mixed 4x400m relay team's Paris qualification despite its failure in Bahamas during the World Relays. Only two slots remain up for grabs. "Our mixed 4x400m team will take part in the Asian Relays (May 20-21 in Bangkok) and we can qualify for Paris if we run below 3 minutes 14 seconds and we feel can do that." Meanwhile, it is learnt that the AFI will shortly come out with a strategic plan with the target of winning multiple medals in the 2036 Olympics. The target is irrespective of India winning the right to host the Games.



Shyaamnikhil ends 12 years wait, becomes India's 85th GM

PTI ■ DUBAI

Shyaamnikhil became India's 85th Grandmaster by completing his third and final GM norm in the just-concluded Dubai Police Masters chess tournament, ending a 12-year-wait for the player who took to the sport as an eight-year-old. Shyaamnikhil needed just one win and eight draws to complete the long-overdue GM title which he achieved in the tournament. The 31-year-old conjured the requisite 2500 ELO rating points, the minimum requirement to be a GM, way back in 2012 with two Grandmaster norms but for the third one, he had to wait for 12 years. "I started playing at the age of eight, my parents taught me but I could not play any tournament for three years. Winning the under-13 State championship opened up opportunities for me as I could play Asian and age group world championship," recalled Shyaamnikhil. Hailing from Nagarcoil in Tamil Nadu this was not an easy ride for the player, who was known as one of the finest talents of his time. "He shifted his base to Chennai to pursue chess despite coming from a modest background and stayed with me," said his former coach K Visweswaran. Making his first GM norm in

Mumbai Mayors Cup 2011 and the second one some time later during the Indian championship as a 19-year-old, Shyaamnikhil completed the rating requirement in early 2012. It was Dubai open in 2012 where Nikhil missed a big chance to score his final norm and then a series of missed opportunities led to a long draught in his career. "It was only in 2017 that I played tournaments in Europe, till then I was trying to play in Vietnam or UAE trying to make the final norm but these places are not so easy as the tournaments are very strong," he said. The 2022 Commonwealth champion said that he had come here prepared and missed a norm again in a tournament in France just before the Dubai Police Masters. "I needed a win in the last round but I drew again and missed the norm again," he said when asked about how he felt about three missed opportunities. "I wanted to play Chess as enjoyment, I like Mikhail Tal and Garry Kasparov. I would like to dedicate this to my parents, who have waited a long time for this title, my trainer Visweswaran sir also helped a great deal," Shyaamnikhil added. "Now that the title is done, I can play more freely," he concluded.

Whoa Nelly! Rose Zhang wins Founders Cup to end Korda's record tying LPGA Tour winning streak

AP ■ CLIFTON (US)

Great things have been expected from Rose Zhang from the moment the two-time NCAA champion won in her professional debut last year and joined the LPGA Tour the following week. The 20-year-old finally delivered again Sunday, birdieing four of the final five holes to win the Cognizant Founders Cup. She beat Madelene Sagstrom by two strokes while putting an official end to Nelly Korda's record-tying LPGA Tour winning streak. "I was able to grow so much throughout the journey in this past year," Zhang said. "I don't know, it's crazy to come out here. Didn't have any expectation of having to win because I realize that it's all just noise and I really just have to be able to work at it myself and try my best to put myself in positions like this." "But no matter what happened this week, I would've been very satisfied and it reignited my passion for the game once again," she added after winning on Mother's Day. Zhang, who was talking to her mom coming into the media room, actually had a funny start to her round. The Stanford product almost fell on her rear end taking a shot from an awkward stance on the first hole. The shot could have gone anywhere. It hit the pin and she made par. "I just thought to myself, wow, I mean, today is probably going to be a lucky day," said Zhang, who played with Sagstrom in a stroke-play duel with the rest of the field far back. "Maybe I can get something



