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CONGRESS WILL NOT WIN A SINGLE SEAT IN UP: YOGI

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BJP RETAINS CONTROL, INDIA GAINS GROUND

WORLD 10
BIDEN ADMIN SENDING \$1 BILLION MORE IN WEAPONS, AMMO TO ISRAEL

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

Late City Vol.160 Issue 131
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

LUCKNOW, THURSDAY MAY 16, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3



the pioneer

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Mamata promises to back INDIA in power

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Often proudly claiming to be the true architect of the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had previously decided to contest elections in Bengal without the Congress and the Left. However, on Wednesday, she announced that she would support INDIA Bloc from the outside if it came to power. Addressing an election rally at Chinsurah in Hooghly district, Mamata said, "After the Modi Government goes we will provide the leadership to the INDIA Bloc and support it from outside and ensure that the people of Bengal — including those who have not been paid the wages for hundred days' work — get back their rights." Mamata's claim came a day after she told another rally that the first four phases of polling have clearly indicated that the weather for the BJP is changing and that INDIA Bloc would win 315 seats against 195 that would fall in the saffron party's bag. "Modi is going and there will be no Modi in Delhi... and Didi will ensure that the INDIA Bloc comes to power at the Centre," she said. Notwithstanding her "outside support" pledge for INDIA Bloc, Mamata said by INDIA she did not mean the Left and the Congress of



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee greets supporters during an election roadshow for the Lok Sabha polls, in Howrah, on Wednesday PTI

Bengal. "I don't mean the Left and the Congress of Bengal, who are the agents of the BJP and are fighting the elections separately. I am talking about the Congress that is in Delhi," she said, leading to a lot of criticism from both the Left and the Congress ranks.

"Didi is also afraid because she is thinking that if the INDIA Bloc comes to power, then she might have to turn to them to save her leaders, her nephew, and herself. So, she is trying to separate the national leadership and the State leadership of the INDIA parties. However,

they are not fools. She has managed to save herself by striking a deal with Modi, but after there is no BJP in Delhi, she will have to answer for her misdeeds," said CPI(M)'s Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya. Back to the rallies both Mamata and Union Home Minister Amit Shah traded relentless fire. Shah referred to the Sandeshkhali incident saying the Chief Minister had developed her own modus operandi where "she lets her men first commit crimes... and to hide it she gets more crimes committed... Sandeshkhali is a classic example of this." On the other hand, Mamata attacked the Prime Minister calling him a publicity man. "Here is a Prachar Babu who wants to get photographed everywhere... asking him to appear in new dresses and get photographed and he has no problem because he wants publicity only... publicity and lies are his two weapons," Mamata said questioning the Prime Minister's earlier claims that he was giving cooking gas, ration and other facilities to the people for free. "He promised ₹15 lakh in every account... did you get it... he promised 2 crore jobs per year... did you get that job... he is telling you that he is giving gas and ration for free... but that is also not true... he is only a prachar babu who thrives on publicity," she said.

USCIS plans extra time for laid off Indian H-1B workers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a possible relief to scores of Indians, laid-off H-1B workers can stay beyond 60 days in the US. This directive by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) comes amid a slew of layoffs by tech companies in the US, which have impacted thousands of employees, including Indians. The USCIS clarified that laid-off H-1B visa holders could stay in the US beyond the 60-day period. To remain in the US beyond the grace period, the laid-off H-1B workers can apply for a new employer, change visa status, or adjust their visa status. H-1B non-immigrants can work for a new employer after filing a new H-1B petition. Tech companies like Google, Meta, Apple, Dell, Twitter, Amazon, and Microsoft, among many others, have terminated scores of non-immigrant employees living in the US, including many Indians. There is a general assumption that laid-off staffers have to leave the US within 60 days. However, the USCIS has clarified this in its latest statement. "When non-immigrant workers are laid off, they may not be aware of their options and, in some cases, may wrongly assume that they have no option but to leave the country within 60 days," stated the USCIS in its latest release. The tech industry continues to grapple with lay-offs, with news of new job cuts surfacing every month. So far, a total of 237 tech companies have laid off 58,499 employees in 2024. According to the Press release, when a non-immigrant worker's employment ends, either voluntarily or involuntarily, they typically may take one of the following actions, if eligible, to remain in a period of authorised stay in the United States.

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Helping the Poor

Guarantee of Free Ration for next 5 years

Guarantee of delivering Clean Drinking Water at every household

Guarantee of reducing Electricity Bill to zero through PM Surya Ghar Yojana

Guarantee of Ensuring Food for the poor

Guarantee of ensuring a Secure Roof over every poor person's head

Phir Ek Baar Gareebon Ki Sarkar

Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar

Press the lotus button Make BJP win



Photo: The Pioneer

Ram temple, Modi aura will see me through: Bidhuri

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, a veteran in the politics of the national Capital, is vying for the South Delhi Lok Sabha 2024 seat as a BJP candidate. He claimed that the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya will have a significant impact on the voters of his constituency, who will vote for him to give Prime Minister Narendra Modi a third term in a row. The sitting MLA from Badarpur and Leader of the Opposition said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is not an alternative to Modi. Having an experience in the political domain for 53 long years, Bidhuri told The Pioneer in the midst of his campaign that people have made up their minds. "They are going to vote for Modi above caste, religion and community. In front of people, there is no alternative to Modi. Rahul tries to be his alternative but people are not taking him seriously. I believe that last time, the BJP candidates had 57 per cent to 60 per cent votes. This time, BJP is going to get more than 70 per cent votes. BJP is winning all seven seats in Delhi because people have a lot of faith in Modi," he said. Born and brought up in a family of farmers in South Delhi's Tughlakabad village, he said he will get votes in the elections to make Modi secure a third term again, who he claims will get the same respect from the countrymen as Lord Ram and Krishna got.

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Uttarakhand Chief Secy feels SC heat

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Slamming the Uttarakhand Government for its "lackadaisical" approach in controlling forest fires, the Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the State's Chief Secretary to personally present himself before it on May 17 to give explanation, including on utilisation of funds and vacancies in forest department.

Termining it a "very sorry state of affairs", the apex court said the State was just trying to find some excuse or the other.

A bench headed by Justice B R Gavai directed that the staff and vehicles of the forest departments of States shall not be requisitioned for election purposes or any other purposes like the 'Char Dham Yatra'.

"We are at pains to say the approach of the State of Uttarakhand in controlling the fires is, to say the least, lackadaisical. Though action plans have been prepared and finalised, no steps are being taken for implementation of the same," said the bench, also comprising Justices SVN Bhatti and Sandeep



Mehta. The top court was hearing a plea on raging forest fires in Uttarakhand. The bench said when funds from the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPAA) were available and also sanctioned by the Central authority, it saw no reason as to why only ₹3.41 crore out of the ₹9.12 crore was utilised for forest related activity in Uttarakhand in 2023-24. The bench observed it also saw no reason as to why the balance amount was not utilised for forestry. "Another issue that needs to be addressed is with regard to huge vacancies in the forest department



of the State of Uttarakhand," it said. The bench noted that one of the grievances raised by the state was regarding failure of timely disbursement of the national disaster management fund or state disaster management fund. "We fail to understand as to how the State could have grievance with regard to the disbursement of the national disaster management funds in as much as it is within the domain of the state to disburse the said funds," it said. "It is further pertinent to note that at one hand, the state contends that the resources, that is, manpower and vehicles are not available, and on the other hand, keeps a large number of

vacancies..." the bench observed.

It said taking into consideration the importance of controlling forest fires in Uttarakhand, the apex court had requested Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Aishwarya Bhati to take instructions with regard to disbursement of funds for financial year 2023-2024.

The bench said in so far as CAMPAA funds are concerned, it has been submitted that these funds are lying with the state and it was for the state to release them for works undertaken by the forest department.

It noted that as far as exemption of field officials of the forest department from election duty, Char Dham yatra and other related activities was concerned, the Election Commission by various orders has already exempted its staff and vehicles from elections and allied purposes. "Be that as it may, we direct that in all the states, the forest staff as well as the forest vehicles shall not be requisitioned for election purposes or any other purposes like 'Char Dham Yatra', the bench said.

Continued on Page 8

Rajmata Scindia passes away at AIIMS

PNS ■ GWALIOR/NEW DELHI

Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia's mother Rajmata Madhavi Raje Scindia died on Wednesday morning at AIIMS, Delhi, where she was on a ventilator for the last few days. She was undergoing treatment for the last three months and suffered from pneumonia, along with sepsis, sources said.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and senior Congress leaders Digvijaya Singh and Kamal Nath expressed grief over the death of Rajmata. People from the Gwalior-Chambal region mourned her demise and many took to social media to express grief. Rajmata, who hailed from Nepal's Royal family, got married to former Union Minister Madhavrao Scindia in 1966. She is survived by her son Jyotiraditya Scindia and daughter Chitrangada Rajesh Singh.



In this April 23, 2002 photo, Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia's mother Madhavi Raje Scindia attends an event in New Delhi. She died on Wednesday morning at AIIMS in Delhi PTI

Her mortal remains will be brought to Gwalior on Thursday morning and will be kept at the Rani Mahal in the Jai Vilas Palace for people to pay their respects. Her last rites will be performed at Amma Maharaj ki Chhatra in Gwalior on Thursday, sources said. The last rites of late Rajmata Vijaya Rajesh Scindia and her son Madhav Rao Scindia had also been held at the same place.

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Nomadic bird haven turns a swamp

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Kabartal Lake, Asia's largest freshwater lake nestled in Bihar's Begusarai district and designated as a Ramsar Wetland site in 2020, is gasping for breath due to the State Government's inaction.

The unchecked expansion of human settlements, agricultural activities, and infrastructure development around this lake, once a paradise for large numbers of winged birds, has encroached upon its natural habitat.

The development has a debilitating impact on the oxbow shape lake leading to reduction in its size from its original 7,000-hectare expanse to just over 2,620 hectares. Standing ruined, the lake has now been deserted even by

migratory birds, which are now seeking other sites for breeding and resting purposes. It used to be home to several aquatic flora and fauna.

To add to the woes of this water body which was once sprawled over 7,000 hectares, is the construction of embankment on the near-by Burhi Gandak river that has choked the major water inlet to the wetland.

Poaching of migratory birds, once abundant in the area, further exacerbates the ecological imbalance and undermines conservation efforts.

It was first declared a protected area by the State government in 1986, and later, a sanctuary by the Central Government, to prevent poaching of birds. Oxbow lake like shape is typically crescent-shaped and



common features in floodplains and low-lying areas near rivers, like in the cases of this water body also famously known as Kanwar Lake. It is formed by meandering Gandak River. The site lies in

Indo-Gangetic plains of North Bihar which is one of the most productive flood-plains of the world and accommodates a large population. Intriguingly while the Centre identified it as Bihar's first

Ramsar Site in a bid to put it on the global map, tourists coming here express disappointment when they see the condition of the lake, which bears no resemblance to the descriptions they have read or heard about, according to reports.

Such has been the apathy of the authorities that despite being declared a protected area by the Bihar Government in 1986 and a bird sanctuary in the Centre in 1989, overall, there has been a large-scale reduction in wetlands in Bihar as low as 2620 hectares. Even though locals depend on farming, encroachment has been growing. Due to the encroachment of the wetland for agricultural practices, the Kabartal wetland's declining ecosystem is visible, as is the ongoing loss in the wetland area. Despite the proclamation of a

bird sanctuary, numerous birds have been designated as fragile or endangered negatively impact species, according to a study "Kabartal (Kanwar) Lake: First Ramsar Wetland Site of Bihar" published in ResearchGate. It was presented at the 9th International Multidisciplinary Conference on Current Research Trends-2023, last year. The authors of the article are Bijay Kumar Das, Associate Professor, Department of Architecture and Planning, NIT Patna, Khushbu Kumari, Independent researcher from Patna, Avi Kush, a Civil Engineering student from SMVDU, Katra, Jammu and Kashmir, Arpita Srivastava from Department of Architecture and Planning, NIT Patna, and Sumit Kumar, a wildlife photographer.

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BJP's campaign most intensive in Lko constituency

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Bharatiya Janata Party is carrying out the most intensive campaigning in the Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency as compared to other political parties. BJP Lucknow City president Anand Dwivedi said that they were confident that the party would win. "The increased intensity in the campaign is not to win the election but to bring in a historic win for Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and increase the number of votes in the margin which decides the victory," he said. He said that till now they had organised six big rallies for Rajnath Singh along with the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, over 218 nukkad sabhas, seven sammelans of the various morchas and over 325 meetings in various wards. "Small meetings are drawing room meetings in which no permission is required and BJP workers sit with the families of the public and urge them to cast their vote," he said. When asked how many party workers were involved in carrying out campaigning, he said that it was a large number. "There are 1,893 booths in the Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency and there is a committee of eleven members of the BJP at

every booth which itself accounts for a substantial figure. There 334 shakti kendras and 21 mandals which have BJP members associated with them. There are 700 very influential people who step out to campaign for Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. Two big programmes have been held in the Muslim community by Shahnawaz Hussain in the Lucknow East assembly constituency," he said. Dwivedi said that they had tapped almost all the communities. "These include Christian community, muslim community, Valmiki community, Dhanuk community, the Shias and Sunnis separately and other communities," he said. He said that the party had reached out to all the professions - traders, doctors, advocates and others. "We have held sammelans in each of the assembly segments and included Yuva Morcha, Mahila Morcha, the Scheduled Caste Morcha, the Kisan Morcha, in the campaign," he said. He said that in the door-to-door campaigns, a large number of voter slips had been distributed. He said that the campaign witnessed the support of various Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak, ministers Mohsin Raza, Arun Saxena, Danish Ansari and Uttarakhnd Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama.

Ram rajya has commenced with Ram temple construction: Rajnath

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Defence Minister and Bharatiya Janata Party candidate from Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency, Rajnath Singh, said here on Wednesday that with the construction of the Ram temple, Ram rajya had commenced in the country. Singh said that the prestige of the country had risen very fast. He said in terms of economy India had jumped from eleventh place to fifth place and financial firms recognise it as the fastest growing economy and by 2027 it would reach the third place. Singh said that rumours are being spread that reservation would be given on the basis of religion which the Constitution does not allow. "We want to gain support of the Muslims through confidence and love. I want to tell the Congress not to play politics by misleading the general public. Our politics is to make a country," he said. He said that the USA ambassador said that if one wanted to see and feel the future, one should visit India. Praising the chief minister of UP, Singh said that Yogi Adityanath had maintained law and order in the country.

Ayodhya and they had constructed it. "I firmly believe that Ram rajya will commence in the country. People ask what Ram rajya means and I say that it means the realisation of a sense of responsibility towards the country," he said. Singh said that the prestige of the country had risen very fast. He said in terms of economy India had jumped from eleventh place to fifth place and financial firms recognise it as the fastest growing economy and by 2027 it would reach the third place. Singh said that rumours are being spread that reservation would be given on the basis of religion which the Constitution does not allow. "We want to gain support of the Muslims through confidence and love. I want to tell the Congress not to play politics by misleading the general public. Our politics is to make a country," he said. He said that the USA ambassador said that if one wanted to see and feel the future, one should visit India. Praising the chief minister of UP, Singh said that Yogi Adityanath had maintained law and order in the country.



"We will make UP a one-trillion-dollar economy," he said. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that four phases of Lok Sabha elections had been completed and the opposition parties were now resorting to lies. "I was listening to a press conference of the Congress and the Samajwadi Party who said that this was the fight of 'vichardhara' (ideology). I want to ask them what their ideology is. They have always carried out

All the development schemes were carried out without any discrimination under Prime Minister Modi," Yogi Adityanath said. Yogi said that the manifesto of Congress and SP were a bundle of lies. "The Congress is still sticking to the slogan 'Garibi hatao' when Modi has lifted 25 crore people above the poverty line," he said. Meanwhile, while addressing voters in the Cantonment, Rajnath Singh said that there was a perception that politicians made false promises to voters. "As far as I am concerned, I have never made false promises to the janata (public) because it creates a crisis of credibility. There is no match between the words and the deeds of what the politicians say," he said. He said that the top leaders of the BJP had accepted this challenge of crisis of credibility. "We have fulfilled our commitments after we gained a majority in Parliament," he said. Rajnath Singh said that he had always been concerned about the development of Lucknow.

Getting good response, says BSP's Sarwar Malik

SHARMILA KRISHNA ■ LUCKNOW

It is 10:45 am on Wednesday morning. Bahujan Samaj Party candidate from Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency, Sarwar Malik, is still waiting for the daily schedule to begin his campaigning for the day. Malik says that he campaigns in the morning from 7 o'clock and returns when it gets too hot. "I and my wife Shaheen Bano then step out after 4 pm for campaign in the constituency," he adds. The BSP candidate said he takes a liquid diet and fruits while campaigning. "We eat only in the evening." He admitted that the feedback he was getting from the general public was very encouraging. "The public is giving us a good response. This is because my wife Shaheen Bano had contested the mayoral elections recently and we had campaigned in 110 wards at that time. For the current Lok Sabha election, over 89 wards fall in the Lucknow Lok Sabha constituency and we have carried out 'jan sampark' in all these wards and we have found that most of the people are inclined towards the BSP," he says. When asked why would the

general public like to vote for BSP, he said, "This is because he is Lucknow or NOIDA, BSP supreme Mayawati has beautified these places and improved the condition of roads, and has given memorials and monuments. Behenji is the one who should be credited for making Lucknow beautiful. Secondly, if we talk about administration and governance then Behenji's tenure has showcased the best governance and administration. The officials used to come on time and the administrative work went on smoothly when she was the chief minister of UP. Women could move freely in the night as there was adequate security. The goondas and the mafia element were in jail. Nobody dared to step outside and do something," he said. Commenting on being the lone Muslim candidate in the Lucknow constituency, he said, "Behenji picks up a candidate only after studying all the equations in a particular district. She has given prominence to the Brahmin community apart from the Muslim community in her selection of candidates in the entire Uttar Pradesh. There are several constituencies from which the Brahmin community is contesting the election in



Uttar Pradesh on BSP ticket and this is creating problems for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. Behenji gives a lot of respect to the Muslim community and I am a living example of it." Regarding what he would do for Lucknow if he wins the elections, he says, "The most important thing to be noticed is that there is a medical college in Lucknow. We have always been dependent on Sanjay Gandhi Post-graduate Institute of Medical Sciences and the medical college where there are no proper facilities of ventilators. If you want to get admitted to SGPGIMS you have to face a lot of problems hence there should be one more med-

ical college where ventilators should be present in large numbers in ratio with the population of Lucknow. As far as I am concerned, I will first establish a medical college and then an information technology (IT) hub for children who have to go to Pune and Bengaluru and face problems. Thirdly, the children and the women who used to be involved in handicrafts of chikankari and zari zardozi are not getting any employment after COVID-19 pandemic. This has resulted in so many skilled craftsmen opting for running an e-rickshaw to earn their livelihood. We will establish a centre where these artists can work and show their talent and thereby earn a

livelihood," he added. When pointed out that the BJP is almost confident of its victory and is stating in clear terms that they were campaigning only for increasing the margins of victory, Malik said, "Anybody can say anything. But the public has rejected them. They are overconfident but this time leave aside the big margins of victory, they will find it difficult to win especially in the Lucknow constituency. Simply constructing a flyover will not resolve the problems of the public. I want to know what has Rajnath Singh done for Lucknow except for making flyovers? Can he say that he has established a medical college or an IT hub or a university in Lucknow. I am asking a straight question," he added. Commenting on Samajwadi Party candidate Ravidas Mehrotra, Malik said that he was a dummy candidate. "It is well known that the SP got four nominations filed for Lucknow constituency. They had no confidence in Ravidas Mehrotra hence they got these additional nominations filed. Ravidas Mehrotra's acceptance is only in Lucknow Central assembly segment and not in other Lucknow assembly segments. He is accept-

ed as a leader of a particular area and not of the entire city. The Muslim population is very high in the city but Akhilesh Yadav found it difficult to give a ticket to a Muslim candidate and he does not want the progress of Muslims. He has selected Ravidas Mehrotra to give a walkover to Rajnath Singh," he added. When asked that he has contested elections several times but has always lost, he said, "The ticket which has been given to me is the decision of Behenji. Even Atal Bihari Vajpayee lost elections five times and the sixth time he became the prime minister. The results of the elections are decided by the general public and not the BJP. I will keep fighting elections and I am getting a lot of support from the general public. Losing or winning the elections does not make a difference to me," he added. Malik said Mayawati's recent rally in the constituency had made a great and effective impact. "She had mentioned in her address at the rally that she had done a lot for Lucknow. Her words have gone among the people and wherever I go, people are very enthusiastic about her rally," he said.