going. Would not have imagined myself being who are now, especially after 12. Sagstrom birdied that hole to take a three-shot lead and things did not look good for Zhang. It got better in the event that honors the 13 founding members of the tour. Zhang, who shot a 6-under 66, birdied Nos. 14, 15, 17 and 18 at Upper Montclair Country Club, while Sagstrom bogeyed the 16th in finished two back. Korda, who struggled the final two days after playing magnificently in winning the five straight events she entered, began the day 11 strokes back and shot her second straight 73 to tie for seventh at 7 under. She had no regrets. She hopes someone will join her and Hall of Famers Nancy Lopez and Annika Sorenstam in winning five straight or even more. "But just to do that with all the competition out here is super, super

rewarding with how much work that I've put in," the 25-year-old Korda said. "So I think to get a streak like that in any sport in general is amazing with the amount of talent that I feel like every athlete has in their sport. Just an amazing feeling and hopefully one day it'll sink in." It was a heart-breaking end for Sagstrom, the 31-year-old Swede who started the day with a one-shot lead and was looking for her first victory since 2020 and second overall on tour. "I struck it so nicely this week. I've worked really hard for a long time," Sagstrom said. "I putted incredibly. It's really high up there. That's probably why it hurts more. Nothing against Rose. She played incredibly. I kind of wish I gave myself a few more chances at the end there. Didn't want it to end that way. This is probably the best golf I played in years." Sagstrom led by three after 13, but Zhang curled in a birdie putt at 14 and made an 8-footer on the next to draw within one. They were tied after 16, with Sagstrom missing a 10-foot par putt after a bad chip from the back fringe. After Sagstrom saved par at the par-3 17th with a fast, downhill 25-footer, Zhang took the lead with a short birdie putt and she closed things out on the final hole with Sagstrom waiting to make a birdie attempt. Zhang, who won last year at nearby Liberty National in her pro debut, finished at 24 under 264. Rookie Gabriela Ruffels of Australia was third at 9 under, her best finish. She shot 71. Peiyun Chien of Taiwan and Ruoning Yin and Xiyu Lin of China tied at 8 under.



Wanted to be a doctor but opted for athletics due to father passion: Olympic bound Jyothika

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

An academically-inclined child is a dream realised in most Indian households and that's why Olympic-bound runner Jyothika Sri Dandi aspired to be a doctor before she realised that her father would be happier seeing her excel in sports. "Because of him, I did not have to struggle much. He takes care of everything. So, now I want to fulfil his dream of seeing me do well in the Olympics," said Jyothika who has a personal best of 52.73 seconds in individual 400m. It all started after Jyothika won races in school meets and that was when her father realised the talent of his daughter. "I used to finish first in annual school sports competitions in 200m and 400m and even in some races organised by clubs. "He took me to the school PET teacher when I was in seventh class (around 12 years of age). I ran on the mud tracks at a college ground in my place. I started taking part in district and state meets when I was in ninth class in 2014." Between 2014 and 2021, Jyothika trained under Sports Authority of India coach Vinayak Prasad in Vijaywada. In 2021, she trained under Ramesh Nagpuri, current national junior team head coach, in Hyderabad for one year during which she ran her then personal best of 53.05 seconds after which she was called for the national camp. "I got national medals, I went to World School Games and Asian Youth Championships but interest in sports, I did not have. Till 2017, I did not have interest in sports.

Her mother is a home-maker and she has an elder sister who got married recently. "My father was a bodybuilder when he was young but stopped as there was no support from family. Now he is a businessman. He is very much interested in sports and he pushed me a lot and he wants me to be in the Olympics. "Because of him, I did not have to struggle much. He takes care of everything. So, now I want to fulfil his dream of seeing me do well in the Olympics," said Jyothika who has a personal best of 52.73 seconds in individual 400m. It all started after Jyothika won races in school meets and that was when her father realised the talent of his daughter. "I used to finish first in annual school sports competitions in 200m and 400m and even in some races organised by clubs. "He took me to the school PET teacher when I was in seventh class (around 12 years of age). I ran on the mud tracks at a college ground in my place. I started taking part in district and state meets when I was in ninth class in 2014." Between 2014 and 2021, Jyothika trained under Sports Authority of India coach Vinayak Prasad in Vijaywada. In 2021, she trained under Ramesh Nagpuri, current national junior team head coach, in Hyderabad for one year during which she ran her then personal best of 53.05 seconds after which she was called for the national camp. "I got national medals, I went to World School Games and Asian Youth Championships but interest in sports, I did not have. Till 2017, I did not have interest in sports.

Wonder goal for Ella Toone as Manchester United wins Women FA Cup with 4-0 rout of Tottenham

AP ■ LONDON

Manchester United won its first major trophy by routing Tottenham 4-0 in the Women's FA Cup final at Wembley. Ella Toone's stunning long-range strike in first-half stoppage time set up victory for Marc Skinner's team. United cruised to victory after the break through two goals from Lucia Garcia and another from Rachel Williams. United quickly made up for defeat to Chelsea in last year's final by lifting the trophy 12 months on. Toone's wonder goal broke Tottenham's resistance when she curled the ball into the top corner from around 20 yards (meters) in the third minute of time added on in the first half.



Williams doubled United's lead with a powerful header nine minutes after the break. United effectively sealed victory three minutes later, this time through Garcia, who was named player of the match. Seizing on a weak clearance from Spurs goalkeeper Becky Spencer, Garcia pounced to score from close range. She added her second and United's fourth in the 74th minute by lifting a shot into the top corner from inside the

box. It is the first time since Birmingham's victory in 2012 that the cup hasn't been won by one of Arsenal, Chelsea or Manchester City. Victory eases the pressure on Skinner, who guided the club to second place in the Women's Super League last season but has endured a difficult campaign this time round with United set to finish fifth. Skinner's contract is set to expire this summer. Asked if he expected to carry on next season, the 41-year-old Skinner said: "I hope so ... But we've created history and I have got to live in that moment. "I believe in myself fully and I am still only a baby in terms of my career.

Djokovic follows Nadal to early exit at Italian Open in first match after being hit by water bottle

AP ■ ROME

Novak Djokovic's performance was so poor that even the 24-time Grand Slam champion admitted it was "concerning." Djokovic put on one of his worst displays at one of his favorite tournaments as he was upset by 29th-seeded Alejandro Tabilo in the third round of the Italian Open. It was Djokovic's first match since accidentally getting knocked on the head by a water bottle while signing autographs after his opening win on Friday. "I managed to sleep okay, I had headaches. The next day or yesterday was pretty fine, so I thought it's okay. Maybe it is okay. Maybe it's not," Djokovic

said. "I mean, the way I felt on the court today was just completely like a different player entered into my shoes. Just no rhythm, no tempo, no balance whatsoever on any shot. It's a bit concerning." Djokovic started off with a double-fault and it didn't get much better for the six-time Rome champion. The top-ranked Djokovic lost his first two service games and went on to lose the match 6-2, 6-3 in just 68 minutes, handing Tabilo the victory when he double-faulted - his fifth of the match - amid boos at the Foro Italico. "I'm trying to soak it all in and wake up right now," Tabilo said after the biggest win of his career. "I was just trying to keep my nerves in and keep

swinging. Towards the end my arms were getting tired but I was trying not to think about it. "It's crazy, I just can't believe what's happened. I can't believe it right now. I don't think anyone can believe it." The third-round loss marked Djokovic's worst performance at the Italian Open. He had lost only once before to an opponent outside the top 10 in Rome, where he had never gone out before the quarterfinals. Djokovic followed Rafael Nadal to an early exit after the record 10-time Rome champion lost his third-round match to Hubert Hurkacz 6-1, 6-3 on Saturday. While Djokovic had said he was "fine" after the water



bottle incident, it was an unusually off-key performance from the Serb as he tries to step up his game on clay before attempting to defend his title at the French Open, which starts on May 26. "I was going for kind of easy training yesterday. I didn't feel anything, but I also didn't feel the same," Djokovic said. "Today under high stress, it was quite bad - not in terms of pain, but in terms of this balance. Just no coordination. Completely different player from two nights ago ... I don't know. I have to do medical checkups and see what's going on." Djokovic had 12 unforced errors to Tabilo's four and produced 14 winners to his opponent's 22. It was also a rare occasion when he had