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I, Digari Devi, mother of Army No. 4199014-N, Hav Niranjan Singh Karki, presently posted at Unit 7, Kumaon C/O 56 APO & Village Khetal Sanda Kham, Tehsil Khatima, District Udham Singh Nagar, (UK) 262308. It is stated that my name has mentioned as Degri Devi in the service record of my son in palce of Digari Devi moreover my date of birth is 09.01.1957, which is required to be correct or recorded in Service records of my son.

NOTICE

This is to inform that my daughter's Name has been erroneously mentioned as Hifza Farooqi in her birth certificate and school records. Whereas my daughter's correct name is Hifza Farooqui. Therefore, my daughter's name should be read and understood as Hifza Farooqui in all future purpose. Najmus Shahid, son of Mohammad Sharfuddin, resident of house number 68/380, Shyam Babu's house, near Gold Gym, Sunderbagh, Lucknow.

NOTICE

I am severing the relations with my son Saif Ur Rahman & daughter in law Namra Rahman & evict them from my movable and immovable property. For any kind of transaction or wrongdoing they themselves will be responsible. Khaldia Farooqui w/o Late M.E.R. Farooqui, 76B, Siddharth Nagar, Gooba Garden, I.I.T, Kalyanpur, Kanpur Nagar

NOTICE

I 14692174L Sitesh Sahu of SHO Lucknow hereby declare that the Date of Birth my wife Mrs Richa Sahu has erroneously recorded as 16 Feb 1980 in my service documents. The correct date of birth of my wife is 16 July 1982 as per Affidavit No 51 AE 128206 dt 13 May 2024.

NOTICE

I, RAJ VANSHI PRASAD KUSHWAHA as per change of next of kin por/service documents dependents of SATYA PRAKASH KUSHWAHA resident of B-123, MALVIYA NAGAR GORAKHPUR UP- 273010 have changed by Name from (RAJ VANSHI PRASAD KUSHWAHA as per change of Next of Kin POR / Service Documents) to RAJVANSHI PRASAD vide Affidavit No. 93 AE 667533 dated 14.05.2024 at Kanpur.

सूचना

मैंने अपना नाम Mohammad Moin Salmaane से बदलकर Mohd Moin रख लिया, Mohd Moin S/o Minajuddin R/o-132/488, Babu Purwa Kanpur

सूचना

सूचित करते हैं कि शादी से पूर्व मेरा नाम सुमैधा अरोरा पुत्री श्री राकेश अरोरा था। शादी के पश्चात मेरा नाम सुमैधा मशोक हो गया है। अब इसी नाम से जाना पहचाना जाये। सुमैधा मशोक पत्नी श्री दीप किरन सिंह निवासिनी- 10, स्टेशन रोड निकट सिटी मॉन्टेसरी स्कूल हुसैनगंज लखनऊ।

सूचना

मैंने अपना नाम Muqem ahmad से बदलकर Mukeem Ahmad रख लिया है, MUKEEM AHMAD S/O ABDUL KHALIQ Address 191, Lahedari khateeb, kara, Kaushambi

NOTICE

Let it be known that the allotment letter of my building no. 2278 C, Sector-C Rajajipuram Lucknow has been lost, the use of which would be illegal. Shamim Akhtar Khan, R/o.-C.2289 Sector-C, Rajajipuram, Lucknow

WANTED

WANTED Sri Bachchu Ram Ram swaroop Singh P. G. Collage Adhauri Dhata Fatehpur (U.P.) Collage Code 2006. One Lecturer/Asst. Professor for Hindi Litt. Ancient Indian History U. G. and sanskrit P. G. Classes. Qualification and payment as per U.G.C. Rules. Last Date- 10 June 2024 Main Trusty/Manager Mo.6306376276, 9935306738

NOTICE

To be informed that in my high school (ISC boards) marksheet, my father name is wrongly mentioned Rajesh Kumar Whereas his correct Name is Rajesh Kumar Yadav. in all future purposes Shaurya veer Singh S/o Rajesh Kumar Yadav, R/o-3/394 Vivek khand gombi Nagar Lucknow -226010

Dalit girl thrashed, abused by stalker

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A Dalit girl was thrashed and abused in full public view for not accepting the proposal of stalker and agreeing to meet him, in Cantonment police station area. The accused, Aman Yadav of Neelmatha, developed a fancy for the girl some time back and started stalking her whenever she went out for work. He used to blackmail her and force her to marry him and had warned to kill her along with her family if she refused his proposal. Despite the pressure tactics, the girl did not bow to his whims and she kept ignoring his amorous advances towards her. On May 4, the girl was accosted by the miscreant when she was returning from a school where she had gone for some work. It is alleged that Aman came in front of the scooter by which she was returning and forced her to stop. He then passed lewd remarks and caught her by her hair when she confronted him. He allegedly pushed her down on the ground and beat her, abused her and hurled casteist remarks on her. The girl and her parents filed a complaint in this regard with the police. The police registered a case under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code.

a private company in Gontinagar on Tuesday. As per reports, the victim, Lalji aka Lalu of Ambedkar Nagar, works at New India Motors in the area. On Tuesday afternoon, Upadhyaya sent his gunner and driver to the company and called him to his office. Lalu alleged that Upadhyaya started abusing him immediately after he saw him and hit him with a stick without any provocation. "I was abused and was showered with casteist remarks. Upadhyaya attacked me with a stick and I ran away to save myself. His driver and gunner chased me and caught me and brought me before him. I suffered head injuries in the attack," he alleged. Police registered a case on the complaint under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and also slapped the provisions under Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe Act. The case is being investigated and the allegations levelled are being probed, said a police officer.

However, the attackers missed the target and the bomb fell on his car's back. Sheikh and other his colleagues rushed inside the office to save their lives. When Sheikh was leaving the scene, he heard the attackers yelling at him and saying this time he was saved but he won't be lucky enough next time they attack him. They then sped off the scene. Sheikh named two miscreants and also accused some of his rivals of having a hand in the attack, stating that his rivals were jealous of his professional achievements. A case for murderous assault and under other sections of the Indian Penal Code has been registered.

2 arrested in Bhadewan murder case

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

After a five-day-long chase, the Bazaar Khala police on Wednesday arrested two of the killers who had stabbed one Mohammed Zaid to death outside a mosque in Bhadewan locality in full public view on May 11. Those arrested were identified as Mohammed Taha aka Taham and Mohammed Jamal Haroon aka Harish, both of Bhadewan. In the case, Karim aka Parvez, Mohammed Zubair, Mohamed Taham aka Taha, Mohammed Shahab, Mohammed Jamal Haroon aka Harish, Mustafa and 3-4 unidentified miscreants were named. Zaid was stabbed by the miscreants, all of Bhadewan, after he came out of a mosque where he had gone to offer namaz. The arrested accused confessed to the crime and disclosed that they had a rivalry with Zaid and his family over a 133-bigha land on Mohan Road and 9,000 square feet in Almas Bagh in Thakurganj. Police said the attackers and Zaid are of the same family tree. The legal dispute related to the 133 bigha land is pending at Sarojini Nagar tehsil while the 9,000 square feet land dispute is pending verdict at the civil court in Lucknow.

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Declaration about criminal antecedents of candidates set up by the party- Form C-2 (As per the judgment dated 25 September, 2018, of Hon'ble Supreme Court in WP (Civil) No.536 of 2011 (Public Interest Foundation & Ors. Vs. Union of India & Anr.)

Name of political party: Mera Adhikar Rashtriya Dal
*Name of Election: LOKSABHA General Election 2024, Name of State/UT: Uttar Pradesh

Sl. No.	Name of Constituency	Name of Candidate	(A) Pending criminal cases	(B) Details about cases of conviction for criminal cases	
			Name of Court, Case No. & status of the case(s).	Sections of Act concerned and brief description of offence(s)	
1.	Lucknow	Kapil Mohan Chowdhary	Civil Judge (JD)/FTC-CAW, 410/2013 (FIR No. 25/99); Pending	Sections 498a, 323, 504, 506 of IPC and 3/4 D.P. Act (Case based on False allegations)	NOT APPLICABLE
2.	Lucknow	Kapil Mohan Chowdhary	18-CJM Barabanki 110/2023 (FIR No. 1350/2022); Pending	Sections 323, 504, 506, 307 of IPC (Fatal RIOR case expunged and 182/211 IPC initiated against applicant)	NOT APPLICABLE

INDIA bloc in a strong position after first four phases: Kharage



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge asserted that the INDIA bloc is in a strong position after four phases of Lok Sabha polls and the people of the country are prepared to bid farewell to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Congress national president Mallikarjun Kharge and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav addressed a joint press conference of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) here on Wednesday. Kharge said that the INDIA bloc would form the government in India on June 4. He asserted that the opposition was in a strong position after four phases of Lok Sabha polls and that the people of the country were prepared to bid farewell to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Kharge said, "In four phases of elections that have been completed, INDIA bloc is in a strong position and people have decided to let go of PM

Modi. On June 4, the INDIA bloc will form the government. This election is an important one to save democracy and the Constitution." He also said that the election was to save the Constitution and asked why PM Modi had not taken action against those talking about changing the Constitution. He claimed that the Bharatiya Janata Party would change the Constitution if it came to power again. "These people are trying to change the Constitution. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh leader Mohan Bhagwat said it first. It was said in Karnataka that a two-thirds majority is needed to change the Constitution. In Uttar Pradesh, so many from the BJP have talked of changing the Constitution," Kharge said. "I am surprised that Modi remains quiet on this. You talk of strength and 56-inch chest; why don't you scare them, expel them from the party? One should not say such things against the Constitution," he added.

Kharge said the Congress made a law to ensure food is provided to the poor. "If the INDIA bloc government is formed, we will provide 10 kg of free rations per month to the poor," he added. "We all should work together to protect the future, democracy, and the Constitution of the country otherwise we will become slaves again. If there won't be a democracy but autocracy and dictatorship, how will you elect someone with your ideology? Wherever any big leader of the BJP is contesting, opposition party leaders are being stopped from filing nominations. I have seen in Hyderabad that one woman candidate of BJP was checking women's identities by removing their burqa. Is this how free and fair elections are conducted?" he said. Kharge said the INDIA bloc was committed to fulfilling people's guarantees. "We will fulfill all the guarantees promised to you. There has been talk about 5 kg ration. The Food Security Act was brought

'Cong making false promises'

New Delhi (PTI): The BJP on Wednesday accused the Congress of making "false promises" to win the Lok Sabha elections after the main opposition party president Mallikarjun Kharge announced that if the INDIA bloc is voted to power, it will double the quantity of free rations provided by the BJP government to the poor. "Kharge is lying," senior BJP leader Arjun Ram Meghwal, who is also a Union minister, told reporters here when asked to comment on the Congress president's promise. "They want to come to power by making false promises. The people will not forgive them and believe in what they say," he added. Hitting out at Kharge, Meghwal alleged that the Congress did not fulfil the promises it made to the people of Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka when it came to power in these states.

by us. I promise that if the INDIA bloc government is formed, we will give 10 kilograms of ration. We have implemented guarantees in Karnataka and Telangana and we will do it when we will come to power at the Centre," Kharge said. SP chief Akhilesh Yadav claimed that the INDIA bloc would win 79 of the 80 Lok

Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh. "I want to congratulate the people for the golden period in national politics beginning on June 4; that will be a day of 'freedom of Press'. The BJP is tangled in its own negative narrative. INDIA bloc will win 79 seats in Uttar Pradesh, there is a fight on just one seat that is in 'Kyoto' (Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency of PM Modi)."

Congress will not win a single seat in UP: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath asserted that the Congress party will fail to win a single seat in Uttar Pradesh in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections while advising Mallikarjun Kharge, the national president of the grand old party, to prioritise honesty in his statements. Chief Minister Yogi made these remarks during an interview at his official residence here on Wednesday, a news agency reported. Yogi accused Congress of perpetuating national division based on various factors, such as ideology, religion, geography and language. Specifically, he criticised Kharge for his unsavoury remarks on revered deities like Lord Shiva and Lord Ram, labeling it as indicative of their narrow-minded approach. Chief Minister Yogi highlighted the Congress party's significant disrespect towards Babasaheb and the SP's disregard for both Babasaheb and other champions of social justice. He cited instances such as SP president Akhilesh Yadav's remarks about demolishing memorials of Dalit leaders and the removal of Babasaheb's name from the Kannauj Medical College. Additionally, changes were made in the names of institutions like the Kanshiram Medical College and Language University, he added. He also emphasised the increasing dissent within the opposition coalition regarding Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for India's development. The chief minister said, "Four phases of the Lok Sabha elections have concluded and the Modi wave has turned into a tsunami, while the opposition has lost its steam. The electorate has rejected them, thwarting the INDI Alliance's attempts to damage the nation



irreparably. Now, they will never be able to ascend to power in the country." Yogi condemned the INDI Alliance for disregarding the principles of the Indian Constitution and engaging in divisive caste politics. Furthermore, Yogi underscored the remarkable journey of 'New India' under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, which, he asserted, has transformed the nation into a beacon of respect and efficient governance. Taking a jab at the opposition, Yogi remarked, "This vision of a developed India is unsettling for the INDI Alliance, which hovers between advocating for Pakistan and pushing for caste-based census." He criticised Congress for its extensive history of constitutional amendments and alterations. "Now, they aim to undermine the reservation system for Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other

Backward Class communities," added. Yogi predicted the public's rejection of the INDI Alliance in the forthcoming phases of the Lok Sabha election. He labeled the INDI Alliance as "anti-Ram, anti-Indian values and anti-reservation". Referring to past attempts by the United Progressive Alliance government to dilute reservations through committees like Ranganath Mishra and Sachar, Yogi cautioned people, saying, "Their intentions liken them to Aurangzeb's oppressive taxes." He stressed the imperative of rejecting such propositions outright. Yogi recounted the consistent support Modi received from the people of Uttar Pradesh in 2014, 2017, 2019 and 2022. "In 2024, the public is again with Modi, with slogans like 'Fir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar' and 'Abki Baar 400 Paar' resonating across the country.

BJP-RSS ideology is to crush poor, backwards, Dalits, tribals: Kharge

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, on Wednesday, said that the ideology of Bharatiya Janata Party-Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was to crush the poor, backward, Dalits and tribals. "The BJP wants to end democracy and the Constitution. If the Constitution is abolished then the people will become slaves," he said. Addressing a huge gathering in favour of party candidate KL Sharma at Amethi Seva Sankalp Sabha in Deeh area of Amethi parliamentary constituency on Wednesday, Kharge asked the local people if they liked slavery? In response the people shook their hands and heads and said 'no'. Kharge said if the Constitution was gone then the basic rights of the people would not remain and reservation would end but the Congress would never let this happen. Kharge claimed that Amethi was a stronghold of Congress, but Narendra Modi and Amit Shah exerted so much pressure that the Congress lost the last election and after winning Modi's ego grew so much that if he (Modi) is there, everything is there, and Modi always crushed the poor. "Earlier they used to say that Congress did nothing in 70 years, now they say for 55 years," he added.

Quantity, quality of ration to poor will be improved by INDIA bloc govt: Akhilesh

PTI ■ GAINSARI

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav Wednesday said if the INDIA bloc comes to power, the quality of the ration being provided to the poor will be improved and its quantity will be doubled. He alleged that the "BJP is providing bad ration to the poor". Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and SP President Akhilesh Yadav held a joint press conference in Lucknow. Addressing a public meeting in support of party candidate Rakesh Yadav in the Gainsari assembly bypoll in Balrampur district, Yadav said, "We are assuring our poor that while the ration will increase, we will also work on providing free (mobile) data along with flour,"

he said. Those who would have heard the press conference of the INDIA bloc's Congress and the Samajwadi Party must have come to know that when their government will be formed in the future, they will improve the quality of ration and double the quantity, Yadav said. In an attempt to counter the BJP government's popular free ration scheme, Kharge announced at the press conference that the INDIA coalition government will provide 10 kg of free food grains every month to the poor after coming to power. Yadav attacked the BJP's Agnipath scheme of recruitment in the armed forces. He charged that the BJP has also cheated the youth by not providing jobs or by not stopping the paper leaks of recruitment exams. public said 'yes' in a loud voice. Kharge questioned the intentions of Modi and BJP and said that if BJP wins the election again, there will be no further elections. There will be no Dalit candidate, no backward candidate, no tribal candidate and no woman candidate, he added. Speaking on the local issues, Kharge said that Congress worked in Amethi during the Congress era, Indira Gandhi's era, Rajiv Gandhi's era, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi's era. "Amethi is the karmabhoomi of our popular leader Rajiv Gandhi, his footprints are there in every street. Whatever devel-

BJP diverting people's attention: Priyanka

PTI ■ RAE BARELI

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday accused the BJP of diverting people's attention and bringing up religion during elections. Gandhi said the government was not accountable to the people in the last 10 years due to this "politics of religion". "The leaders of BJP have realised that they can come to power after tricking you in the name of religion," she said addressing a rally in support of her brother and Congress' Rae Bareli Lok Sabha seat candidate Rahul Gandhi. The BJP's leaders, right from Narendra Modi to the BJP candidate from Rae Bareli all think that there is no need to work for the public and "divert your attention in the name of religion" during elections, she added. BJP's Dinesh Pratap Singh has been fielded against Rahul Gandhi in Rae Bareli. Priyanka Gandhi said there are two kinds of politics being done in the country: one is truthful, devoted and willing to work for the voters, while the other is the politics of BJP — they play with your emotions, seek votes in the name of religion and remain in power without caring for voters. She also alleged that the BJP's candidate from Rae Bareli is threatening village heads for votes. Targeting the BJP over the electoral bonds issue, Gandhi said, "They call us corrupt. But



the Congress party could not become a rich party in 55 years (it was in power), but the BJP has become the richest party in the world within 10 years." Recounting the Congress' promises made in its 'Nyay Patra' — its manifesto — Gandhi said a government led by the party will work for women, farmers and youth who have been neglected by the BJP. Addressing another meeting here, Gandhi said Rae Bareli has a great history and that the

freedom movement started from here. "There were big leaders here earlier also but they would appear simple. All big work were done here during the tenure of Indira Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi. The politics established here has been the politics of accountability," Gandhi said. Referring to the BJP government at the Centre, she added, "There is no accountability in the politics that has dominated for the last 10 years."

Gandhi said a woman in Firozabad told her that no work had been done in the last five years by the MLA. "The woman said that no development work has been done here. She said that she makes bangles and that is how she meets her expenses," the Congress leader said. "When I asked her why she voted for the MLA who does no work, she said it was a matter of religion," Gandhi said. Polling in Rae Bareli is on May 20, the fifth round of the ongoing Lok Sabha polls.

Is RSS missing from the political scene in UP?

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

As the election fervour intensifies in Lucknow with less than five days remaining until polling day, a curious absence has been noted by both politicians and observers alike — the seeming lack of activity from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The topic first gained traction when a Congress candidate, Ujjawal Ram Singh contesting the election from Allahabad, told this reporter around a fortnight back that he was in a

dominating position because the RSS seemed to be not active in the election this time. "I have some contacts in RSS ... and know for sure that they are not as active as they used to be in elections," he said. On Monday last, a Bharatiya Janata Party lawmaker racked up the same question. When questioned about the low voter turnout, he retorted with a pointed query: "Have you seen RSS workers in this election?" This questioning has sparked a debate on whether the RSS, a historically influential force in BJP's electoral machinery, is

indeed less visible in this campaign cycle. Traditionally, the RSS has played a crucial role in mobilising voters, though it refrains from openly endorsing any political party. Instead, it subtly advocates for the BJP's nationalist agenda. However, recent observations suggest a departure from this norm. Reports indicate a decline in coordination meetings between RSS and BJP leaders, a departure from previous election cycles where such interactions were routine. A BJP leader remarked that samanvayak

baithaks (coordination meetings) were held earlier, but now there is no meeting. Some leaders believe that RSS did not like the personality-centric campaigning where Narendra Modi's image has been projected as larger than life. Others argue that RSS cannot snub Modi because he has implemented the Sangh agenda like the construction of the Ram temple, revoked Article 370, and even announced the implementation of UCC (Uniform Civil Code) if he returns to power. In response to these specula-

tions, RSS leaders have dismissed allegations of reduced activity, asserting that the organisation continues its voter mobilisation efforts independently. Bholendra, a senior leader of Vishwa Hindu Parishad and pracharak, emphasised that RSS meetings are ongoing at the ground level. "It is not mandatory to involve BJP representatives in the meetings. We are doing our work at the ground level to build a strong samaj," he told this reporter and added: "BJP leaders should not question Sangh's sincerity

in this election." RSS worker Sudhir Sehgal said that meetings were being held regularly. "Drawing room meetings are being held regularly where Sangh workers interact with people of a particular locality," he said. Bholendra is also concerned about low voting percentage. He attributes the low voter turnout to voter disillusionment and various other factors, including speculation surrounding Modi's potential return to power and discontent among party workers over alliances and candidate selec-

tions. Despite reassurances from RSS leaders and accounts of grassroots activities, the apparent absence of the familiar sight of RSS workers in their trademark attire has left many wondering about the organisation's true level of involvement in this election cycle. As the polling day draws nearer, the question remains: Will the subdued presence of the RSS have a significant impact on the electoral outcome, echoing the events of the 2004 elections? Only time will tell.