zero break point chances. He was broken four times in the match, including in the final game, and Djokovic could only shake his head when another unforced error handed Tabilo match point. Djokovic is still without a title this year - the first time he's reached May without a trophy since 2018, when he was returning from a right elbow injury. Tabilo next faces 16th-seeded Karen Khachanov, who beat Francisco Cerundolo 6-2, 6-4. Third-seeded Alexander Zverev advanced after the 2017 Rome champion beat Luciano Darderi of Italy 7-6 (3), 6-2. Grigor Dimitrov and Thiago Monteiro also advanced, while Taylor Fritz beat American compatriot

Sebastian Korda 6-3, 6-4. Another American, Ben Shelton, lost to Zhang Zhizhen. In the women's tournament, second-seeded Aryna Sabalenka eased through to the fourth round with a 6-4, 6-2 win over Dayana Yastremska. American Sofia Kenin, who won the Australian Open in 2020 and also reached the final at Roland Garros the same year, was upset by Slovakian qualifier Rebecca Sramkova 6-4, 4-6, 6-4. American Danielle Collins is safely through after beating Caroline Garcia 6-3, 6-3. Also advancing in third-round matches were Maria Sakkari, Irina-Camelia Begu, Jelena Ostapenko, Victoria Azarenka and Elina Svitolina.



Focus on KL Rahul as LSG face DC in playoff battle

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
 Focus will be on skipper KL Rahul as a struggling Lucknow Super Giants look to keep their slim IPL playoff chances alive when they face an equally desperate Delhi Capitals in a must-win game here on Tuesday. There has been a lot of speculations about Rahul's future as LSG skipper after his "public reprimand" by team owner Sanjiv Goenka following their 10-wicket hammering by Sunrisers Hyderabad last Wednesday. Speculations are rife that Rahul may step down as captain or perhaps he will do his duties for the remaining two games before leaving LSG. In either case, the India batter would look to answer with his bat and end things on a high. Rahul hasn't been in the best of form and it's not only cost him a place in India's T20 squad but also left LSG at the seventh spot with 12 points with RCB

and DC, who are fifth and sixth respectively. Five days is a lot of time to introspect and Rahul and Co. Will look to come out all guns blazing when they face DC, who are also on 12 points and are coming into the match after a loss against RCB on Sunday night. Besides Rahul, Quinton De Kock's poor form this season has left LSG struggling in the powerplay, putting pressure on the likes of Marcus Stoinis and Nicholas Pooran, who haven't got the freedom to unleash their big shots. Although Pooran and Ayush Badoni managed to rescue the team in the last match, the bowlers failed miserably against the formidable SRH pair of Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma, who racked up 167 in 9.4 overs, a T20 record by any team. The loss of tearaway pacer Mayank Yadav to injury has left a big hole which Yash Thakur and Naveen-ul-Haq haven't been able to fill. Also



Mohsin Khan picked up an injury and didn't play last match. The spin duo of Krunal Pandya and Ravi Bishnoi too have been to do a lot of soul

searching after being punished by SRH. Delhi Capitals, on the other hand, will hope the return of skipper Rishabh Pant after a one-match suspension due to slow overrate against

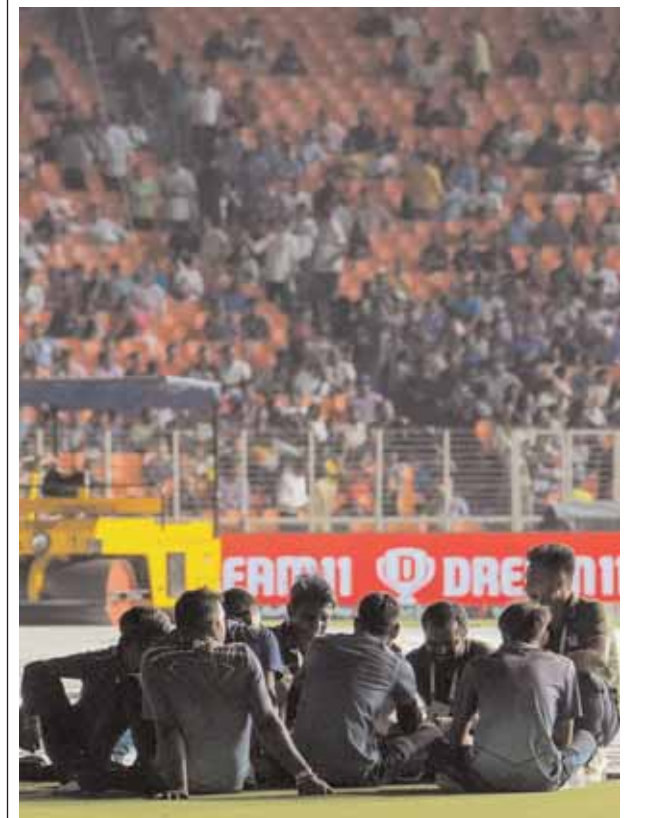
Rajasthan Royals will help them to end things on a high. Delhi sans Pant paid the price for their fielding lapses as those drop catches and misfields came back to haunt them

against RCB on Sunday night. While the bowlers let RCB off the hook after a good start, the batting once again came unstuck as they lost four wickets inside 4 overs to be bowled out for their lowest innings score this IPL. But this is the same team which scored four 200 plus totals this season and they will have to find their mark in their last game to salvage any slim hopes of a top four. Jack Fraser-McGurk, with 330 runs from seven matches at an impressive strike-rate of 237.41, has been their most impactful batter. While Abhishek Porel (269, 156.39), Pant (413, 156.43) and Tristan Stubbs (321, 185.54) too have been among runs this season. In the bowling department, the spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav (15) and Axar Patel (10) have shared 25 wickets, while pacers Khaleel Ahmed (16 wickets) and Mukesh Kumar (16) too have got them the breakthroughs.

Rains wash away GT playoff hopes

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD
 Gujarat Titans' hopes of qualifying for the Indian Premier League play-offs was dashed on Monday as rain washed out their must-win match against Kolkata Knight Riders here without a ball

turning up with the right attitude. "GG (Gautam Gambhir) has been pretty solid with how he wants us to play as a team. He stressed on us to come here and still look for two points," said Kolkata's opener Phil Salt as the teams waited for the



being bowled. It meant KKR were assured of a top two finish with 19 points from 13 games and a place in the Qualifier 1. GT, the last year's runners-up and 2022 champions, are out of the play-off race, garnering 11 points from 13 matches. The toss didn't happen at scheduled time of 7 pm due to incessant lightning, which was followed by slight drizzle that became heavier as time passed by. The cut-off time was 10:56 PM for a five-over contest but the official decided to abandon the match, a first in this IPL, because of the consistently intensifying rain and wet outfield. "It is a big achievement for us. The chat before the game (vs GT) was about not letting up,

rain to subside. KKR has already secured their place in the play-offs after they defeated Mumbai Indians in their previous fixture. Rajasthan Royals are second in the standings with 16 points from 12 games, while defending champions Chennai Super Kings are placed third with 14 points from 13 matches. Sunrisers Hyderabad are placed fourth with 14 points from 12 matches, while Royal Challengers Bengaluru are on fifth with 12 points from 13 games. With 12 points from as many games, Lucknow Super Giants are still in the play-off race, while Delhi Capitals are virtually out of the reckoning with 12 points from 13 matches.