Plea to extend time for nomination in Varanasi dismissed

New Delhi (PTI): The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to entertain a Tamil Nadu-based farmer leader's plea for an extension of deadline for filing nomination papers to contest from Varanasi Lok Sabha seat where Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in the fray, decriing the petition as "publicity interest litigation". The prime minister filed his nomination papers from Varanasi parliamentary constituency on May 14, the last day for filing the papers, as a BJP candidate.

Modi to target many seats in Purvanchal today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

After a successful roadshow and a show of solidarity among the partners of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) during his own nomination, seeking a third consecutive win from the Varanasi Lok Sabha seat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is now targeting many other seats of Purvanchal (eastern UP). He will address many back-to-back election meetings in the adjoining districts on Thursday. Though he will address three poll rallies during the day in Azamgarh, Jaunpur and Bhadohi, he will target five Lok Sabha seats close to his own Varanasi parliamentary seat. The results of many seats in 2019 went against the NDA as it lost Azamgarh, Jaunpur and Lalgaon (SC) seats, although it registered win at Machhlishahr (SC) and Bhadohi. As per the earlier programme, Modi was sched-

uled to stay at night in Kashi on Wednesday and then to go to different venues to address poll meetings in the region but now he will land at Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport, Babatpur by a plane on Thursday morning and go to rally sites by a helicopter. He will first go to Azamgarh to address a rally in favour of sitting MP and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate Dinesh Lal 'Nirahua' against Dharmendra Yadav of Samajwadi Party (SP). In 2019 elections, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav defeated Nirahua with a huge margin but after 2022 assembly polls, when Akhilesh concentrated on state politics, resigning from the seat, Nirahua won in bypolls defeating former Badaun MP and Akhilesh's cousin Dharmendra Yadav by a low margin due to the presence of Guddu Jamal of BSP. Now Jamal joined SP. Azamgarh seat is a stronghold of SP and this time, the

BSP which always fared well there, has fielded Mashhood Ahmed, who runs an NGO. Through the same meeting, the PM will also target Lalgaon (SC) seat of Azamgarh district. This time the BJP once again fielded its former MP Neelam Sonkar, who lost in last election to BSP's Sangeeta Azad. The sitting BSP MP had joined the BJP just a few months ago. The BSP has fielded a BHU teacher Dr Indu Chowdhary while SP has fielded its two-time former MP veteran Daroga Prasad Saroj. Then Modi will go to the TD College grounds in Jaunpur in support of BJP candidate and former Congress-led Maharashtra government minister Kripashankar Singh. In 2019 Jaunpur seat was also won by BSP. The constituency was in the news when BSP had decided earlier to field Srikala, wife of mafia-turned-politician Dhananjay Singh but later it fielded its sitting MP

Shyam Singh Yadav. Through this meeting, the PM will also target Machhlishahr (SC) seat of the Jaunpur district. One assembly segment of this seat is in Varanasi district (Pindra). The BJP has reposed its faith in its sitting MP Bholanath (BP Saroj) who is facing challenges from Priya Saroj, daughter of former MP Toofani Saroj and a Supreme Court advocate. At last, Modi will address a meeting at Gopiganj in Bhadohi parliamentary constituency where the NDA partner NISHAD Party has fielded a doctor Vinod Kumar Bind, an MLA from Majhawan assembly (Mirzapur). In 2019, the seat was won by Ramesh Chand Bind of BJP. The SP left the seat for Trimool Congress (TMC) candidate and former Congress MLA Lalitesh Pati Tripathi, grandson of former Union Minister Pt Kamalapati Tripathi. The BSP has fielded its party in-charge of Mirzapur division Hari Shankar Chauhan.

Cong leader attacks Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Varanasi Mahila Congress president Anuradha Yadav in a statement questioned the nomination of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and asked whether he did not find any woman proposer in Varanasi? Yadav has said that Modi talks about taking all classes into consideration and women empowerment, but he considered it unnecessary to include the name of any woman in his list of proposers. She said women represent half the population of the society and their participation in the political process is of fundamental importance. On the other hand she said that Varanasi's prominent woman Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Pooja Yadav was also included in the two proposers of Congress candidate Ajay Rai, but the neglect of women's participation in prime minister Modi's proposers is indicative of Bharatiya Janata Party's 'neglectful' behaviour towards women.

Blood-stained body of youth recovered

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Mystery shrouds the killing of a youth whose blood-stained body was recovered on the down rail track between Maitha-Bhaupur station on Delhi-Howrah rail route late on Tuesday night. During the search, the police recovered an express train ticket from Rohtak to Katihar and an Aadhaar card from the possession of the deceased. The police informed the kin of the deceased from the mobile phone recovered in his possession and sent the body for an autopsy. Earlier, on seeing the body late on Tuesday night, track man passing from there informed the Bhimsen station master. On the memo sent by him, Bhaupur outpost in charge Anoop Pandey rushed to the spot and started a probe. The police recovered a train ticket of May 13, an Aadhaar card of Panchu Kumar (26), a resident of Milki Rangpura village, Purnia (Bihar) and a mobile phone from the possession of the deceased. On hearing about it his wife burst into tears. Brother-in-law Chhail Behari informed the police on phone that Panchu was

7 schools in Kanpur receive 'hoax' bomb threat emails

PTI ■ KANPUR

Seven schools, including two Sruti by the government, received bomb threat emails which were found to be a 'hoax', officials said on Wednesday. "Most schools reported the threat emails to police on Tuesday after it came to their knowledge, as the schools were closed on Sunday and Monday." Additional Commissioner of Police (Law and Order) Harish Chandra said. Five private schools and two government schools have received bomb threats through an email in the last 72 hours, he said. The schools that received

the bomb threat include those in Hanuman Vihar, Gujaini etc. The officer claimed that following a preliminary investigation it was found that the threats were a hoax. "The Cyber Crime officials have been alerted and instructions were issued to launch the investigation into the matter after registering the FIR," the ACP said. "We are also trying to ascertain patterns between the hoax bomb threats received by schools in Lucknow, Bengaluru, Jaipur and Delhi-NCR," he said. Similar "hoax" threats were received in schools of Lucknow, Bengaluru, Jaipur and Delhi-NCR earlier this month, the police said.

Students take out voter awareness rally

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

While participating in the five-day Scout and Guide programme of BED, BED Special (VI and HI) fourth semester of the Faculty of Education, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) for community service and awareness, 'Voters Awareness Campaign' was conducted under which the students of the Faculty of Education took out a voter awareness rally at places like Kolhuwa, Shankuldhar, Kamchha etc through the faculty campus. They encouraged the people to vote. The voter rally was flagged off by Dean of the faculty Professor Anjali Bajpai. This voter rally pro-



BHU BED students taking out a voter awareness rally in Varanasi on Wednesday.

gramme was successfully completed under the leadership of Dr Ajay Kumar Singh (Coordinator, Scouts and Guides) and received the efficient guidance of District Training Commissioner (Scouts) Dr Zakir Hussain, Dr Meena Kumari (District Training Commissioner, Guides) and Abhishek Gaurav. In this special programme, the students of BED, BED Special (VI and HI) fourth semester participated enthusiastically. In this, Anand Prakash Singh, Anima Priya, Susharita, Gautam Kumar, Gyanvendra Tiwari and Gajendra Tiwari etc played important roles. The rally ended with the vote of thanks by Dr Ajay Kumar Singh.

Digvijay Singh's public meeting in Prayagraj today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

All the parties are putting in their strength in the election campaign as voting is to be held in Prayagraj on May 25. In this series, former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh and Rajya Sabha MP Digvijay Singh will campaign in Prayagraj on Thursday. Party's district City Committee spokesperson Haseeb Ahmed said Rajya Sabha MP Digvijay Singh will reach the city by train on Thursday morning and will be welcomed by local leaders at Prayagraj station. Digvijay Singh will visit MP Pramod Tiwari's residence at Civil Lines, Elgin Road.

After meeting party leaders for some time, he will talk to journalists. After this Digvijay Singh will address a public meeting at Gajroop Singh Inter College, Karchana Dharwar at 12:30 pm in support of Congress candidate Ujjwal Raman Singh from Allahabad Lok Sabha seat. A meeting was held under the leadership of district president Suresh Yadav at the party office on Zero Road to prepare for his arrival. Prominent among those present on the occasion including in charge Mukund Tiwari, Haseeb Ahmed, Raees Ahmed, Manoj Pasi, Mohd Haseeb, Bhanu Kushwaha, Tabrez Ahmed, Sunil Yadav, Arshad Ali etc.

DIES: A 50-year-old pharmacist died due to a heart attack in a moving car here on Wednesday. He left home in his car for the Handia Community Health Centre (CHC) and had an attack when he was just a short distance from home. In panic he parked the car on the side of the road. By the time the police arrived on the information given by passers-by, he was dead. He was driving the car himself and was alone in it police said. On the other hand, Jhansi police station in charge Upendra Pratap Singh said that pharmacist Pramod Yadav was posted at Handia CHC in UPardahan. Meanwhile a 25-year-old youth who had sustained griev-

ous injuries after his bike collided with a divider near Saraswati Hitech City turn on Tuesday night died here on Wednesday while undergoing treatment. Reports received here said that Vikas Chaturvedi (25), living in the Masik area under the industrial Area police station, was going from Naini towards Karchana on his bike on Tuesday night. Suddenly his bike went out of control and collided with the divider near the Saraswati Hitech City turn before United College. As a result of which he was injured. The police admitted him to a private hospital in Rajpur where he died while undergoing treatment.

Awareness, timely treatment will stop spread of dengue: CMO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said only awareness and timely treatment will stop the spread of dengue. Giving his reaction on the eve of National Dengue Day (May 16) he said the theme of the day this year is 'Dengue Prevention: Our Responsibility for a Safer Tomorrow' and it aims to involve the community and seek their required support for prevention, control and awareness of dengue. The chief medical officer said with the drop in temperature, the spread of mosquito-borne diseases increases during the rainy season. This is an unfavourable time for mosquito larvae to develop. The effort of the department is to break this transmission cycle in which health workers and front line workers are playing a better role. Community participation is also very important in this work, he added. On the other hand, Nodal

Officer Dr SS Kanojia said that on the occasion of Dengue Day, seminars will be organised at every community and primary health centre and office level. Public awareness rallies will also be organised in schools and for publicity on a large scale, ASHA workers should go door-to-door during field visits to create awareness among the public through the slogan "Attack on mosquitoes every Sunday". District Malaria Officer (DMO) Sharad Chand Pandey said that dengue is caused by the bite of a female Aedes aegypti mosquito. This mosquito bites during the day. "Dengue fever is a serious flu-like illness that affects anyone including young children. Infectious symptoms develop within three to 14 days after a person is bitten. A patient who is already infected with dengue can infect another person through Aedes mosquitoes during the four to five days after the onset of symptoms," he said adding

that therefore, the disease can be avoided by early detection and treatment. He said that there are no specific antiviral medicines for dengue yet. It is important for the patient to drink plenty of fluids and get adequate rest. He said high fever, severe headache, pain behind the eyes, pain in muscles and joints, nausea, vomiting, swollen glands or rash etc the main symptoms of dengue and these symptoms usually last for two-seven days. "Severe dengue is a potentially fatal complication caused by leakage of plasma, dehydration, respiratory distress, severe bleeding, or organ loss four to 10 days after the bite of an infected mosquito", he said. Apart from this, he added that severe stomach pain, persistent vomiting, rapid breathing, bleeding gums, fatigue, restlessness and vomiting blood. If the patient is not treated on time, the condition can become even more fatal, he added.

Three nabbed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Civil Lines police nabbed three miscreants who had stolen gold worth ₹8.8 lakh from a jeweller's accountant in Civil Lines. They had stolen the bag containing gold from Civil Lines bus stand. A pistol and cartridges was also recovered from the possession of the miscreants. Ranjit Soni of Ramnagar Gansiyari under Mauaima police station area, an accountant, had gone to Delhi to buy gold. He was returning from Delhi with 121 grams and 620 mg gold pieces worth ₹8.8 lakh. When he reached the Civil Lines bus stand on Saturday, someone stole his bag. The Civil Lines Police registered a case and went through the CCTV footage in which three youths were seen. The police made photographs of the footage and started the search. One accused, Rohit Kumar Yadav, a resident of Chironidpur Nawabganj, was identified. Civil Lines inspector Ramasrey Singh said when the police arrested Rohit, he divulged the names of Devraj Tiwari and Pankaj Soni. The police thereafter caught both of them.

Fire breaks out in tannery

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A tannery caught fire in the Ajajmau police station area on Tuesday evening. On seeing the fire, tannery workers somehow saved themselves by running out of the unit. Two fire tenders rushed to the spot and worked hard to extinguish the fire. Nadeem Kamran of Civil Lines owns his tannery in Wazidpur of Jajmau. On Tuesday evening, the fire broke out in the leather finish department of the tannery under mysterious circumstances. The workers initially tried to control the fire but it flared up and soon engulfed the entire unit. They anyhow saved themselves by escaping out from there. On their information, two fire tenders rushed to the spot and extinguished the fire. Fire Safety Officer of Jajmau Fire Station Rahul Nandan said some people informed that the

fire broke out from a spark in chimney while others said electric short circuit was the cause of incident. However, efforts are on to ascertain exact cause of the incident. **JAIL INMATE DIES:** An inmate, lodged in Unnao jail in a gangrape case held in Safipur, died of illness under mysterious circumstances on Wednesday morning. When his condition started deteriorating, jail warder took him to the district hospital where he was declared dead by the doctor. The inmate was undergoing treatment for gastroenteritis. The police sent the body for autopsy. A woman had lodged complaint against Shanker Paswan and Shiva Rawat on February 2 for allegedly sexually assaulting her in a field. After probe, police had lodged an FIR against both the alleged accused on February 10. Thereafter, on the basis of magisterial statement, section of gangrape was also included in the FIR. Later, an FIR was also lodged against Jagtu (husband of complainant woman) for rape. On March 20, police had sent Shanker and Shiva to jail, while Jagtu was sent to jail

after three days. All the three accused were in the jail. On May 7 Shiva Rawat got bail and was released from jail. On Wednesday around 7 am, the condition of Shanker suddenly started deteriorating. Jail Warder Rajiv Kumar and Ram Sewak took him to the emergency ward of the district hospital. After around half-an-hour, Shanker died at 7.20 am. Jailor Amardeep Singh said Shanker was undergoing treatment for gastroenteritis. When his condition suddenly started deteriorating, he was taken to the hospital where he died during treatment. Meanwhile in a case of that puts relationships to shame, a minor girl accused her father and cousin brother of sexually assaulting her. On the basis of the complaint and statement of the victim girl, the police have lodged a first information report (FIR) against her father and cousin brother and started a probe in the matter. The mother of the girl, aged around 15 years, had already died three years ago. She alleged that her father and cousin brother had been sexually assaulting her for a

long time. On getting information the police rushed to the spot and after recording the statement and medical examination of the girl, an FIR had been lodged against the alleged accused. DCP (East) SK Singh said on the allegations of a girl about her being sexually assaulted by father and cousin brother, action against the accused will be initiated after a probe. **KARATE CHAMPIONSHIP:** The players of The Sportz Hub (TSH) Kanpur won 10 medals, including four gold, two silver and four bronze medals, in the Indo-Nepal Karate Championship held in Jaipur. Organised under the aegis of Rural Amateur Games Association, as many as 10 players of TSH took part in this two-day championship. TSH Board of Directors extended greetings to all the winners and coach Nidhi Kashyap. **Winners:** White Belt - Shradha (silver medal), Vishi (bronze), Rhydam Singh, Junaid Raza (bronze), Shailesh Gupta (silver); Yellow Belt - Mehar Bhattar (gold), Shikhar Mishra (gold), Anshuman Gupta (bronze), Shrishti (gold),

Complex surgery performed successfully

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Achieving another milestone, the Cardiothoracic and Vascular Surgery (CTVS) Department in Institute of Medical Sciences, Banaras Hindu University (IMS-BHU) has recently successfully carried out a very complex surgery. A 61-year-old patient from Assam who has been suffering from heart disease for five years, was being treated at Sir Sunderlal Hospital (SSH) in BHU through medication. Despite being on medication for a long time, his health did not improve significantly. Eventually, he was referred to the department's OPD for surgery. According to the angiography report, significant blockages were detected in the main arteries of his heart, and bypass surgery was recommended as a solution. Considering the patient's age and diabetic condition, senior surgeon Prof Sanjay Kumar of the Cardiothoracic Department recommended undergoing surgery under the MICS (Minimally Invasive Cardiac Surgery) procedure. Essentially, this is a special type of heart surgery where a small incision is made and an artery graft is placed inside the chest instead of making large incisions in the chest or legs. As a result, the postoperative wound is only about three inches long and the patient experiences minimal discomfort due to lesser pain. Since there is no need for the use of a pump, there is no requirement for blood donation during or after the operation. The patient was discharged within five days post operation. Such

operations are usually performed at specialised institutions, and only a few major healthcare centres in the state offer this procedure, informed Prof Sanjay Kumar. Prof Kumar, who led this operation, stated that performing such a procedure was a major challenge here as it had never been done before. However, with the support of the administration, OT team, and nursing staff, they were able to successfully conduct the operation. Senior surgeons Dr Lalit Kapoor, Dr Rajeshwar Yadav and Dr Champak Meher contributed significantly in this historic operation under the guidance of Prof Sanjay Kumar. Likewise, the contribution of Dr Vikas Tosniwal, Dr Sonu, and Vivek under the supervision of Professor RB Singh, head of the Anesthesia Department, was commendable. Prof Sanjay Kumar believed that this achievement in the department will boost the enthusiasm of new doctors and the bypass surgery patients in Purvanchal will benefit tremendously from it.

Yadav: Postal services constantly creating new dimensions by adopting latest tech

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Postmaster General (PMG) of Varanasi Region Krishna Kumar Yadav felicitated divisional superintendents for excellent work in last financial year. During a review meeting of the performance of divisional and sub-divisional heads for the financial year 2023-24 here on Wednesday, Yadav said the postal services are constantly creating new dimensions by adopting latest technology. According to him, in 2023-24, about 5.44 lakh new savings accounts, 2.73 lakh India Post Payments Bank accounts, 58,000 Sukanya Samridhidi and 21,000 Mahila Samman Savings Certificate accounts were opened in the post offices of Varanasi Region. Besides, 8.69 lakh people availed Aadhaar services through post offices and IPPB, while 25,000 people applied for passport in Post Offices. He further said that in Varanasi region, revenue of ₹64.94 crore was earned from savings bank services, ₹8.03

crore from IPPB, ₹11.44 crore from speed post and parcel and ₹36.2 crore from postal operation. A total premium of ₹37.77 crore was collected in Postal Life Insurance and ₹16.20 crore in Rural Postal Life Insurance. So far, 1,020 villages have been made postal operation and business. Along with this, Parmanand Kumar, Superintendent Ballia Jaunpur Division for India Post Payments Bank, Pradeep Kumar Pathak, Superintendent Ghazipur Division for Mahila Samman Savings Certificate and Rural Postal Life Insurance

business whereas Hemant Kumar, Superintendent Ballia Division for opening of maximum savings accounts and parcel and speed post delivery were also felicitated. Along with the divisions, officers doing excellent work at the sub-division level were also felicitated. They include Assistant Superintendent Varanasi Town Sarvesh Kumar Singh, Assistant Superintendent Varanasi West Indrajit Pal and Assistant Superintendent Pt Deendayal

Upadhyay Nagar Shrikant Pal for Postal Life Insurance, Sub-Divisional Inspector Ballia Angad Kumar Yadav for Post Office Savings Account, Sub-Divisional Inspector Varanasi West Mandeep Kumar for Mahila Samman Savings Certificate, Sub-Divisional Inspector Gyanpur Vikas Verma for Rural Postal Life Insurance and IPPB, Sub-Divisional Inspector Jaunpur Central Balbir Singh and Sub-Divisional Inspector Machhlishahr Shashikant Kannaiyya for IPPB Premium Account. Development Officer (Postal Life Insurance) Sarvesh Pandey and Direct Agents Hemant Kumar Rai and Nishant Pandey were also felicitated. On the occasion, Assistant Director Brijesh Sharma, RK Chauhan, Accounts Officer Plaban Naskar, Santoshi Rai, Assistant Superintendent Pallavi Mishra, Inspector of Posts Dilip Pandey, Ajita Kumari, Shriprakash Gupta, Rahul Verma and many other officials were also present.