RCB have demonstrated ability to deliver when it counts: Moody

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
 Royal Challengers Bengaluru have shown the ability to perform when it matters most, said former Australian all-rounder Tom Moody after their fifth straight win in the IPL. Languishing at the bottom of the points table 10 days ago, Virat Kohli and Co have found their mojo back. Their winning streak has given them a fighting chance to make the knockout stage. "Once again, RCB has demonstrated their ability to deliver when it counts, setting the stage for what promises to be a thrilling encounter between the two teams," Moody said on Star Sports. They will take on MS Dhoni's Chennai Super Kings, who are also in contention for a playoff berth, in their final league game at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium on Saturday. "It's iconic for the entire IPL, truly. You've got two colossal names in cricket here in India and in world cricket-Dhoni



and Kohli. "They're both dominant figures, leaving a huge legacy wherever they've been. And the interesting thing is anything can still happen on that table." Barring Kolkata Knight Riders, who have already qualified, as many as seven teams are still in contention for a playoffs berth. "After the weekend, I was assuming that a couple of results will sort of fall the way they should fall and then we'll have a clear idea who's going to end up in that top four. "Yet, it's still anyone's game. Any team could clinch a spot

in that coveted top four," Moody said. After a sedate start to the season, RCB batter Rajat Patidar has found his groove, scoring five fifties in the last seven innings at a quick pace. "Patidar, in particular, has been a revelation in the past five or six games, notching up several quick-fire half-centuries. "His aggressive approach has consistently put pressure on the opposition's bowling attack, making it incredibly challenging for them to get back into the contest," Moody added.

PBKS' Livingstone returns to England to address knee niggle ahead of T20 WC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
 Punjab Kings' all-rounder Liam Livingstone on Monday returned to England from the ongoing IPL to undergo a knee recuperation ahead of the next month's T20 World Cup. The Kings are already eliminated from this IPL after managing just four wins from 12 matches and they are currently at the bottom of the

table with eight points. "IPL done for another year, had to get my knee sorted for the upcoming World Cup," Livingstone wrote on his Instagram wall. "Thanks once again to the Punjab Kings fans for all their love and support. Disappointing season as a team and personally, but as always, I loved every minute of playing in the IPL," he added. Hence, Livingstone will not be

available for PBKS' last two matches of the tournament against Rajasthan Royals (May 15) and Sunrisers Hyderabad (May 19). The injury is not of serious nature but the England management, as per ESPNcricinfo, decided to give him more time to get it treated prior to their home T20I series against Pakistan, beginning on May 22. After that series, the defending champions will travel to the West Indies for their T20 World Cup engagements, starting on June 4 against Scotland in Bridgetown, Barbados. Livingstone had a lean IPL this season, scoring 111 runs from seven matches and took just three wickets. Meanwhile, other England players in the IPL who are part of their World Cup squad — Moeen Ali (CSK), Sam Curran, Jonny Bairstow (PBKS), Jos Buttler (RR), Will Jacks, Reece Topley (RCB) and Phil Salt (KKR) - will be home-bound the coming weekend.



We have switched on the attacking mode: RCB pacer Dayal

PTI ■ BENGALURU
 Pace bowler Yash Dayal attributed the renaissance of Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the second half of the IPL to them "switching on the attacking mode." After six consecutive defeats, Royal Challengers won five matches on the bounce to remain in contention for a playoff berth. In the last game, RCB defeated Delhi Capitals by 47 runs here on Sunday to leap to fifth spot on the table with 12 points from 13 matches. "Our performances have markedly improved in the last few matches. I think we have switched on that attacking mode in the last few matches. It has been a big positive for us," said Dayal, who took three for 20 against DC, during the post-

match press meet. The left-arm quick said even while RCB were going through a losing streak, the dressing room remained a thickly-knit unit. "When you lose matches continuously, like it happened with us, morale will come down a bit. But we took it in our stride and bounced back well. "But even when we were losing, fingers were not pointed at anyone. We have remained positive throughout the season," he added. The resurgence of RCB is directly linked with the improved performance of their bowling unit, which was all over the place in the first half of the season. Dayal credited team bowling coach Adam Griffith for that turnaround. "The credit goes to our bowling coach. He engages us in specific drills,