'Sampoorna Sukanya Samridhidi Gram' and 519 villages have been made 'Sampoorna Bima Gram' in Varanasi region, he added. The PMG felicitated the Senior Superintendent Varanasi East Division for Aadhaar enrolment and updation, Postal Life Insurance and parcel revenue, Vinay Kumar, Superintendent Varanasi West Division for highest Sukanya Samridhidi account, speed post revenue and excellence in

PPGCL
 Regd Office: Shatabdi Bhawan, B12 & 13, Sector 4, Gautam Budh Nagar, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301
 Plant Address: PO- Lohgara, Tehsil-Bara, Prayagraj (Allahabad), Uttar Pradesh-212107
 Phone: +91-120-8102000/8102009 CIN: U40101UP2007PLC032835

NOTICE INVITING EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
 Prayagraj Power Generation Company Limited invites expression of interest (EOI) from eligible vendors for Title of Procurement: ESP Ramping Spares for ESP Overhauling of 3x660 MW Thermal Power Plant at Prayagraj Power Generation Company Limited, Bara, Dist. Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India.
 Details of pre-qualification requirements, bid security, purchasing of tender document etc. may be downloaded using the URL-<https://www.ppgcl.co.in/tenders.php> Eligible vendors willing to participate may submit their expression of interest along with the tender fee for issue of bid document latest by 25th May 2024.

PPGCL
 Regd Office: Shatabdi Bhawan, B12 & 13, Sector 4, Gautam Budh Nagar, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301
 Plant Address: PO- Lohgara, Tehsil-Bara, Prayagraj (Allahabad), Uttar Pradesh-212107
 Phone: +91-120-8102000/8102009 CIN: U40101UP2007PLC032835

NOTICE INVITING EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
 Prayagraj Power Generation Company Limited invites expression of interest (EOI) from eligible vendors for PROCUREMENT OF FERRIC CHLORIDE (ANHYDROUS TECHNICAL GRADE - 98% - Pack Size 25 Kg in Waterproof Bag) of 3x660 MW Thermal Power Plant at Prayagraj Power Generation Company Limited, Bara, Dist. Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India.
 Details of pre-qualification requirements, bid security, purchasing of tender document etc. may be downloaded using the URL-<https://www.ppgcl.co.in/tenders.php> Eligible vendors willing to participate may submit their expression of interest along with the tender fee for issue of bid document latest by 23rd May 2024.

Deeply saddened: Centre condoles Indian UN worker's death in Gaza

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Wednesday condoled the death of an Indian who was working with the United Nations (UN) in war-torn Gaza. Colonel Waibhav Anil Kale (ret'd), a 46-year-old former Indian Army officer, was killed on Monday when the vehicle he was travelling in came under attack in Gaza's Rafah region. The United Nations condoled and expressed apologies to India over the killing. The killing marks the UN's first international casualty since the Israel-Hamas war began last year. The UN has called for a full investigation into his death while Israel has ordered a separate probe into the attack. In its first official reaction, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said it is deeply saddened by Colonel Kale (ret'd)'s death. "We are deeply saddened by the death of Colonel Waibhav Anil Kale (Retd.), Security Coordination Officer in the

UN Department of Safety and Security (DSS) in Gaza on 13 May 2024. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and dear ones," said a statement. The Indian permanent mission to the UN in New York and its missions in Tel Aviv and Ramallah are helping in bringing back the retired soldier's body, the ministry said. "Our Permanent Mission to the UN in New York and our Missions in Tel Aviv and Ramallah are extending all assistance in the repatriation of mortal remains to India and continue to be in touch with relevant authorities regarding the investigation into the incident," it added. Colonel Kale (ret'd) had taken premature retirement from the Indian Army in 2022 and joined as a Security Coordination Officer in the UN Department of Safety and Security (DSS) two months ago, officials said yesterday. He is survived by his wife Amruta and two teenage children, son Vedant and daughter Radhika. The United Nations



GAZA WAR

condoled and expressed apologies to India over the killing of the former Indian Army officer. "We also express our apologies and our condolences to the Government and people of India," Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said at the daily press briefing on Tuesday, reports PTI from United Nations. "We appreciate the contribution that India has made," he said. Haq said the UN has established a fact-finding panel to look into the deadly attack. "It's very early in the investigation, and details of the incident are still being verified with the Israeli Defence Force (IDF)," Haq said. The fact-finding mission is being set up by the Department of Safety and

Security. Haq said a weapon appears to have impacted the back of the white UN vehicle that was carrying the two UN staff members, killing Kale and injuring the other DSS female staff member who is receiving medical attention and "we believe that she will make it through." "The deceased staff member has been identified. He is

was part of that." When asked if Israel apologised to the UN and if the world body sees this as a deliberate attack, Haq said the case is "still under review". "We'll see what the review results in," he said, adding that "as the review proceeds, we'll need to see what the precise nature of the circumstances were." The Permanent Mission of India to the UN had said in a post on X that it is "deeply saddened" by the loss of Col Waibhav Kale. "Our deepest condolences are with the family during this difficult time," it said. UN chief Guterres expressed sadness to learn of Kale's death and injury to the other DSS staffer and condemned all attacks on UN personnel, calling for a full investigation. Guterres sent his condolences to the family of the fallen staff member. "With the conflict in Gaza continuing to take a heavy toll — not only on civilians but also on humanitarian workers — the Secretary-General reiterates his urgent

appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and the release of all hostages," Guterres said. He said that more than 190 UN staff have been killed in Gaza. "Humanitarian workers must be protected. I condemn all attacks on UN personnel and reiterate my urgent appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire & the release of all hostages," he said. Trinamool Congress MP Saket Gokhale on Wednesday wrote to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, urging that the government strongly condemn the killing of a former Indian Army officer in Gaza. Gokhale said the former Army officer was travelling in a clearly-marked UN vehicle when he was killed. "It is clear from reports that Col. Kale was killed when his convoy was attacked in a strike by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). There is well-established international law which prohibits military strikes on UN personnel in a conflict zone," he said in his letter to the minister.

EC summons Andhra chief secretary, DGP over post poll violence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Taking cognisance of post-poll violence in Andhra Pradesh, the Election Commission (EC) of India has summoned the State's chief secretary and the DGP on Thursday to "personally explain" the administration's failure to contain the incidents, sources said. Reminding the state government that the Model Code of Conduct is still in force, the EC also asked the chief secretary and the police chief to ensure such incidents are not repeated. The Commission has repeatedly emphasised that there is no place for violence in a democracy and since the announcement of Lok Sabha elections, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar

has been personally monitoring the election space to ensure peaceful and violence-free conduct of polls, officials pointed out. When they appear at the EC headquarters here on Thursday, the top Andhra Pradesh officials will be asked to "personally explain" the reasons for the administration's failure to contain the post-poll violence, the sources said. They will also be asked about preemptive steps being taken to avoid any such incidents in the future, the sources said. Post-poll violence was reported in parts of Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday where Lok Sabha and assembly polls were held together on Monday. The leaders of ruling YSRCP and opposition TDP have levelled allegations against each other for the incidents.

BJP, Congress spar over Modi's remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP and Congress on Wednesday sparred following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's that he will never do Hindu-Muslim politics to assert that he has worked for development of all sections of society with any discrimination. While BJP leaders cited the Prime Minister's remarks and said he ended communal appeasement with his inclusive governance, Congress, however, claimed that the "outgoing PM" has had no agenda barring Hindu-Muslim politics as "Modi ki Guarantee" has "fallen flat" and "400 paar" given a "silent burial." With the Congress and its allies accusing Modi of communal politics in his campaign, the prime minister had told a private television channel on Tuesday that he will not be fit for public life if he starts doing Hindu-Muslim. Former



Union minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi said Modi ended communal appeasement with his inclusive governance, asserting that his numerous welfare schemes have benefitted the poorest people without any caste, religious or regional biases. Even Modi's critics cannot deny that his schemes have benefitted everyone, the BJP leader said. BJP spokesperson R P Singh claimed it was leaders of the

Congress and its allies which have spoken in favour of reservation for Muslims and strengthening personal laws, inviting a rejoinder from the prime minister. The Congress manifesto, he said, promises strengthening personal laws, alleging that it implies implementation of parts of sharia. RJD president Lalu Prasad Yadav has favoured reservation for Muslims, he added. "The BJP's agenda is for the

country's advancement," Singh said, noting that his party's manifesto for expanding health insurance, housing, water and electricity facilities and boosting infrastructure is meant for all sections of society. Slamming the prime minister, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the nation knows very well that "the outgoing PM is a pathological liar." "But even by his own pathetic standards, Mr. Modi's

latest claim that he does not do Hindu-Muslim politics shows the new depths he reaches daily in lying. Since April 19th 2024, it is a matter of public record that cannot be erased from our collective memory - even if Mr. Modi erases it from his own - that the outgoing PM has blatantly and brazenly used communal language, symbols, and allusions," Ramesh charged on X. Another BJP spokesperson Shahnawaz Hussain said Modi has always considered over 140 crore population of the country as one, and it is the opposition which has tried to stick "Hindu-Muslim" charge on to him. "Modi has never done politics in the name of Hindu-Muslim," he said. The issue had taken the centre stage following his speech in Rajasthan last month, in which he had attacked the Congress over its alleged agenda for redistribution of wealth and Muslim reservation.

Modi said he was shocked at such an allegation and had cited his government numerous welfare measures aimed at saturation in their reach to make his point. Ramesh, however, alleged that throughout this campaign, "the outgoing PM" has had no agenda barring Hindu-Muslim politics. His party's manifesto, an incoherent jumble of words amidst an array of his own photos, has found zero traction, the Congress leader claimed. "Modi ki Guarantee, promoted at tremendous cost to the public exchequer for the last few months, has fallen flat. 400 Paar has been given a silent burial," Ramesh said. "His last, desperate attempt at having a campaign has been to lie and spread untruths about the Congress Party's and the INDIA janbandhan's agenda for equitable growth for each and every Indian citizen," he said. "The certainty of his exit has now forced him to feign memory loss," Ramesh added.

India urges Iran to release 40 Indian seafarers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has asked Iran to release nearly 40 Indian seafarers who were detained from four different merchant ships seized by the Persian Gulf country over the past eight months on different charges, sources said on Wednesday. Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Sarbananda Sonowal made the request during a meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in Tehran on Monday. Sonowal was in Tehran where India signed a 10-year contract to operate the strategic Iranian port of Chabahar that will help expand the trade with Central Asia. Following a request of Iranian side, a meeting was held between Sonowal and Abdollahian where bilateral issues were discussed, sources privy to the development said. During the meeting, Sonowal requested Abdollahian to



release all Indian seafarers who are in Iranian custody. Abdollahian said Tehran is positive on the release of the Indian seafarers but it is getting delayed as legal procedures have to be followed, the sources said. The sources said the Indian seafarers were working in four ships -- Steven, Global Cherylyn, Margol and MSC Aries -- which were seized by Iran over the past eight months on different charges. According

to the sources, Steven was seized by the Iranian Coast Guard on September 12, 2023, for "smuggling" and the crew were also detained. There were nine Indian crew members on board and it has come down to six now after three of them, along side two other nationals, were taken away by Iranian authorities on April 24 and their whereabouts are still unknown. Iran is yet to give consular access to the Indian seafarers of

the ship and the Indian Embassy in Tehran is in regular touch with Iranian authorities, the sources said. Another ship, Global Cherylyn, was seized on December 11, 2023 at Bandar Abbas with 20 Indian crew members and one Bangladeshi. Consular access to the crew was given on March 12, 2024. The vessel was seized on charges of "fuel smuggling". The issue was raised with the Iranian Embassy and authorities in Tehran. According to the latest update, the release orders of the seafarers have been signed by a local court but final release depends on the approval of a court in Tehran. Another vessel, Margol, was seized on January 22, 2024. It has currently one Indian, the vessel's captain Sujet Singh. So far, consular access has not been given. The vessel was seized on charges of "fuel smuggling". The ship's 12 Indian crew were already released and they reached

Delhi on February 14. A penalty of Rs 20 crore was imposed on the captain by the Iranian authorities. Shipping company RPSL is in touch with the Iranian authorities and they have assured the release of the captain by this month. Merchant ship MSC Aries was seized on April 13, 2024 by Iran for its alleged links with Israel. There were 17 Indian crew. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke to his Iranian counterpart on April 14 for the release of Indian crew members. Following the conversation, Indian female deck cadet Ann Tessa Joseph was released and she landed in Kochi on April 18, 2024. On May 9, five more Indian sailors of MSC Aries were released by Iran. India has requested the Iranian side for the early release of the remaining Indian crew members of the ship. The Indian embassy is in touch with Iranian authorities and has requested for second consular access, the sources said.

India sees highest heatwave deaths globally from 1990 to 2019: Study

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

India shouldered the highest burden of heatwave-related excess deaths globally accounting for more than 20 per cent of the total 1.53 lakh such mortalities surpassing both China and Russia in this aspect in the last three decades from 1990 to 2019. A research conducted by Australia-based Monash University said that the impact of heat waves on India is particularly severe due to a combination of geographical, climatic, and socioeconomic factors. In contrast, China and Russia, each experienced roughly 14 per cent and 8 per cent of these heat wave-linked excess deaths, respectively. Overall, more than 1.53 lakh deaths a year were associated with heat waves around the world. The study found that heatwave-linked excess deaths accounted for about a third of all heat-related deaths and 1 per cent of total deaths globally. Needless to say, overall 1.53 lakh excess deaths occurred every summer, close to half came from Asia and more than 30 per cent from Europe. Further, the largest estimated death rates (deaths per population) were seen in regions with dry climates and lower-middle incomes. The findings are published in PLoS Medicine. The high incidence of heatwave-related mortality in India is reflective of several factors, including the country's large population, its geographical location, and the prevalence of extreme temperatures, particularly during the summer months. Additionally, socioeconomic factors such as poverty, inadequate access to healthcare, and limited infrastructure exacerbate the vulnerability of certain segments of the population, particularly those living in urban slums or rural areas with limited resources. The authors explained that "During the warm seasons from 1990 to



2019, heatwave-related excess deaths accounted for 153,078 deaths per year, a total of 236 deaths per ten million residents or 1 per cent of global deaths." For the study, the researchers used data from the UK-based Multi-Country Multi-City (MCC) Collaborative Research Network that included daily deaths and temperatures from 750 locations across 43 countries including India. Comparing the decade up to 2019 with that up to 1999, the duration of heat waves each year was found to have extended from 13.4 to 13.7 days on average around the world, with average ambient temperature warming by 0.35 degrees Celsius every decade. The researchers said that while previous studies have quantified excess deaths due to heat waves locally, they have not compared these estimates across the globe over a prolonged duration. The authors have called for a "comprehensive approach" tackling not only immediate health risks during heat waves but also implementing long-term strategies to minimise vulnerability and inequalities across communities. "The strategies include climate change mitigation policy, heat action plans (e.g., heat early

warning system), urban planning and green structure, social support program, healthcare and public health services, education awareness, and community engagement and participation," they said. The study echoes findings of a recent report by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) which said in India alone, severe heat waves in April and June resulted in about 110 reported fatalities due to heatstroke in 2023. Yet another analysis by an international team of leading climate scientists from the World Weather Attribution group has called for urgent measures to mitigate the impact of heat waves which are likely to intensify in coming years. "Some countries, such as India, have comprehensive heat action plans in place. Yet, to protect some of the most vulnerable people, these must be expanded with mandatory regulations. Workplace interventions for all workers to address heat stress, such as scheduled rest breaks, fixed work hours, and rest-shade-rehydrate programs (RSH), are necessary but have yet to become part of worker protection guidelines in the affected regions," it said.

SAARC Secretary General holds talks to boost regional cooperation

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Secretary General of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Md Golam Sarwar paid an official visit to India from May 11-15 and interacted with the authorities of the government on issues of cooperation in SAARC. It was Secretary General's first official visit to any of the Member States of SAARC. Giving details here, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said during the visit, the Secretary General was hosted for a working lunch by Jaidev Majumdar, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs. The two sides had detailed discussions on vari-



ous issues of regional cooperation within SAARC. Following this, the Secretary General also called on the Foreign Secretary and Minister of State for External Affairs Rajkumar Ranjan Singh. During the discussions, India reiterated its commitment towards regional cooperation for growth and prosperity of the people of South Asia through SAARC. It was also underlined that India con-

siders SAARC as an important regional association for cooperation in South Asia and has been taking several efforts and initiatives to bring the peoples of South Asia closer to each other. The Secretary General also visited the South Asian University (SAU) which is a specialised body of SAARC hosted by India in New Delhi and discussed with its authorities issues concerning the University.

Not necessary to make arrest in all GST cases: SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday told the Centre that there is no need for making arrests in all Goods and Services Tax (GST) cases and that it can be done only if there is credible evidence and tangible material to prove culpability. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna, MM Sundresh and Bela M Trivedi, which reserved its verdict on a batch of pleas challenging the constitutional validity and interpretation of provisions relating to the Customs Act and Goods and Services Tax Act, said the power of arrest is different from necessity of arrest. "The legislation does not say that for

completion of investigation you need to be arrested. It is not the object of the legislation. It is not necessary for you to arrest in each and every case of GST. It has to be based on some credible evidence and tangible material," the bench told Additional Solicitor General SV Raju. The bench, which posed several questions to Raju on provisions of arrest under the GST law, said the legislation has itself kept liberty on a high pedestal and it should not be diluted. Raju said arrests are mostly made during the investigation as there can be no arrest after the probe in a case has been completed.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Eating gold

Already costly, food items to be dearer on the back of heatwave, poll expenditures

With wholesale inflation hitting a 13-month high of 1.26 per cent in April and the mercury poised to peak in the next two months, stubbornly rising food prices are worrying many a family across the nation. This rise was driven as both food and fuel became dearer. Interestingly, India's retail inflation, measured by the consumer price index (CPI), fell to an 11-month low of 4.83 per cent year-on-year in April 2024, compared to 4.85 the previous month. The Reserve Bank of India primarily considers retail inflation when formulating monetary policy. However, for the average person, the rise in WPI is concerning as it is primarily influenced by food items, both processed and unprocessed, as well as manufactured goods. India is experiencing an ongoing heatwave, which is expected to affect vegetable prices. WPI inflation is forecast to increase to 2-3 per cent in May 2024; it is expected to spiral up and reach its peak in June 2024. WPI food inflation, which includes primary food articles and manufactured food items,



increased for the third consecutive month to an eight-month high of 5.5 per cent in April (compared to 0.4 per cent in April 2023), driven by both manufactured food products (reaching a 15-month high of 1.2 per cent) and primary food articles (reaching a four-month high of 7.7 per cent).

The increase in WPI inflation in April was attributed mainly to fuel and food items. However, there is a silver lining as the outlook for food inflation has improved due to expectations of a normal monsoon, which is anticipated to boost agricultural production. Additionally, commodity prices have rebounded on hopes of increased demand from China. Since it is an election

year, there is an automatic push to prices based on market speculation and uncertainty over continuation of governance policies, not to mention that the cost of election is recovered from the common man via higher prices. The funding of political parties by corporates and traders often reflects in the spiralling prices, pre- and post-elections. Logistic bottlenecks, labour shortages and increased transportation costs, thanks to oil prices, all contribute to the overall inflationary pressures, amplifying the challenges faced by food producers and consumers alike. Amid the backdrop of escalating food prices, election discussions revolve around economic policies and their impact. High prices and employment concerns loom large as hot topics, reflecting the broader sentiment of economic anxiety among voters. Generally, the ruling party bears the brunt of inflation as people hold it responsible for not keeping the prices in check. Effectively managing inflation entails employing a comprehensive strategy that harmonises short-term interventions with enduring structural changes. Swift actions, like directed subsidies and mechanisms for stabilising prices, can provide temporary respite to consumers contending with rising food expenses. Until that happens, we can happily fulfil our tax obligations by paying through our nose. Indeed, inflation is taxation without legislation!

PICTALK



BSF personnel with a youth cycle rally to raise awareness for water, education and clean environment, in Dinajpur PTI

Embracing the joys and wisdom of age

Amidst serene nature, I pondered time's fleeting nature and shifting age perspectives, inspired by three chance encounters

I spent a memorable week in the mountains last year. Crisp and importantly clean mountain air, long walks along jungle trails, beautiful sunrises and sunsets and views of snow-capped peaks in the distance, were only a few of the bonuses that the place offered.

It was during this trip that three different people, in their way, tried to put us at ease, by referring to the facilities that they offered for the comfort of senior citizens. I would have bristled indignantly at a reference to my advancing age until only a couple of years back. Now I was not offended.

I remember an incident about 25 years back. One evening, a younger engineer, recruited through campus placement and working with me, remarked, "Sir, I am amazed by your energy. You work so hard and such long hours even at this age."

At 40, I could not take the Statement as a compliment that he had intended it to be and quipped rather caustically, "What do you mean



by this age? I am still young." I would love to see his face today if someone were to remark to him about his age.

I completed 60 five years back. That was the time I realised the benefits that I was entitled to as I booked my air or train ticket at a discount. I could conveniently travel in the metro trains sitting comfortably on the seats meant for seniors, till someone older than me, or at least someone who looked older than me, came and stood near

me. Old habits die hard. I would offer my seat to the more needy or gallantly offer the seat to a much younger woman since that is what I was taught. But chivalry still had limits. I was not prepared to be called an old man or even an uncle by the younger people. Till we faced the onslaught of something terrible four years back - covid. It invaded our lives like nothing we had witnessed in our lifetime. I too had my share of the dread that many might have

BJP retains control, INDIA gains ground



SIDHARTH MISHRA

The Opposition's revival from near-disarray presents a formidable challenge but may fall short of the impact needed to dislodge the BJP-led NDA

With phase four of the polling over, we are more than halfway through the ongoing Lok Sabha polls. There is no denying that the opposition INDIA bloc, led by the Congress, has been able to create a perspective that it isn't a one-sided battle and the fight was on all the seats.

The usual gimmicks of stock market predictions and illegal 'satta' gambling forecasts have started to emerge on social media and private WhatsApp groups. However the underlying message is that come what may, the BJP shall be able to form the Government. This probably emerges from the faith the BJP supporters have in the abilities of Prime Minister Narendra Modi being a leader with gargantuan mass appeal. However, there is also no denying the fact that the opposition was in tatters when the poll campaign started but by the passing of time have been able to create an image of a close fight, which in the end could prove to be just a mirage. Nevertheless, the Congress campaign in the 2024 polls, whatever the results, would remain an area of discussion among the political scientists in the times to come.

Congress's poll preparation could be said to have begun from the conclave it had at Udaipur in 2022. The declarations at the 'Udaipur Shivir' talked of building a vibrant organisation. This came in the backdrop of desertions plaguing the party especially from their most prominent leader Rahul Gandhi's coterie. In 2022, when the Congress met in Rajasthan, one right decision it took was to hold the polls for the post of the president of the All India Congress Committee. It did activate the party and in Mallik arjun Kharge, the party has found a good campaigner, who not only campaigns hard but makes a lot of sense with what he says. Strategically, unlike the Vidhan Sabha polls held some months back in the four States, the leadership has consolidated on the



alliance despite the initial hiccup caused by its very convener, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar walking out of the formation. Though some point out that Kharge and not Nitish was foisted as the chair of the alliance, as given his track record, Nitish's opposition to the BJP was always suspect. The second move by Congress has been to channel the strength of the alliance partners to keep itself afloat. To this end, the Congress is contesting just 328 seats this time, much lower than what it had contested in the 2019 polls. Last time it had contested 421 seats. The party would have contested 330 seats this time but for the rejection of the papers of its candidate in Surat and its candidate withdrawing in Indore. This means that the Congress in INDIA has created an alliance base that is much wider than that of the United Peoples Alliance (UPA). This also means that the party has shrunk from the position of a dominant



THE CONGRESS CAMPAIGN IN THE 2024 POLLS, WHATEVER THE RESULTS, WOULD REMAIN AN AREA OF DISCUSSION AMONG POLITICAL SCIENTISTS IN THE TIMES TO COME

partner to a senior partner with some other members of the bloc like the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab not even entertaining an alliance. Those in charge of the alliance forging for the party claim that the grouping this time is much more pragmatic than in 2019. The case in point is Uttar Pradesh. The party went into the 2019 polls all by itself. With no major allies and up against the BJP and the SP-BSP alliance, Congress contested 67 of the State's 80 seats. It could win only one: Sonia Gandhi in Rae Bareilly. This time in alliance with the Samajwadi Party it's contesting just 17 seats, down by 50 seats. People close to poll planning, point out that it has been done to conserve the party resources for more realistic contests. Similarly West Bengal, after contesting 40 seats in 2019 is contesting just 14 seats this time giving the remaining seats to the alliance partner - the Left parties. Similar arrange-

ments have been made in other States. Now how would that affect the final results? The BJP in 2024 wants to equal the performance of the Congress in 1984 when it got more than 400 seats. What's not to be forgotten is that those 400 seats came as a harvest of the sympathy wave in the favour of the party following the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. What makes BJP in 2024 different from Congress in 1984 is that it has delivered on its ideological agenda thus the cadre commitment would be there. Based on that the saffron party has expanded its poll machinery. This could work both ways, if there is an undercurrent, it would bring bonus points and if there is voter indifference, the performance should not fall below, as they say in commerce, the reserve price.

(The writer is the author and president, the Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE ESSENCE OF RAM RAJYA

Madam — Apropos the news article "Ram Rajya will begin in the country now, doesn't mean theocratic State: Rajnath Singh" published on 14 May, this is my response. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's remarks on the inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and the concept of Ram Rajya reflect a perspective blending faith with civic duty. Singh emphasises that Ram Rajya isn't about establishing a theocratic State but fostering a sense of responsibility among citizens. His call for a return to the essence of politics, where words align with actions, resonates with the public disillusionment with political rhetoric. Singh's stance on the triple talaq issue underscores a commitment to gender equality transcending religious boundaries. His assertion reflects a broader narrative of social justice and protection of vulnerable individuals, regardless of religious affiliation. As he seeks reelection, Singh's emphasis on fulfilling electoral promises underscores accountability in governance. His track record in Lucknow adds weight to his assertion, aligning action with words. Overall, Singh's discourse encapsulates a nuanced understanding of governance, intertwining religious symbolism with practical governance and societal welfare.

Vihaan Sharma | Kolkata

KEJRIWAL'S GUARANTEE

Madam — It refers to the article "Kejriwal's bail: Unveiling political prophanis post-release," published on 13 May. Most of the AAP's guarantees require more funds since most are a burden to the State exchequer. Free electricity, the MSP guarantee, the scrapping of the magnifier and the creation of two crore jobs need heavy payout from the State exchequer. Finding funds without taxing the people is not possible in today's situation. The six guarantees of the Congress remain to be implemented in Karnataka and Telangana. Guarantees have become political stunts during elections. Furthermore, during the last 2019 gener-

Triangular contest in Ladakh



Apropos the news article "Ladakh stands alone in Lok Sabha roll call," published on 13 May, this is my response. The political landscape in Ladakh has dramatically shifted, morphing a once two-way battle between the BJP and Congress into a three-way challenge. The emergence of local alliances and the entry of an independent candidate complicates the electoral dynamics, adding layers to an already complex scenario. The contest reflects the region's aspi-

rations and frustrations, particularly regarding Statehood and constitutional status. The BJP's incumbency faces scrutiny, with discontent palpable over unmet demands. Meanwhile, Congress positions itself as a champion of local interests, leveraging historic ties and promising to address grievances.

The involvement of grassroots movements and renowned figures underscores the grassroots activism shaping Ladakh's political narrative. The electorate's choice will influence not just parliamentary representation but also the trajectory of regional autonomy and development. As the campaigns intensify, candidates grapple with reconciling national agendas with local exigencies, emphasising dialogue and resolution of longstanding issues. Ultimately, Ladakh stands at a crossroads, poised to redefine its political identity through this pivotal electoral battle.

Dhruv Malhotra | Mumbai

al election, Kejriwal said that that would be the last election if Modi is returned to power. It was Indira Gandhi who included the words socialism and secularism in the preamble of the Constitution. So the charge Modi will not hold elections or tamper with the constitution is without substance and a repeat of what was said in 2019. Furthermore, many politicians, actors and so-called social workers said in 2014 and 2019 that if Modi wins the elections they will move out of the country. Still, they are all here enjoying the fruits of freedom. On corruption, first, let Kejriwal come clean on the Delhi liquor gate scam.

N R Ramachandran | Chennai

PARAG'S INSPIRING JOURNEY

Madam — Apropos the news article "Home Turf: Rajasthan Aim to clinch a playoff berth in Parag's 'Royal' Homecoming," published on 14 May, this is my response. Riyan Parag's journey from the northeastern corner of India to becoming a cricketing sensation embodies hope and perseverance. His anticipated return to Guwahati, backed by a

robust performance, not only fuels the Rajasthan Royals' playoff dreams but also marks a milestone for cricket in the region. Parag's stellar season, coupled with the strategic investment made by the Royals, highlights the potential lying dormant in lesser-explored cricketing territories.

The upcoming matches against Punjab Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders hold more than just playoff implications; they symbolise the rise of a new cricketing stronghold. While Parag's emergence steals the spotlight, it's crucial to acknowledge the collective effort of the team. Sanju Samson's leadership and consistent batting form, alongside the solid bowling unit, underscore the Royals' strength as a cohesive unit. As cricket enthusiasts, witnessing Parag's ascent not only inspires but also reshapes the narrative of cricketing talent in India, extending its reach beyond conventional boundaries.

Ishita Kapoor | Ahmedabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

HARNESSING THE POWER OF RESOLUTION

Achievers propel success with determination and humility



RAVI VALLURI

Successful completion of a task releases endorphins in the body which act as a tonic and an analgesic. "Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other," said Abraham Lincoln. Resolution is the positive intent, resolve or aspiration to give a hundred per cent to achieve the targeted goal. Before treading the path, one should remain grateful and blessed for the abundance provided by nature. Half the job gets done by feeling the blessings.

Effort, skill and courage are prerequisites for brewing this heady cocktail. Achievers tap the potential from the depths of their minds and hearts and conquer the fear of failure in the process.

The mind is that element of a person that enables him to be aware of the world and its myriad experiences to think positively and to feel the faculty of consciousness simultaneously purging negative thoughts in the bargain. One must dream big, even if ideas may appear outlandish to become high-end achievers and ensure to never kill an idea, however witless it may appear on the surface. That is the Audacity of Hope. Be it a Mandela, a Modi, or an Obama.

"The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires," writes William Arthur Ward. Successful individuals foster friendships and build trust. There is no deficit in trust. They respect colleagues and only symphony is orchestrated in the environment. There is no room for any cacophony.

Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar always differentiates between mere hearing and the art of listening. Listening is a trait of a humble person; while hearing is the character of a brusque and an inaccessible person. An achiever is available to all his followers 24*7, 365 days a year. Achievers are adaptable to new ideas, thought processes, abstractions and intentions. Their minds are not closeted by achievements or failures of the past and continuously live in the present moment. This is the trademark of their personality.



Those who are high achievers are not driven by amassing wealth. Such trailblazers and trendsetters are continuous learners. Leadership implies 3Ls for them. These are learned, learn some more and learn even more. Top-grade sportsmen, artists and scientists are compulsive learners and are humble about their achievements. There is only one path from the top and that is downhill. High-end achievers never believe that they have reached the summit or the pinnacle or that they are too powerful.

Such a conjecture smacks of capriciousness and arrogance and that would be their nemesis. Every successful career is a lesson in humility. Rewards and recognition are meant to act as motivators, not create a glass ceiling of conceit.

Achievers are surrounded by positive-oriented people and positive thoughts, as negative emotions are a big drain on resources. It is important to ascertain positive feedback and build on the synergy of the group. Understanding group dynamics is an important physical and psychological tool. They glean synergies of any joint venture. Achievers always work with teams and individuals who share their values, they possess long-term vision inherently and believe in themselves and the set goals. They direct the wind and the sails. Such people need to build on their strengths and those of the organisation. It is essential and paramount to prioritise targets, the mission and vision Statements, identify a self-do list and focus on projects that can be delegated.

"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way," says John C Maxwell.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Electric tractors for electrifying agriculture



AS MITTAL

These technological marvels promise not only to rejig farming practices but also to mitigate the industry's environmental footprint

Climate change is an issue of utmost importance that the world is currently facing and it is a challenge that is complex and multifaceted. Particularly the agriculture sector is vulnerable, as greenhouse gas emissions are being released into the atmosphere, causing extreme weather conditions such as heat waves and floods. This is directly impacting crop productivity and farmers' livelihoods, which is a significant threat to global food security.

To counter this challenge, we must adopt environmentally friendly cultivation and processing methods. Electric tractors are one of the globally emerging excellent alternatives for future farming. It can reduce farming costs and zero emissions effectively addressing the issue of a sustainable environment and reducing our dependence on imports of crude oil.

As the world's largest tractor manufacturer, India sells over 1 million tractors annually. However, the adoption of electric tractors has been slower than other electric vehicles (EVs) like two-wheelers, three-wheelers, passenger cars and electric buses. It's time to take action and promote electric tractors. This will foster an environment for mass adoption and position India as a global exporter of electric tractors. To achieve this, we must integrate electric tractors into incentivised EV policies. It's unacceptable that no incentives are being offered for electrifying tractors.

Electric Tractors Could be Fetched in FAME-3 Scheme: The FAME-2 scheme (April 2019-March 2024) was a central Government subsidy that aims to promote the Fast Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles (FAME). The scheme ended on 31st March, with a total outlay of Rs 10,000 crore to support the production of 7,000 electric buses, half a million electric three-wheelers, 55,000 electric passenger cars and one million electric two-wheelers. However, the scheme excludes electric tractors, which means that manufacturers cannot significantly reduce the cost of producing electric tractors. The Ministry of Heavy Industries has recently proposed the FAME-3 scheme, which has an outlay of Rs 12,600. The scheme is expected to be implemented after the Lok Sabha elections. Farmers are hoping that the scheme will include electric tractors, which will reduce their costs significantly. With a subsidy of up to Rs 2.4 lakh (capped at 40 per cent of the tractor's base price), the burden of high purchasing costs on farmers will be greatly reduced.

To promote the use of electric vehicles, several States such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh offer concessions or a waiver on the road tax between 50 per cent and 100 per cent. Other States, including Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, offer direct cash incentives on top of the road tax waiver through a similar approach to the central FAME scheme. The incentives range from Rs 2,500 to Rs 10,000 and the subsidy cap ranges from Rs 60,000 to Rs 2.5 lakh, depending on the battery capacity. Punjab and Haryana offer incentives (up to 40 per cent of the ex-showroom price) for e-tractors in their EV policies. Other key agricultural States should consider following this approach to promote sustainable agricultural practices.

Rationalisation of Taxes: Tax rationalisation has proven to be an effective way of promoting electric vehicles through discounted taxes and insurance fees. The existing fiscal incentives provided for zero-emission



THE ADOPTION OF ELECTRIC TRACTORS PRESENTS A STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIA TO ENHANCE ITS ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY, PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN ACHIEVING NET-ZERO EMISSIONS, STRENGTHEN THE RURAL ECONOMY AND SHAPE A SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT FARM FUTURE

motor vehicles should be extended to zero-emission tractors as well. While electric vehicles are charged a reduced GST of 5 per cent, e-tractors are still taxed at the same rate as diesel tractors, which is 12 per cent. Additionally, electric vehicles receive a 15 per cent discount on third-party insurance premiums, whereas this provision is not available for e-tractors. The International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) has analysed that reducing the GST to 5 per cent or even nil and providing discounted insurance would reduce the cost gap between electric and diesel tractors by almost 40 per cent.

Infrastructure Development: Investing in charging infrastructure for electric tractors, especially in rural areas, is crucial for the rural economy to meet India's development goals by 2047. Using corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds for this purpose and establishing a charging station network with incentives will ensure widespread accessibility and convenience for farmers.

To increase demand for electric tractors, it's important to introduce them into custom hiring centres for agricultural machinery. This will help farmers experience the benefits of electric tractors and mitigate challenges related to charging and maintenance.

R&D Investments & Training: Allocating funds for research and development in electric tractor technology can lead to innovation, efficiency improvement and cost reduction. Encouraging collaboration between Government agencies, agricultural research institutions such as the Indian Council for Agricultural Research and the manufacturers would speed up technological advancements in the sector. Developing and certifying testing and quality assurance standards for electric tractors can attract manufacturers to this sector, addressing supply-side constraints. Institutes

like the Central Farm Machinery Training & Testing Institute can set manufacturing, operational and performance standards for various electric tractors based on power output, design and usage purposes. Training and skill development initiatives for farmers, technicians and service providers on electric tractor operation, maintenance and repair are crucial. Empowering stakeholders with the necessary knowledge and skills will facilitate the transition to electric tractors and ensure their effective use in agricultural operations.

Zero Emissions in Electric Tractor: A study by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, reveals that the agriculture sector in India is responsible for almost 14 per cent of the country's greenhouse gas emissions, with diesel-powered machinery playing a major role. However, electric tractors could be a solution to these challenges.

Currently, most tractors used in India are powered by diesel, which accounts for approximately 7.4 per cent of the country's annual diesel consumption, equivalent to the amount consumed by buses. While incentives have been introduced to encourage the electrification of buses, no such incentives have been introduced for tractors.

The adoption of electric tractors presents some challenges, such as the initial cost, infrastructure development and promoting their use among farmers. Diesel-powered machinery, notably tractors, accounts for approximately 12-15 per cent of the total cost of agricultural production, which varies by crop type and geographical region. However, electric tractors have many advantages, including zero-emission and a reduction in fuel and maintenance costs due to having fewer moving parts.

According to a study by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), electric tractors could reduce

maintenance costs by up to 40 per cent over their lifetime, providing a more reliable, environment friendly and cost-effective option for farmers. The Way Forward: India's tractor manufacturers have developed advanced technology and moved beyond incentives to introduce electric tractors. However, the primary challenge at present is the cost. On-road zero-emission electric tractors cost 40 to 50 per cent more than diesel tractors. This high cost could deter farmers, even though electric tractors are more cost-effective when used in the field. Urgent support from the Government is needed in the early stages of the market to bridge the cost gap between e-tractors and diesel-driven tractors.

Central and State-level incentives would send a positive signal to the industry to invest more in zero-emission tractors. Additionally, this aligns with India's goal of improving air quality and energy security and has the potential to boost India's tractor exports. Countries such as the US, Europe, Japan and Canada have implemented strict regulations for tractor emissions and have expressed interest in decarbonising farm machinery.

The global electric tractor market is projected to grow from USD 0.7 billion in 2024 to USD 3.4 billion by 2030, presenting a strategic opportunity for India to leverage its manufacturing capabilities. It can enhance its economic competitiveness, play a pivotal role in achieving net-zero emissions, strengthen the rural economy and shape a sustainable and resilient farm future.

The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council and President of Tractor and Mechanisation Association (TMA). Views expressed are personal.

AI is revolutionising sustainable, tech-driven farming

By harnessing data-driven insights, AI empowers farmers to optimise resource allocation, mitigate environmental degradation and enhance crop yields

Artificial intelligence (AI) in agriculture is expected to increase dramatically food waste, climate change and other issues lead approximately one billion people to remain hungry and malnourished even though the globe produces enough food to feed everyone. With 9.7 billion people expected to inhabit the planet by 2050, the agriculture sector is under increasing pressure to provide food with less resource use and less environmental effect. Thankfully, the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in agriculture has promise for revolutionising food systems and mitigating the world food issue. AI can assist farmers in making data-driven choices, optimising resource consumption and minimising envi-



PRERNA NEGI

ronmental effects by analysing data from several sources. According to a World Economic Forum analysis, integrating AI into agriculture might result in a 60 per cent reduction in the use of pesticides and a 50 per cent reduction in water usage.

Market demand analysis is an essential component of contemporary agriculture. In addition to analysing meteorological data and satellite

photos, AI can assist farmers in choosing the best crop to produce or sell and offer insightful advice on when to plant and what kind of crop to grow. It is possible to forecast market demand for certain crops while optimising profitability by examining data patterns. Farmers may reduce the likelihood of crop failures by using forecasting and predictive analytics. This will create software applications that analyse fruits and vegetables and offer information on their quality, freshness and size using artificial intelligence (AI) and computer vision methods. In addition to identifying flaws and illnesses in crops, these AI technologies allow farmers to take preventative action before the crops are impacted. Artificial

Intelligence (AI) can assist in the production of crops that are more weather and disease-adapted by gathering data on plant growth. Scientists can use AI to find the best-performing plant kinds and cross-breed them to make even more superior hybrids. AI systems are capable of reliably estimating missing nutrients and performing chemical soil analysis.

One of their products, Nutrient Scanner, gathers information from soil samples and gives farmers precise estimations of the nutrients that are lacking and the general condition of the soil. This enables farmers to optimise crop growth and minimise environmental impact by modifying irrigation schedules and fertiliser applications. AI

can monitor the State of plants to spot and predict diseases, identify and remove weeds and recommend effective treatment of pests.

It can also suggest the most effective treatment for pests, reducing the need for broad-spectrum insecticides that can harm beneficial insects and lead to pesticide resistance. Farmers find it difficult and time-consuming to estimate crop growth and maturity, but AI can complete the work accurately and swiftly. Farmers can accurately forecast when crops will achieve ideal maturity by monitoring and tracking crop changes with the use of AI-powered gear, such as sensors and image recognition tools. According to studies, the accuracy rate attained by employing AI to forecast crop

maturity was greater than that of human observers. Farmers may benefit from large cost savings and better revenues as a result of this improved precision. Farmers can precisely track the amount of water and nutrients in the soil by integrating sensors and AI systems.