visualising particular opposition batsmen and we discuss this a lot. "When I go out to bowl, I just think about how to get the batter out or save some runs. All of us think the same way," he added. "GAVE TOO MANY RUNS": James Hopes, the DC bowling coach, said dropped catches allowed RCB to add a few more runs and reach an over-par total. Rajat Patidar, who made a quick fifty, and Will Jacks, who scored a fluent 41, were dropped multiple times on Sunday. "They got one too many and we dropped four catches and had we taken them we could have probably restricted them to 160-165. "But that's fine and if you are not going to put it together with the bat you are not going to win too many games in this

tournament," said Hopes. The Delhi side now has 12 points from 13 matches and it now needs a massive win over Lucknow Super Giants on Tuesday to keep their playoff hopes alive. The former Australian all-rounder was confident of achieving it in their home ground. "We have to win big now. But fortunately, we are going back to Delhi where big scores have been the norm for the season. "So, we are going to ask them to put a big score on the board and keep them a fair way below us to have any chance to advance in this tournament," he said. However, Hopes rued the missed opportunity against RCB. "But today was our chance to really get into the mix for playing finals, and now we've left it up to fight, which you don't really want to do in this tournament."

OTHER SPORTS

Satwik, Chirag look to regain competitive edge as Thailand Open begins

PTI ■ BANGKOK
 Star shuttlers Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will look to regain their competitive edge as they spearhead the Indian challenge at the Thailand Open Super 500 tournament, beginning here on Tuesday. The top seeded Indian pair, who are one of the favourites to win a gold at the Paris Olympics, found it a tad difficult to negotiate the variety of serves dished out by the Indonesians and Chinese at the Thomas Cup. Both shuttlers will look to address the slight drop in their

level this week when they begin their campaign against Malaysia's Nur Mohd Azriyn Ayub Azriyn and Tan Wee Kiong. With the Olympic-bound shuttlers looking to fine-tune their skills ahead of the Paris Games, the BWF world tour events will offer the perfect platform for them to test those new strokes or tweaks that they make to their games. India's top player in singles, HS Prannoy, a world championships and Asian Games bronze medalist, too will have to find his best footing after being troubled by health issues this season.



His win over Indonesia's Anthony Ginting was a confidence booster but the loss against China's Shi Yuqi will trouble him as he needs to close out such narrow games to

get into the best mental shape ahead of the Olympics. Kiran George and Sathish Kumar Karunakaran are also in fray, while Lakshya Sen and PV Sindhu had pulled out before the draw was announced last week. While Kiran will face China's Australia Open winner Weng Hong Yang, Sathish, who had claimed the Odisha Masters title last December, takes on a qualifier in their respective opening matches. In Sindhu's absence, Ashmita Chaliha, Malvika Bansod and Aakarshi Kashyap will look to keep India's flag fluttering with a solid show in women's singles.

Atletico Madrid moves closer to securing Champions League spot after beating Celta Vigo

AP ■ MADRID
 Atletico Madrid moved closer to securing the fourth and final Champions League spot with a 1-0 win over Celta Vigo in the Spanish league. Rodrigo De Paul scored an 84th-minute winner for Atletico, which opened an eight-point gap to fifth-place Athletic Bilbao with three rounds remaining. Athletic was held at home to a 2-2 draw with Osasuna on Saturday. "You know me, we have to keep improving until the end," Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone said. "We have to keep fighting no matter what." It was the third win in a row for Atletico, which is three points behind third-place Barcelona. The Catalan club hosts seventh-place Real

Sociedad on Monday. Celta, which has lost three of its last five games, dropped to 17th place and five points above the relegation zone. Rayo Vallecano moved to 16th, also five points from danger, after a 0-0 draw at eighth-place Valencia. **BETIS WINS:** Real Betis beat last-place Almeria 3-2 at home to move to sixth place and strengthen its hold on the European qualifying spots. Pablo Fornals, Isco and Ayoze Pérez scored for Betis, which has won four of its last five matches. Almeria was coming off only its second win of the season in the league, at Rayo Vallecano. **CADIZ HOPEFUL:** Cadiz, sitting in 18th place, kept alive its hopes of escaping demotion with a 1-0 win against midtable Getafe.

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