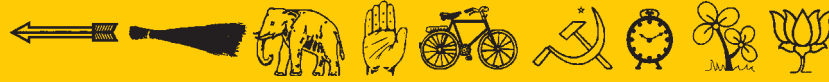
Deploying devices that detect several factors such as temperature, pH levels, nutrient content and soil moisture might be part of the sensor-based soil monitoring process. These sensors relay data back to AI systems, which process it, evaluate it and advise farmers on the best ways to handle their crops in light of the soil conditions they have discovered. AI-powered technologies can help farmers identify plant illnesses and insects faster

than people can. For instance, an AI-powered system might identify an aphid infestation on a strawberry field, transmit the information back to the farmer's Smartphone and then recommend the best course of action.

Through a linked sprayer, the device could even automate the spraying of pesticides if necessary. AI technology can be used to automate insect or weed control. Robotic weeding is supposed to be extraordinarily accurate with the use of computer vision, saving 90 per cent of pesticide use. These solutions use data analytics to determine how much pesticide is required for each field based on information about crop type, soil condition and field history. In the upcoming years, artificial

intelligence (AI) in agriculture is expected to increase dramatically since it can completely transform the industry by boosting efficiency, decreasing waste and raising crop yields. The market for AI in agriculture is likely to develop rapidly, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 35.6 per cent expected to see the market size rise from \$2.35 billion in 2020 to \$10.83 billion by 2025, according to research by Markets and Markets. This will lead to more informed decision-making and improved crop yields, essential for addressing the global food security challenge.

(The writer is research Scholar, Department of Agronomy, SGRR University, Dehradun; views are personal)



This poll is about choosing PM who can take big decisions: Modi

T N RAGHUNATHA ■
MUMBAI

Projecting indirectly himself as a "strong Prime Minister who can take tough and big decisions to make India strong" and "who wants to create a foundation that will accelerate India's dream for 2047", Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday once again attacked the Opposition Congress for indulging in "religion-based" politics and charged that it believed in allocating 15 per cent of the government budget exclusively to the minorities. Countering the narratives put forth by Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi and Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal last week, Modi — speaking at rallies that he addressed at Dindori and Kalyan in Maharashtra — said, "We draw inspiration from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj... This elec-

tion is not just about choosing MPs, but about choosing a PM... a PM who can take tough and big decisions to make India strong... You remember how India addressed the Corona crisis and defeated the pandemic? "I want to create a foundation which will accelerate our dream for 2047. My mantra is to turn your aspirations into my resolve. And I dedicate every second of my life to realise those aspirations... 24x7 for 2047," Modi said, amidst thunderous applause and shouts of "Modi-Modi-Modi" and "fir ek baar... Modi-sarkaar". Modi's assertion that the "country needs a strong Prime Minister who can take tough and big decisions to make India strong" should be seen in the context of Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi's statement that Rahul Gandhi was the "real challenger" to Prime Minister Modi and Kejriwal's claim that

Modi would pass on the mantle to Amit Shah next year after he turns 75, if all NDA comes to power. A day after he said at Varanasi in an television interview that "the day I do Hindu-Muslim, I will be unworthy to remain in public life", Modi once again lashed out at the Congress for practising "religion-based" politics and its belief that 15 per cent of the government's budget should be exclusively allocated to minorities. "Today, I'm going to reveal this to all 140 crore countrymen for the first time. It's a serious topic that needs to be addressed. The Congress believes that 15 per cent of the government's budget should be exclusively allocated to minorities, essentially budget allocation based on religion. Many years ago, Congress mooted the idea of budget allocation based on religion. Just imagine how destructive this idea is?"



"For Congress, there's only one minority which is its vote bank. I recall during my tenure as CM, when the Congress proposed spending 15 per cent of the budget exclusively on Muslims. I vehemently opposed it, and thanks to BJP's strong opposition, the Congress failed in its attempt. Now, they're determined to

revive these old agendas," Modi said. Claiming that the "fake" NCP led by Sharad Pawar and "fake" Shiv Sena headed by Uddhav Thackeray will merge with the Congress after elections, the small parties should merge with Congress so that they can at least stand as the Opposition party... the fake-Shiv Sena and fake-NCP will definitely be subsumed by Congress" Singling out Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray for vicious criticism, Modi said: "The nakli (fake) Shiv Sena has shattered every dream of Balasaheb Thackeray. His

vision included building a grand Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and abolishing Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir. While these dreams have been fulfilled, the fake Shiv Sena is showing the most disgust. Just like Congress, the fake Sena rejected the invitation for the temple's consecration" "While the Congress members are puking hate about the Mandir, the fake Shiv Sena remains silent. Their sinful partnership has been exposed to the entire state of Maharashtra," Modi said. Hitting out at the Congress for its "pro-Pakistan" approach, Modi said: "The Congress asks us to respect Pakistan because it's a nuclear state... When Congress rules, Pakistan threatens us. And, when Congress doesn't rule, then Congress threatens us that Pakistan will threaten us. Why is Congress being a proxy for Pakistan?"

"The Congress used to beg Pakistan to spare India from terrorist attacks. Since you gave me a chance, India started to retaliate by conducting surgical strikes and airstrikes. Now, Pakistan does not threaten us with nuclear attacks anymore," he said. Amid shouts of a small section of the audience to speak on the issue of onion, Modi said at his election rally at Dindori: "Modi always prioritizes the interests of farmers. Nashik and its surrounding region are renowned for onion and grape cultivation. "It was our government that initiated the onion buffer system for the first time, a system absent in previous administrations "Our government is also providing subsidies for onion transport through Operation Green, a mission being reinstated now. Similarly, the cluster development plan for grape cultivation will greatly benefit our grape farmers," Modi said.

Stage set for photo finish at Baramulla LS seat on May 20

MOHIT KANDHARI ■
JAMMU

After the Srinagar Parliamentary seat witnessed a close contest recording the second highest voter turnout of 38 per cent since 1996 in the fourth phase of polling the stage is now set for North Kashmir's Baramulla Lok Sabha seat from where four prominent candidates are gearing up for a photo finish during the fifth phase on May 20. An estimated 17.30 lakh voters are expected to exercise their right to franchise to decide the fate of 23 candidates in the fray. The Baramulla Lok Sabha seat spread over four districts of Baramulla, Kupwara, Bandipora, and Budgam, is already witnessing the high-octane poll campaign. Peoples' Conference Chairman Sajad Lone is taking on the former Chief Minister and National Conference Vice President Omar Abdullah in a direct fight. Peoples' Conference candidate finished runners-up in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls but this time Lone himself is eyeing a maiden entry into the Parliament. Omar is also testing the political waters from the North

Kashmir seat for the first time in his over two decade-long political career. Two other candidates namely former Rajya Sabha member Fayaz Ahmad Mir of the Peoples Democratic Party and an Independent candidate Abdul Rashid Shiekh, currently lodged in the Tihar jail, are both determined to give Lone and Omar a run for their money in the poll arena. In the 2019 polls, Rashid had emerged as a strong candidate in the Baramulla seat. He came third by securing over a lakh votes, finishing ahead of the PDP and the Congress's candidates. In his absence, both his sons are canvassing in his favor and attracting large crowds. Launching his campaign after filing his nomination papers Lone told reporters, "The people of Kashmir deserve to be represented by a new voice, a different voice. Even the people of India deserve to know what exactly is happening here." Lone, who previously contested the seat in 2009, is also receiving tactical support from the APNI Party led by Altaf Bukhari and several former legislators. In his campaign meetings, Lone is attacking Omar Abdullah as a 'tourist'. In



return, the National Conference labels him as BJP's proxy in the poll arena in the absence of their candidate in the fray. Jammu and Kashmir National Conference has won the Lok Sabha seat nine times. In the last leg of the poll campaign, Peoples Conference is mobilizing its cadre to put up a massive show of strength on Thursday at the Degree College in Baramulla. Party spokesperson Adnan Ashraf said, "It will be the biggest mainstream political rally in Jammu and Kashmir not just after 2019, but in the last two or three decades. We are expecting a mammoth crowd. Our party is receiving tremendous response in all assembly segments of Baramulla. Political pundits say Rashid may get 'sympathy votes' as he

will be contesting the election from the Tihar prison, where he has been lodged since 2019 following his arrest by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in an alleged money laundering case related to terror funding in the Valley. Sajad Lone's strong bastion is restricted to the Kupwara district only but ever since he launched his campaign he has been trying to expose the double-speak of the National Conference leadership. Omar enjoys the support base of the party cadre across all four districts. Dr Farooq Abdullah is also working hard to ensure the victory of Omar. Dr Abdullah toured several areas to address impressive poll meetings. In 2019 Lok Sabha elections, National Conference's Mohammad Akbar Lone, who received 133,426 votes -- 29.29 per cent defeated JKPC's Raja Aijaz Ali who grabbed 1,03,193 -- 22.65 per cent -- by a margin of 30,233 votes. In 2014, JKPC's Muzaffar Hussain Baig defeated JKNC's Sharifuddin Shariq by a margin of 29,219 votes. Baig received a total of 175,277 -- 37.61 per cent -- votes while Shariq got 1,46,058 -- 31.34 per cent votes.

14 non Muslim migrants get citizenship under CAA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The first set of citizenship certificates under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) was issued Wednesday here to 14 people by Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla, nearly two months after rules were notified to grant Indian nationality to persecuted non-Muslim migrants from three neighbouring countries. Union Home Minister Amit Shah termed it a "historic day", saying the decades-long wait of those who faced religious persecution in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan is over. Bhalla handed over the certificates to the 14 people after their applications were processed online through a designated portal, an official spokesperson said. The CAA was enacted in December 2019 for granting Indian nationality to persecuted Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi and Christian migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who came to India on or before December 31, 2014. After the enactment, the CAA got the president's assent but the rules under which the Indian citizenship was granted were

issued on March 11 this year. While granting the citizenship certificates, the home secretary congratulated the 14 applicants and highlighted the salient features of the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024. Secretary Posts, Director of the Intelligence Bureau, Registrar General of India and senior officers were also present during the interactive session when the certificates were issued. Home Minister Shah said the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian brothers and sisters who fled religious persecution in the three countries have started getting Indian citizenship and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has fulfilled the promise made at the time of the country's independence. "I express my gratitude to Modi ji for giving justice and rights to these people who suffered for decades. I also assure all my refugee brothers and sisters that the Modi government will give citizenship to all of them through the CAA," he said on X in Hindi. "Modi's guarantee... The guarantee of fulfilling promises." The CAA rules envisage the manner of application form, procedure for processing appli-

cations by the District Level Committee (DLC), scrutiny and grant of citizenship by State Level Empowered Committee (SLEC). "In pursuance of these rules, applications have been received from persons belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist, Parsi and Christian communities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who have entered into India up to December 31, 2014 on account of persecution on grounds of religion or fear of such persecution," the spokesperson said. The DLCs chaired by Senior Superintendents of Post or Superintendents of Post as designated officers, on successful verification of documents, have administered the oath of allegiance to the applicants. After processing as per rules, the DLCs have forwarded the applications to SLEC headed by Director (Census Operation). Processing of application is completely done online. The empowered committee, Delhi, headed by Director (Census Operation), Delhi, after due scrutiny, has decided to grant citizenship to 14 applicants. Accordingly, Director (Census operation) granted certificates to these applicants, the spokesperson said.

Security review meet held in J&K

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
JAMMU

With foreign terrorists responsible for targeting security forces convoys remaining at large in the frontier districts of Rajouri and Poonch, senior army and police officials Wednesday convened a high-level security review meeting with a focus on counter-terrorism operations in the Jammu region. General Officer Commanding (GOC) of Jammu-based 16 Corps Lt Gen Navin Sachdeva chaired the meeting which was also attended by the Additional Director General of Police, Jammu zone, Anand Jain, and representatives of intelligence agencies. "...the discussions concluded with a reinforced commitment to ensuring the safety and stability of the region and coordinating the ongoing anti-terror operations," the White Knight Corps wrote on X after the meeting. The security review meeting took place ahead of the sixth round of polling in the region on May 25 for the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat.

Mayor who brought joy to Kerala turns out to be embarrassment

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

When she was elected as Mayor of Thiruvananthapuram Municipal Corporation, Arya Rajendran made to the headlines of the national media. At the age of 21, she was touted as the youngest Mayor of the country. Three years later, this young lady has become a major embarrassment to the CPI(M) as well as the people of the capital city. RS Sasikumar, chairman, Save University Campaign, a leading whistleblower against the high-handedness of the ruling CPI(M) has disclosed that Mayor Arya Rajendran scored zero marks for Mathematics and just seven marks for her Malayalam paper in the semester examination. The Worshipful Mayor is a B Sc student in the city's All Saints College. "She had said in an interview that she wants to crack the civil service examination and prefers to be an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer. If this is the quality of her studies, this young lady would not be able to get the job of even a last grade employee in the government service without the help of her party," said Sasikumar while revealing the marks scored by the Worshipful Mayor. Sasikumar also said that Arya Rajendran was an embodiment of arrogance and petty mindedness. She posted her picture breastfeeding her newborn and got it published in all newspapers with the caption "Mayor Breastfeeding her child while on office duty," a la-

Jacinda Ardern (former Prime Minister of New Zealand). Arya Rajendran was the principal character in a series of controversies that shook the State. The letter written by her to the district secretary of the CPI(M) asking him to nominate the candidates he prefers to be appointed as regular staff in the Corporation office, her official car violating all security protocols and gatecrashing into the motorcade of the then President Ram Natha Kovind too hogged the limelight. As on date, a controversial stand off between the Mayor supported by her husband who is also a CPI(M) MLA and Yedu Krishnan, driver of a State Road Transport Corporation bus is the major topic of discussion in Kerala. Arya Rajendran alleges that Yedu refused to give space to her personal car in a thoroughfare in the capital city. This led the Mayor to overtake the KSRTC bus and park the car in front of the bus blocking its way. Her response was that the driver showed an obscene sign to her when she sounded the horn, an allegation that he denied vehemently. The city police gave preference to what ever was told by the Mayor and slapped charges on Yedu under harassment of women. According to Sasikumar, the move by CPI(M) to appoint immature persons to important posts like ministers and heads of corporations have led the State to anarchy. "This has affected the education sector in Kerala as most of these recruits are from SFI, the student wing of the CI(M).

USCIS plans extra...

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If a non-immigrant takes any of these actions during the 60-day grace period, they can stay in the United States for more than 60 days, even if they lose their previous non-immigrant status. But if they do not take any action during this time, they and their dependents might have to leave the US within 60 days, or when their authorised period ends, whichever comes sooner. Additionally, H-1B non-immigrants may begin working for a new employer as soon as the employer properly files a new H-1B petition (Form I-129) requesting to amend or extend H-1B status with the USCIS, without waiting for the petition to be approved. The timely filing of a non-frivolous application to change status will "toll," or stop, the accrual of unlawful presence until the application

is adjudicated, if the applicant did not work without authorisation, either before the application was filed or while it was pending, and the applicant maintained their status prior to the filing of the request for change of status. During the 60-day grace period, workers can apply to change their non-immigrant status. Options may include: a) Becoming a dependent of a spouse (e.g., H-4, L-2). b) Some dependents may be eligible for work authorisation. c) Changing to student (F-1) or visitor (B-1/B-2) status. Note that B-1/B-2 visitors cannot work in the US." Timely filing of a petition by a prospective employer can pause unlawful presence accrual, but it does not grant work authorisation until approved. Premium processing may be available for some petitions.

Nomadic...

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Despite the proclamation of a bird sanctuary, numerous birds have been designated as fragile or endangered negatively impact species, according to a study 'Kabartal (Kanwar) Lake: First Ramsar Wetland Site of Bihar' published in ResearchGate. It was presented at the 9th International Multidisciplinary Conference on Current Research Trends-2023, last year. The authors of the article are Bijay Kumar Das, Associate Professor, Department of Architecture and Planning, NIT Patna, Khushbu Kumari, Independent researcher from Patna, Avi Kush, a Civil Engineering student from SMVDU, Katra, Jammu and Kashmir, Arpita Srivastav from Department of Architecture and Planning, NIT Patna, and Sumit Kumar, a wildlife photographer.

Uttarakhand...

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"We fail to understand as to how the State could have grievance with regard to the disbursement of state disaster management funds in as much as it is within the domain of the state to disburse the said funds," it said. "It is further pertinent to note that at one hand, the state contends that the resources, that is, manpower and vehicles are not available, and on the other hand, keeps a large number of vacancies..." the bench observed. It said taking into consideration the importance of controlling forest fires in Uttarakhand, the apex court had requested Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Aishwarya Bhati to take instructions with regard to disbursement of funds for

financial year 2023-2024. The bench said in so far as CAMPA funds are concerned, it has been submitted that these funds are lying with the state and it was for the state to release them for works undertaken by the forest department. It noted that as far as exemption of field officials of the forest department from election duty, Char Dham yatra and other related activities was concerned, the Election Commission by various orders has already exempted its staff and allied purposes. "Be that as it may, we direct that in all the states, the forest staff as well as the forest vehicles shall not be requisitioned for election purposes or any other purposes like 'Char Dham Yatra,'" the bench said.

Rajmata Scindia passes...

From Page 1

Rajmata, who hailed from Nepal's Royal family, got married to former Union Minister Madhavraj Scindia in 1966. She is survived by her son Jyotiraditya Scindia and daughter Chitrangada Rajesh Singh. Her mortal remains will be brought to Gwalior on Thursday morning and will be kept at the Rani Mahal in the Jai Vilas Palace for people to pay their respects. Her last rites will be performed at Amma Maharaj ki Chhatra in Gwalior on Thursday, sources said. The last rites of late Rajmata Vijaya Rajesh Scindia and her son Madhav Rao Scindia had also been held at the same place.

Ram temple, Modi aura will see me through: Bidhuri

From Page 1

"He works hard and is down to earth and I even once told him directly that he is not an ordinary man. He is an 'anshi' of the Supreme," he said, adding that the country has made historic progress during the 10 year tenure of BJP and Modi. "Today, the borders of the country are safe. The country is completely safe in his hands. He is the most popular leader in the world. So people of India feel proud. People in India and abroad come and tell us how they have been treated since he became the PM. Now, the way Europeans are treated abroad, the same way

Indians get respect," said Bidhuri, who has experience in several political parties, including Congress, AAP, and BSP. Attacking Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP, Bidhuri said Delhiites are tired of seeing AAP leaders crying foul for everything they can't do and asked why no one in the previous Governments had any problem even when the ruling party in Delhi wasn't the same as the Central Government. Responding to a question that the AAP Government accused the Centre and Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena of not letting them work, the leader said,

"There was no tussle when Chief Minister Madan Lal Khurana-led the BJP Government was here and there was Congress Government in the Centre. We have seen Sheila Dikshit's Government being run in Delhi without any problem with the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led BJP Government in the Centre. They never had a confrontation with LG. These people deliberately create drama when they can't get any work done." He said there are transferable subjects that come under the elected Government of Delhi and hence crying foul all the time about it makes the

people think of voting for BJP. "AAP makes a lot of commitments which are not possible for them to fulfill. And when these commitments are not fulfilled, AAP leaders say the BJP Government is not allowing us to work. The LG is not allowing us to work. I am an MLA from Badarpur. If I say I am not able to work, that Kejriwal is not allowing me to work, then people will regret electing me. People understand this and if this is the case with AAP, why will people not elect BJP to bring a double engine Government in Delhi?" he said. Talking about the development projects, he

highlighted the biggest eco-park in the world being built on 885 acres in his constituency, which had NTPC's ashes there. He said it will have a jogging track, a cycle track, a yoga center, a safari, a zoo and a boating lake. He talked about expanding the metro network and working on developing a master plan to solve the issue of traffic, which is a pertinent issue in the area. "I will expand the Metro network, develop master-plan roads and regularise 69 unauthorised colonies. Traffic is a big problem in our region and we will develop a peripheral road

connecting Sangam Vihar to Deoli. The Mehrauli-Badarpur road needs to be turned into an elevated road, up to the Gurugram border. Mandi Road will be widened to 100 feet from 25 feet to provide another passageway connecting Haryana," he stated. He said, "We are constructing a six-lane road to decongest traffic on Mathura Road. So, in the next six months, 70 to 80 per cent of that work will be completed. From DND Kalindi it will connect the Baroda-Mumbai highway. This will solve the issue of traffic allotment."



This election is to punish those who are anti-Ram: BJP chief Nadda

PTI ■ MOTIHARI (BIHAR)

Launching a scathing attack on opposition INDIA bloc, BJP national president JP Nadda on Wednesday said this election is about holding those accountable who oppose the core values of 'Ram', nationalism, reservation, Sanatan Dharma and the Constitution and hinder the Centre's mission to make India 'Viksit Bharat'. He accused the opposition leaders, including RJD, of misleading the electorate in the name of providing employment to youths. "They will first take the land of the poor before giving them jobs. If anyone can do good for the poor, then it's only the NDA government at the Centre led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi," said Nadda while addressing an election rally here in support of Lovely Anand, the NDA nominee from Sheohar Lok Sabha constituency. The allusion was apparently to the land-for-jobs scam during RJD supremo's tenure as the railway minister in the



Manmohan Singh government. The scam is currently being probed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). "When Sonia Gandhi was the chairperson of UPA, she had raised questions of the existence of Lord Ram and the then government gave an affidavit in the court terming him as fiction (imaginary). This election is to punish those who are anti-Ram, anti-national, anti-reservation, anti-Sanatan Dharma and against the Constitution. This election is also to punish

those who are opposing the Centre's initiatives to make India a 'Viksit Bharat'," Nadda said. "Tamil Nadu minister Udhayanidhi Stalin had denigrated Sanatan Dharma as dengue, malaria etc. No Congress leader condemned his statement. They are anti-Sanatan Dharma," said Nadda. Nadda said the party led by Lalu Prasad stands for 'Rishwatkhori Jungleraj Dal'. He accused the opposition coalition of "protecting" corrupt people, whereas

Modi was "striving hard" to end corruption in the country. "A majority of the leaders of the INDIA bloc, including those of the Congress and RJD, are either in jail or out on bail," he added. "We have a PM who is working for the country and on the other hand, you have the INDIA bloc, a 'parivar bachao, dynasty bachao' alliance," he said and alleged that Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Lalu Prasad and Tejashwi Yadav are all out on bail. Reiterating that the BJP-led NDA will win 400-plus Lok Sabha seats, including all 40 in Bihar, Nadda asserted that the eastern state has developed only under NDA rule. "Bihar is also likely to get Rs 3 lakh-crore aid from the Centre for its overall development," he said. "Modi's only aim is welfare of every person. But INDIA bloc leaders want to give reservation on religious lines. The Congress is giving tickets to those belonging to 'tukde-tukde' gang," Nadda added.

Congress making false promises to win LS polls: BJP

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday accused the Congress of making "false promises" to win the Lok Sabha elections after the main opposition party president Mallikarjun Kharge announced that if the INDIA bloc is voted to power, it will double the quantity of free rations provided by the BJP government to the poor. "Kharge is lying," senior BJP leader Arjun Ram Meghwal, who is also a Union minister, told reporters here when asked to comment on the Congress president's promise. "They want to come to power by making false promises. The people will not forgive them and believe in what they say," he added. Addressing a joint press conference here with Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav in Lucknow earlier in the day, Kharge announced that the INDIA bloc will double the quantity of free rations provided by the BJP government to the

poor if voted to power. The Congress president referred to the Modi government's scheme providing five kilograms of ration to the poor every month and said, "The Congress brought the Food Security Act, you (Modi government) did nothing." "You are giving five kg. If INDIA bloc government is formed, we will give 10 kg of ration to the poor," Kharge said, adding "I am saying this with guarantee because we have already done it in the states, including Telangana and Karnataka". Hitting out at Kharge, Meghwal alleged that the Congress did not fulfil the promises it made to the people of Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka when it came to power in these states. "I come from Rajasthan. They made a false promise of waiving off the farmers' loans. They made false promises in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka as well," he charged.

Grand temples will also be built in Mathura and Kashi if BJP wins 400 seats: Assam CM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said here that grand temples will also be built in Mathura and Kashi if the BJP wins 400 seats. "The BJP government had promised the Ram temple (in Ayodhya) and the government kept the promise. The BJP government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has fulfilled all the promises," Sarma further said addressing a public meeting in support of BJP candidate Harsh Malhotra in Laxmi Nagar. Sarma also said that the vice president should take suo motu cognisance of the incident with AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's official residence. "There was an earlier allegation that a Delhi chief secretary was beaten by Kejriwal. Yesterday, he also thrashed a Rajya Sabha MP. I think the vice president, who is also the chairman of the Rajya Sabha, should take suo motu cognisance of how a chief minister can beat a Rajya Sabha MP," Sarma told reporters. Maliwal on Monday went to



the Civil Lines Police Station and alleged that a member of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's personal staff "assaulted" her at the chief minister's official residence, police officials said. Attacking the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Sarma said, "The Lal Qila (Red Fort) and the Qutub Minar are the main attractions of the capital, but the CM of Delhi invites people to show Mohalla Clinics, which are in bad conditions." He further said that medical colleges are being built in every district of Assam, and if the BJP is voted to power again, the government will build super-specialty hospitals and medical colleges in the national capital. Local MLA Abhay Verma, deputy president of Delhi BJP Lata Gupta and many other BJP leaders and workers were present during the meeting.

Congress leader joins BJP in Chandigarh

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Senior Congress leader and former Chandigarh mayor Subhash Chawla on Wednesday joined the BJP here. Chawla expressed his dissatisfaction with the Congress-AAP coalition in Chandigarh, citing its detrimental effects on the grand old party's standing in the city. "Leaving the party, which I joined at the age of 21, was a harsh decision for me to take. However, I cannot ignore the damage AAP's presence inflicted on Congress in the recent municipal corporation election," said Chawla, who has also served as president of Congress' Chandigarh wing. "AAP is a party which indulges in petty politics. And Congress's decision to join hands with AAP for the Lok Sabha seat will destroy its presence in the union territory," he added. The former mayor was welcomed into the party fold by BJP national vice president Saroj Pandey, the party's Chandigarh Lok Sabha candidate Sanjay Tandon and Chandigarh BJP chief Jitender Pal Malhotra, according to a party statement.

Lack of industry, migration of skilled workforce main issues in Kendrapara Lok Sabha seat

PTI ■ KENDRAPARA

Lack of industries, unemployment and migration of skilled workforce are the main issues in Kendrapara Lok Sabha constituency in coastal Odisha from where BJP national vice president Baijant Panda is contesting against BJD's Anshuman Mohanty. Kendrapara parliamentary constituency has sent a galaxy of political heavyweights including late Biju Patnaik and former Lok Sabha Speaker Rabi Ray to the Lok Sabha in the past. This time, the fight is mainly between Panda and Mohanty with Sidharth Swarup Das of Congress also in the fray. Elections to the Kendrapara Lok Sabha constituency will be held on June 1. This coastal region is primarily an agrarian belt with people largely dependent on farming for sustenance. The district, despite sending several political heavyweights to Lok Sabha and state Assembly, still does not figure in the industrial map though the Naveen Patnaik government in December last year had approved ArcelorMittal Nippon Steel's proposal to set up a Rs 1,02,275 crore worth mega steel project at Mahakalpara

block of Kendrapara district. Migration of skilled workforce is a common factor here as employment opportunities here are few and far. The skilled plumbers from this region have made their presence felt across the globe. The plumbers are much sought-after for their workmanship and dexterity. Exodus of plumbers to overseas is a recurring phenomenon. Just like nurses from Kerala, Kendrapara plumbers are much in demand in Gulf countries for their professional approach to work. The region, home to Bhitarkanika National Park and Olive Ridley turtle habitat of Gahirmatha marine sanctuary, virgin beaches, is yet to be utilized for ecotourism-related economy. "I know for sure; there will be no visible change whoever wins. Kendrapara will remain the same as it was... Though there has been improvement in infrastructure in the form of road infrastructure, river bridges and rail lines, employment opportunities elude the youths here," rued an elderly voter from Kendrapara town, Subhash Chandra Mohanty. Panda, an industrialist was elected to Lok Sabha twice from the Kendrapara seat in 2009 and 2014 on BJD ticket. He was also a two-time BJD

Rajya Sabha MP from 2000 to 2009. Panda was suspended from the Naveen Patnaik-led BJD before the 2019 Lok Sabha polls on charges of anti-party activities and later he resigned from the party as well from Lok Sabha. Panda lost to BJD's Anubhav Mohanty by a margin of 1,81,483 votes in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections. Mohanty, a Congress deserter and former MLA had joined the BJD days before the polls. The Congress candidate Das is a political greenhorn with zero experience in Vidhan Sabha or Lok Sabha election. The poll fight, according to observers, will be principally between BJP's Panda and BJD's Mohanty, son of veteran politician late Nalinikanta Mohanty who was expelled from BJD in 2000 by CM Naveen Patnaik. The Aul, Mahakalpada, Rajnagar, Kendrapara, Patkura, Kisanagar and Mahanga Assembly segments constitute the Kendrapara Lok Sabha constituency spread across Kendrapara district with parts in Cuttack district. Significantly, all the Assembly seats coming under the parliamentary constituency were bagged by the BJD. The parliamentary constituency is home to 17,91,112 voters including 42,181 first-time voters. It has 9,26,275 male voters and 8,64,837 female.

Himachal: Poll officers traverse tough terrains to make each vote count

PTI ■ SHIMLA

Each vote counts, and the truism is not lost on the polling officers, some of whom take the long precarious road to bring democracy to the far-flung and frugally populated areas, such as Bara Bhangal of Himachal Pradesh, which has all of 63 voters. The journey involves trekking for two days on a perilous mountain path, braving several landslide-prone stretches, and avoiding falling into the imperious Ravi River, which flanks the

road. Located in Kangra district, Bara Bhangal has little to offer in way of comfort in everyday life, and conducting elections should not be an exception. Just so any weather caprice does not thwart the polling, the election office sends two teams via two different routes to Bara Bhangal - one team is airdropped in the area in Baijnath and the other treks for two days on foot. Another area which tests the mettle of polling officers is Sat Kuthera of Fatehpur,

where it takes a 5.5 km boat ride to reach the polling station. Dr Surjit Saroch, a polling officer who was part of a team in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, told PTI how he took journey to Bara Bhangal five years ago. "Starting from Chamba side, we commenced our journey on foot from Naya Gram and reached Dharari, the only village en route to Bara Bhangal, and stayed in a small two-room kachha house in the village," he said. The team, which included porters and mules, walked for two days on the

hazardous narrow footpath with a bellowing Ravi River flowing beneath and shooting stones rolling down from the hilltop, Saroch recalled. Rakesh Chandel, the polling officer who supervised the assembly polls in Bara Bhangal in 2022, said he felt he had left the world behind when he reached the area. "With solar panels being the only mode of electricity and no communication devices except the satellite phone given to the polling officer, we felt we were cut off from the rest of the world," he said.

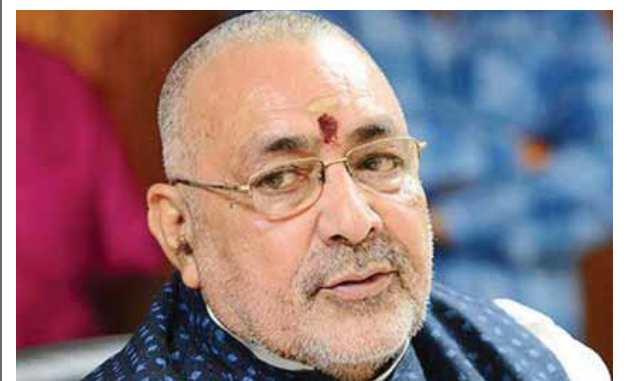
Over 30 police personnel from Assam, on election duty in Bihar, injured in accident

PTI ■ MUZAFFARPUR

More than 30 personnel of the Assam Police, on election duty in Bihar, were injured on Wednesday when their bus collided head-on with a truck in Muzaffarpur district, a senior official said. Senior Superintendent of Police Rakesh Kumar said the accident took place in Sakra police station area on a national highway. Thirty-six personnel of the Assam Police, who were deputed in Samastipur where polls were held on Monday,

were travelling on the bus. They were on their way to Saran, where voting is scheduled next week, said the SSP. "On NH-28, the bus crashed into a truck coming from the opposite side. The impact of the collision caused many to be thrown off the bus, smashing the window panes," said the police officer. The driver of the truck was also severely injured in the mishap, said the SSP, adding that all the wounded persons have been rushed to local hospitals.

Tejashwi is making baseless statements out of nervousness: Giriraj



PTI ■ PATNA

After RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav claimed that he was getting "full support" from "uncle" Nitish Kumar, senior BJP leader and Union Minister Giriraj Singh on Wednesday said the former is making "baseless statements out of his nervousness". "After completion of four phases of LS polls in the country, leaders of INDI alliance have realised that they are going to face a humiliating defeat in this polls. The NDA under PM Narendra Modi and CM Nitish Kumar will win 400 plus seats in the country and all 40 Lok Sabha seats in Bihar. RJD leader (Tejashwi Yadav) is nervous now. He is making these baseless statements out of his 'nervousness' only," said Singh. The BJP leader, who is seeking re-election from Begusarai Lok Sabha seat, made the remark when journalists sought his views on former deputy CM Tejashwi Yadav's claim that he was getting "full support" from "uncle" Nitish Kumar. Yadav on Tuesday claimed that he was getting "full support" from "uncle" Nitish Kumar, the JD(U) president who is a BJP ally, in his fight against the saffron party. He said, "chacha (uncle) may have been hijacked by the BJP. But he taught me the importance of driving out of power those whose ascent came in 2014. Deep down, he retains the sentiment". "I know his blessings are with me because I am carrying forward his fight. Just take

note, he has taken ill on the very day Prime Minister Narendra Modi was to file his nomination papers. It is clear I am getting his full support", Yadav had remarked. Further commenting on Yadav's reaction on PM Modi's roadshow in Patna on May 12 that INDIA coalition will do a 'job show' if it is voted to power, Singh said, "What sort of jobs he (Yadav) is talking about... The RJD can do 'jungle raj show', 'extortion show' and 'corruption show', and nothing else." Reacting to the Union minister's comment, Yadav told reporters here on Wednesday, "Whatever he (Giriraj Singh) is saying is baseless. There is no need to react to such things." Further attacking the PM, Yadav said, "I must tell you people that since Modi ji is going to turn 75 very soon. He must retire at the age of 75. He has decided 75 years as the age for retirement in the BJP for an elected representative. He must join his party's 'Margdarshak Mandal' of senior leaders." "Our youth is bearing the brunt of Modi government's pathetic apathy... ever-rising unemployment has destroyed their future. Around 25 crore youth in the country are now over-aged due to lack of employment policy of the Central government. Besides, what Agniveers will do who will retire at the age of 23? Therefore, Modi Ji, who can't think for the welfare of the country and youths, should join Margdarshak Mandal," Yadav added.

Bongaon: Muslims divided over CAA narrative in Matua bastion

PTI ■ BONGAON (WB)

In the Matua stronghold of Bongaon, considered the cradle of the citizenship movement that shaped the CAA, there's a diverse array of beliefs, aspirations, and divisions within the Muslim community. The Matuas, a Hindu refugee community originally from East Bengal (now Bangladesh), has long been a dominant force in Bongaon's socio-political landscape. With their roots deeply entrenched in the struggle for citizenship rights, the CAA represents a beacon of hope, promising a pathway to citizenship for persecuted Hindu minorities from neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The Indo-Bangla border region, characterised by lush fields and tight-knit communities, is currently experiencing a notable split as political parties adopt contrasting positions on contentious issues, with apprehensions of NRC looming large. Juxtaposed against this narrative, Bongaon's Muslim population faces uncertainty regarding the CAA, adding to their challenges. While some see it (CAA) as a compassionate Act to help persecuted minorities, others regard it as a means of discrimination, worsening



already existing socio-religious tensions. "What is the need for CAA when all of us are citizens here. How come we can cast our votes and have all necessary documents," said 62-year-old Amirul Mondal of Mallickpur village along the Indo-Bangla border in Bongaon. Mintu Rahman, a weathered farmer with hands calloused from years of toil, voiced the fears of many. "Why target Muslims," he questioned, "When their roots run deep

into the soil of this motherland? It is discriminatory that in CAA, Muslims have been omitted. All religions should have been allowed under the Act," he said. The schism within Muslim community in Bongaon is palpable, mirroring the broader national discourse surrounding CAA. On one end of the spectrum are those who vehemently oppose the Act, viewing it as an assault on the secular fabric of the nation. They

argue that the CAA, by explicitly excluding Muslims, contravenes the principles of equality enshrined in the Constitution, thereby marginalising an already vulnerable community. Conversely, there are Muslims in Bongaon who, albeit reluctantly, express tacit support for CAA. Their rationale stems from a pragmatic assessment of the socio-political landscape, where aligning with the dominant narrative might offer a semblance of security and acceptance. "CAA is for persecuted minorities from neighbouring countries. The Act is about giving citizenship and not taking it away. Muslims like us who have been living here for generations are citizens of this country," Amirul Dafadar told PTI. Amirul, BJP's booth president of Sayestnagar in Bongaon, has been tediously reaching out to every Muslim households in his area trying to apprise people about the "negative campaign" going on over CAA. "It is the TMC which is instigating the Muslims against the CAA. They are misguiding them," he said. Moidul Sheikh echoed similar sentiments, emphasising that as long as their identity and citizenship remained unquestioned, people from the community should not worry about the Citizenship

Amendment Act (CAA) as much as they did about the NRC in Assam. "If our rights and status are secure, there is no need for undue concern regarding the CAA. We are opposed to NRC but not against CAA," he said. However, this support is often accompanied by a sense of apprehension, as they grapple with the moral implications of endorsing a policy that appears to "disenfranchise their community". "Many people say that we are going against our community but it is not about opposing or supporting anything. It is about a humane approach," Moidul Sheikh said. The recent enactment of the CAA has sparked fears of a potential NRC exercise that could leave many in the Muslim community vulnerable to statelessness. "With the implementation of the CAA, there is a looming fear that the NRC might follow suit, subjecting us to scrutiny and uncertainty about our citizenship status," Bapan Sheikh said, echoing the sentiments of many in Bongaon. A large section of Muslim residents fear that they may face similar challenges in proving their citizenship, especially considering the lack of documentation. "As Muslims are persecuted minorities, they have all their documents in place. They are

very thorough about their documentation. In Assam also, we had witnessed a similar situation where more Hindus got omitted than Muslims," political analyst Maidul Islam said. Mahitosh Baidya, general secretary of All India Matua Mahasangha, conceded that there is seething anger and confusion among a section of Muslims over CAA. The Matuas, who are SC along with refugees, constitute around 70 per cent of the approximately 19 lakh electorate of Bongaon, an SC-reserved seat. The minorities comprise nearly 25 per cent of the electorate. "The BJP is playing a dangerous game in the name of the hoax called CAA. They are dividing the communities for own political gains," senior TMC leader of Bongaon district Ratan Ghosh told PTI. The Muslims in this constituency have traditionally voted for the TMC in the last few elections. BJP MLA from Haringhata in the constituency Asim Sarkar said the TMC is trying to vitiate the atmosphere by playing a communal card. The TMC knows they will lose in Bongaon that is why they are creating this narrative of NRC after CAA. We have communicated to educated Muslims that CAA in no threat to them," he said.

Biden admin sending \$1 bn more in weapons, ammo to Israel

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration has told key lawmakers it would send more than USD 1 billion in additional arms and ammunition to Israel, three congressional aides have said. But it was not immediately known how soon the weapons would be delivered.



Biden signed last month. It wasn't known if the shipment was the latest tranche from an existing arms sale or something new. The Biden administration has come under criticism from both sides of the political spectrum over its military support for Israel's now seven-month-old war against Hamas in Gaza — at a time when Biden is battling for reelection against former President Donald Trump. Some of Biden's fellow Democrats have pushed him to limit transfers of offensive weapons to Israel to pressure the US ally to do more to protect Palestinian civilians. Protests on college campuses around the US have driven home the message this spring. Republican lawmakers have seized on the administration's pause on the bomb transfers, saying any lessening of US support for Israel — its closest ally in the Middle East — weakens that country as it

for tank ammunition, USD 500 million in tactical vehicles, and USD 60 million in mortar rounds, the congressional aides said. They spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss an arms transfer that has not yet been made public. There was no immediate indication of when the arms would be sent. Two congressional aides said the shipment is not part of the long-delayed foreign aid package that Congress passed and

fights Hamas and other Iran-backed groups. In the House, they are planning to advance a bill this week to mandate the delivery of offensive weaponry for Israel. Despite the one-time suspension of a bomb shipment, Biden and administration officials have made clear they will continue other weapons deliveries and overall military support to Israel, which is the largest recipient of US military aid. Biden will see to it that "Israel has all of the military means it needs to defend itself against all of its enemies, including Hamas," national security spokesman John Kirby told reporters Monday. "For him, this is very straightforward: He's going to continue to provide Israel with all of the capabilities it needs, but he does not want certain categories of American weapons used in a particular type of operation in a particular place.

Slovakia's prime minister wounded in shooting

AP ■ BRATISLAVA

Slovakia's populist Prime Minister Robert Fico was wounded in a shooting Wednesday afternoon and taken to hospital. Reports on TA3, a Slovakian TV station, said that Fico, 59, was hit in the stomach after four shots were fired outside the House of Culture in the town of Handlova, some 150 kilometers northeast of the capital, where the leader was meeting with supporters. A suspect has been detained, it said. Police sealed off the scene, and Fico was taken to a hospital in Banska Bystrica. The shooting in Slovakia comes three weeks ahead of crucial European Parliament elections, in which populist and hard-right parties in the 27-nation bloc appear poised to make gains. Deputy speaker of parliament Lubos Blaha confirmed the incident during a session of



Slovakia's Parliament and adjourned it until further notice, the Slovak TASR news agency said. Slovakia's major opposition parties, Progressive Slovakia and Freedom and Solidarity, canceled a planned protest against a controversial government plan to overhaul public broadcasting that they said would give the government full control of public radio and television. "We absolutely and strongly condemn violence and today's shooting of Premier Robert Fico" said Progressive Slovakia

leader Michal Simecka. "At the same time we call on all politicians to refrain from any expressions and steps which could contribute to further increasing the tension." President Zuzana Caputova condemned "a brutal and ruthless" attack on the premier. "I'm shocked," Caputova said. "I wish Robert Fico a lot of strength in this critical moment and a quick recovery from this attack." Fico, a third-time premier, and his leftist Smer, or Direction, party, won Slovakia's Sept. 30 parliamentary elections, staging a political comeback after campaigning on a pro-Russian and anti-American message. Critics worried Slovakia under Fico would abandon the country's pro-Western course and follow the direction of Hungary under populist Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Thousands have repeatedly rallied in the capital and across Slovakia to protest Fico's policies.

German court convicts Palestinian of train murder

Berlin (AP): A court in Germany convicted a man of murder and sentenced him to life in prison Wednesday for carrying out a fatal stabbing on a train last year. The state court in Itzehoe convicted the 34-year-old Palestinian, who has been identified only as Ibrahim A. in line with German privacy rules, of murder and attempted murder, German news agency dpa reported. It found that he fatally stabbed two teenagers and wounded another four passengers seriously in the January 25, 2023 incident in the northern town of Brokstedt, before being overpowered by others on board the regional train travelling from Kiel to Hamburg. The defendant grew up in the Gaza Strip and came to Germany in 2014.

Dutch anti-Islam party nears government formation

Brussels (AP): Anti-Islam firebrand Geert Wilders is on the verge of brokering a four-party coalition in the Netherlands six months after coming in first in national elections, opening the prospect that yet another European Union nation will veer toward the hard right weeks ahead of EU-wide elections. Wilders has said he does not expect to become prime minister himself, because he remains too extreme for his coalition partners, but his Party for Freedom would be the driving force in the coalition. With hard right and populist parties now part of or leading a half dozen governments in the 27-nation bloc, they appear positioned to make gains in the June 6-9 EU polls. "I hope we will get there. I think we will get there. I cannot see it going wrong," Wilders told the broadcaster NOS early Wednesday after the four parties reached a deal on government financing, the last major stumbling bloc in the talks. It remains unclear who will become prime minister.

Palestinians across Middle East mark 'catastrophe' with eyes on Gaza war

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Palestinians across the Middle East on Wednesday are marking the anniversary of their mass expulsion from what is now Israel with protests and other events across the region at a time of mounting concern over the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. The Nakba, Arabic for "catastrophe," refers to the 700,000 Palestinians who fled or were driven out of what today is Israel before and during the war surrounding its creation in 1948. More than twice that number have been displaced within Gaza since the start of the latest war, which was triggered by Hamas' October 7 attack into Israel. UN agencies say 550,000 people, nearly a quarter of Gaza's 2.3 million people, have been newly displaced in just the last week, as Israeli forces have pushed into the southern city of Rafah, along the border with Egypt, and reinvaded parts of northern Gaza. "We lived through the Nakba not just once, but several times,"

said Umm Shadi Sheikh Khalil, who was displaced from Gaza City and now lives in a tent in the central Gaza town of Deir al-Balah. The refugees and their descendants number some 6 million and live in built-up refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the Israeli-occupied West Bank. In Gaza, they are the majority of the population, with most families having relocated from what is now central and southern Israel. Israel rejects what the Palestinians say is their right of return, because if it was fully implemented, it would likely result in a Palestinian majority within Israel's borders. The refugee camps in Gaza have seen some of the heaviest fighting of the war. In other camps across the region, the fighting has revived painful memories from earlier rounds of violence in a decades-old conflict with no end in sight. At a centre for elderly residents of the Shatila refugee camp in Beirut, Amina Taher recalled the day her family's house in the village of Deir al-

Qassi, in today's northern Israel, collapsed over their heads after being shelled by Israeli forces in 1948. The house was next to a school that was being used as a base by Palestinian fighters, she said. Taher, then 3 years old, was pulled from the rubble unharmed, but her 1-year-old sister was killed. Now she has seen the same scenes play out in news coverage of Gaza. "When I would watch the news, I had a mental breakdown because then I remembered when the house fell on me," she said. "What harm did these children do to get killed like this?" Daoud Nasser, also now living in Shatila, was 6 years old when his family fled from the village of Balad al-Sheikh, near Haifa. His father tried to return to their village in the early years after 1948, when the border was relatively porous, but found a Jewish family living in their house, he said. Nasser said he would attempt the same journey if the border were not so heavily guarded. "I would run. I'm ready to walk

from here to there and sleep under the olive trees on my own land," he said. The latest war began with Hamas' rampage across southern Israel, through some of the same areas where Palestinians fled from their villages 75 years earlier. Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people that day, mostly civilians, and took another 250 hostage. Israel responded with one of the heaviest military onslaughts in recent history, obliterating entire neighbourhoods in Gaza and forcing some 80 per cent of the population to flee their homes. Gaza's Health Ministry says over 35,000 Palestinians have been killed, without distinguishing between civilians and combatants in its count. The UN says there is widespread hunger and that northern Gaza is in a "full-blown famine." Israel says its goal is to dismantle Hamas and return the estimated 100 hostages, and the remains of more than 30 others, still held by the group after it released most of the rest during a cease-fire last year.

Houthi Rebels admit attacking US destroyer in Red sea

AP ■ DUBAI

Yemen's Houthi rebels on Wednesday claimed targeting a U.S. Navy destroyer and a commercial ship in the Red Sea. However, the attack on the warship apparently happened nearly two days earlier and saw the vessel intercept the missile targeting it. The latest statement from the Houthis comes as their attacks on shipping, which have disrupted trade through a vital corridor leading into the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean Sea, have slowed in recent weeks. Though the rebels have not acknowledged the slowdown, the U.S. military has suggested its airstrikes and interceptions of Houthi fire have disrupted their assaults and chewed into their weapon stockpiles. Recently, the Houthis have been claiming days-old attacks. Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree said the rebels targeted the USS Mason with missiles and launched an attack on a ship he identified as the Destiny. Multiple vessels have that name in shipping reg-



istries. The Mason, an Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer, has been in the Red Sea, a wider region as part of a U.S.-led coalition trying to prevent Houthi attacks on shipping. On Monday night, the Mason "successfully engaged and destroyed one inbound anti-ship ballistic missile launched by (the) Iranian-backed Houthis from Yemen over the Red Sea," the U.S. military's Central Command said. The US Navy's Mideast-based 5th Fleet did not immediately respond to a request for comment regarding the claimed attack on the Destiny. The Houthis say their attacks

on shipping in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden are aimed at pressuring Israel to end its war against Hamas in Gaza, which has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians there, according to local health officials. The war began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 others hostage. The Houthis have launched more than 50 attacks on shipping, seized one vessel and sunk another since November, according to the U.S. Maritime Administration. Shipping through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden has declined because of the threat.

Protesters throng streets of Georgia's capital

AP ■ TBILISI

Huge throngs of protesters blocked streets in the capital of Georgia and milled angrily outside the parliament building after lawmakers on Tuesday approved a "foreign influence" bill that critics call a Russian-style threat to free speech and the country's aspirations to join the European Union. Soon after the 84-30 vote, a crowd of protesters in front of parliament tried to break metal barriers near the building. At least 13 people were arrested and Georgian news reports showed one with severe cuts and bruises on his head. The protests expanded after nightfall, with thousands of demonstrators marching to Heroes Square about two kilometers from the parliament and blocking off the streets that converge on the square. The bill requires media and nongovernmental organisations and other nonprofit groups to

register as "pursuing the interests of a foreign power" if they receive more than 20 per cent of their funding from abroad. The government says the bill is needed to stem what it deems as harmful foreign actors trying to destabilize politics in the South Caucasus nation of 3.7 million people. The opposition has denounced the bill as "the Russian law" because Moscow uses similar legislation to crack down on independent news media, nonprofits and activists critical of the Kremlin. European Council President Charles Michel said Tuesday that if Georgians "want to join the EU, they have to respect the fundamental principles of the rule of law and the democratic principles."



French President mulls state of emergency in New Caledonia

AP ■ PARIS

French President Emmanuel Macron is considering imposing state of emergency in the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia to curb spiraling violence, the presidency said Wednesday. At least three people were killed and four others, including a gendarme, were seriously injured, according to officials in the territory and French media reports on Wednesday. More than 130 people have been arrested and more than 300 have been injured since Monday, when protests over a constitutional voting reform pushed by Paris turned violent in the archipelago, which has long sought independence. Speaking at parliament, Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, who attended a two-hour meeting with top ministers at the Elysee, said the aim of the state of emergency would be "to restore order in the short-

est time possible." A decree on the methods to impose the state of emergency is to be presented to the French Cabinet on Wednesday afternoon. In a statement, Macron emphasized the need for a resumption of political dialogue and asked the prime minister and the minister of the interior and overseas territories to invite New Caledonian delegations to Paris. "All violence is intolerable and will be the subject of a relentless response to ensure the return of order," the statement said. There have been decades of tensions on the archipelago between Indigenous Kanaks seeking independence and descendants of colonizers who want to remain part of France. French Minister of Interior and Overseas Territories Gerald Darmanin said that 100 gendarmes were evacuat-

ed during violence overnight following "an attack on their station with an ax and live ammunition." "Calm must absolutely be restored," Darmanin said in an interview with French broadcaster RTL. On Tuesday, the French Interior Ministry sent police reinforcements to New Caledonia, which long served as a prison colony and now hosts a French military base. About 1,000 gendarmes and 700 police officers have been deployed and a dozen professional police intervention and riot control unit have also been mobilized, the territory's top French official, High Commissioner Louis Le Franc, said at a news conference in New Caledonia. The territory's political parties appealed for "calm and reason" with people who support independence and those who want the island to remain

part of France. "We have to continue to live together," the rival parties said in a joint statement on Wednesday. "Only with dialogue and resilience (we will) get through this situation." Three people were killed and four were seriously injured in the unrest overnight and on Wednesday, French officials said. A fourth person, a member of the gendarmes, was also seriously injured near the southern town of Plum, according to France Info. He was evacuated in critical condition to the medical unit of the Pacific Marine Infantry Regiment, French broadcaster BFM reported. Le Franc warned that if calm isn't restored, there will be "many deaths" in the area of the capital, Noumea, where protests over the voting rights turned violent on Tuesday. Local authorities extended a curfew until Thursday morning.

Jurors in Trump's hush money trial are getting front row seat to history

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A gag order. The House Speaker turning up outside court. Angry denunciations of the judge overseeing the case. Some of the most explosive moments in Donald Trump's hush money trial have played out for most of the world to see — except for the people who are actually deciding his fate: the jury. The 12-person panel is shown evidence and witness testimony so they can decide whether the former president is guilty of a scheme to buy up and bury seamy stories in an effort to illegally influence the 2016 presidential election. But it's a highly curated experience; jurors are not getting the full picture seen by those who follow along each day.

They don't even witness Trump enter or exit the courtroom. He's already there by the time they are brought into the room, and he stays until they are dismissed. This is by design. Laws carefully govern how a criminal case is tried to ensure that a jury's decision on guilt or innocence isn't affected by fights over evidence or other legal sparring. It's routine to hold back a jury while trial lawyers argue with the judge about what can and can't be included for jurors to see during the trial. And attorneys often gather quietly at the judge's bench to talk about sensitive topics, out of their earshot. Jurors, too, agree to a set of rules when they're chosen for a trial. They can't research the case. They must avoid all news about it. They also agree not to discuss



the case outside of court and not talk about it among themselves until deliberations, when all the evidence has been presented and they're deciding whether the defendant should be convicted. If they break any of these rules, they could be kicked off the panel and replaced with an alternate juror, or a mistrial

could be declared. So if they're taking their civic duty seriously, the Trump jury has never heard the Republican presidential candidate criticize Judge Juan M. Merchan as "totally conflicted." They don't know that Trump has been threatened with jail time and fined USD 10,000 for vio-

lating a gag order that bars him from talking about witnesses in the case, including the prosecution's star witness, Michael Cohen. They haven't watched Cohen's TikTok livestreams. They didn't see House Speaker Mike Johnson hold a press conference outside the courthouse this week, using his powerful position to show his party turning against the judicial system by declaring the Manhattan criminal trial illegitimate. And they're unaware of the hours of legal wrangling over what witnesses can be called to testify, and what they can say when they're called. Trump has pleaded not guilty to 34 counts of falsifying business records and denies any of the sexual encounters happened. Trump's attorneys, for example, last week asked the judge to

declare a mistrial over testimony from a crucial witness, Stormy Daniels, who spoke in discomfiting detail for jurors over the alleged sexual encounter with Trump that prompted the hush money payment just weeks before the presidential election in 2016. Jurors saw Daniels on the witness stand for 7.5 hours over two days. The panel got sent home early the day Daniels finished testifying. And then Trump's attorneys argued with the judge the case should be thrown out over her testimony. They took issue with Daniels' testimony describing a power dynamic between her and Trump, and the visceral reaction she had when she says she saw Trump sitting on the bed of his hotel suite stripped down to his boxers and T-shirt.

"That is so prejudicial and so incredible for a jury to hear," Trump's attorney Todd Blanche argued. He blamed prosecutors for asking questions that elicited intimate details of the alleged encounter. Judge Merchan refused to throw out the case. Trump's attorneys also wanted to modify a gag order that bars him from talking about witnesses in the case. "He needs an opportunity to respond to the American people," Blanche argued. Judge Merchan denied that request too. And an appeals court on Tuesday upheld the gag order, finding that Trump wasn't claiming the restrictions infringed on his right to a fair trial. He was arguing that being prohibited from talking about the case could adversely impact his 2024 presidential campaign.

But Trump's lawyers have won some, too. Merchan said no to prosecutors' request to play jurors a 1999 CNN interview in which Trump discussed his familiarity with campaign finance laws. And just before court let out lastn Friday, Merchan told prosecutors they should inform Cohen "that the judge is asking him to refrain from making any more statements" outside court about the case or about Trump. More routine actions are also decided outside of the watchful eyes of the jury. The judge and attorneys talk about scheduling and days off — including this Friday, when the Republican presidential nominee will be attending his son Barron's high school graduation. And they've talked about potential upcoming witnesses.

Is it time to worry about another trial, asks Aman Sehrawat

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Aman Sehrawat, the lone male Indian wrestler to have qualified for Paris Olympics, finds it annoying that instead of shifting his focus on preparing for the Games, he still has to worry about cutting his weight to prepare for another round of trials.

The 20-year-old Under-23 world champion saved India the blushes by securing a berth in men's freestyle 57kg for the Games at the recent World Qualifiers in Istanbul. In 11 other weight categories where the country's male wrestlers competed, India drew a blank as none of them could qualify. "So many times I have cut my weight. How many times I have to do it? It causes a lot of weakness. I don't understand do I think of now winning trials again or start preparing for Olympics. I think the work I need to put for a good preparation will be affected if I am asked to go through the trials again," Aman told PTI in an interview.

"By the time trials are finished, Olympics will be almost there,

so when do we start preparations? In my opinion trials should not be held," said Aman, whose natural body weight is 62kg.

Aman, who is Asian Games bronze medalist and Asian Championships title winner, is confident that he will be in reckoning for a medal at the Games.

"I see myself in top-3 in the world. Russia and Albania are strong and it will be close with them, others I can manage," he said.

Aman had lost to Albania's Zelimkhan Abakarov in the 2023 World Championship where Serbia's Steven Andria Micici had emerged champion. Zaur Uguev, the two-time world champion from Russia is also a strong wrestler, who had defeated Ravi Dahiya in the Tokyo Games gold medal match.

Most probably Aman will have to beat Ravi Dahiya when the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) holds trials.

Ravi, and the other top-3 wrestlers in men's 57kg category at the last trials held in Sonepat, will have to

compete against each other and the winner among them will fight it out with quota winner Aman.

"I would have already left for Russia for training if not for these trials. It is better that I train abroad with good wrestlers. I think I have done enough training in India and now it's time to train and spar with my competitors.

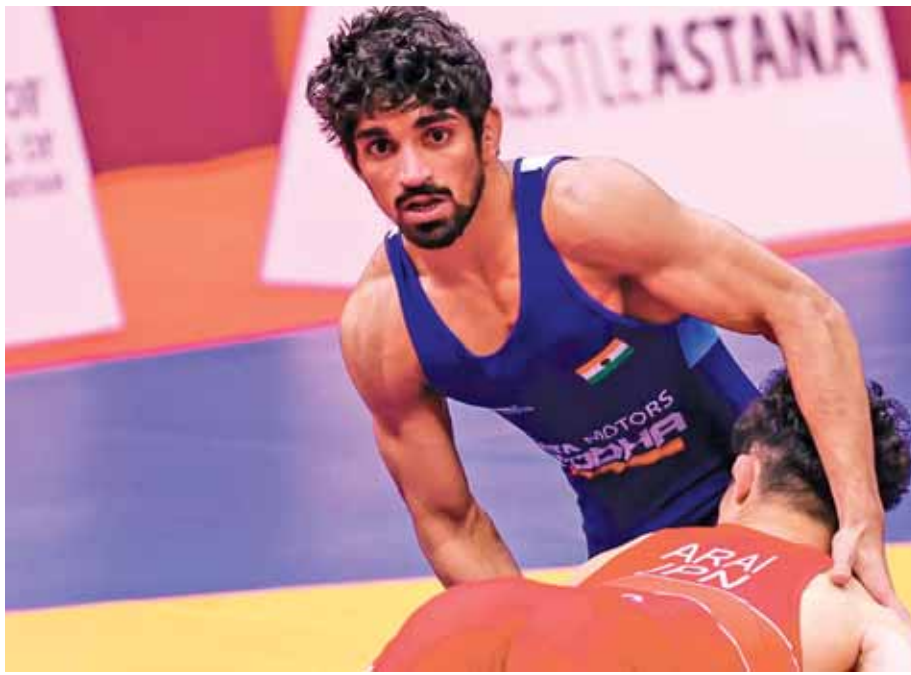
"That will prepare me well for Olympics. I will get a fair idea about my rivals," said Aman, who joined the Chhatarsal Stadium at the age of 10 and has been making a steady progress.

Aman argues that it's not just weight-cut that troubles wrestlers.

"Recovery is also very important. Trials, weight-cut and recovery will eat up a lot of time before Olympics if trials are held again," he said.

Aman also understands the weight of expectations. He is considered the next big thing in Indian wrestling and he is aware of that.

"I hear a lot of things about me. People have expectations now from me. I felt very bad when I



could not qualify at the Asian Qualifiers in Bishkek. It does affect if I am not able to meet expectations. I worked hard for World Qualifiers and finally achieved it," he said adding that

he likes the fame coming his way. He lost his parents in 2015 and since then, Chhatarsal Stadium has been his home. He spoke about the support and care he

gets from his "brother" Sagar, who is a Greco Roman wrestler. "I relish my success with Sagar. He is more than a brother for me. He takes care of everything

at 'akhada'. I just focus on my practice. He manages what I need to do, what I need to eat, when to eat, and helps in practice," said Aman.

Sagar is six years senior to Aman and wants to see his friend achieve what he could not.

"I lost my chances but now I want him to do what I could not do," said Sagar, who competed in 2019 World Championship in Nur Sultan. "He was 10 year-old when he joined us. I was 16 then. I know that support at the right time matters. I did not get it, but I try to do it for him. What I like about Aman is that he is honest. He never lies about practice and training."

MY STAMINA IS GOOD BUT DEFENSE IS AN ISSUE: Aman considers endurance, like all other Indian wrestlers, as his strength. He admits that he has to change his bout strategy a bit to continue to excel at the big stage.

"My stamina is pretty good. Defense is my weakness though. They (coaches) want me to attack from the word go. The mistakes I committed in

Asian Qualifier, I did not repeat in Istanbul. I was thinking about tiring out my opponent in the first period and then launch an attack, but it did not work, so changed my strategy.

"I also need to work on my leg attacks."

AMAN NEEDS HIS OWN COACH BY HIS SIDE DURING TOURNAMENTS: Lalit Kumar, who is the head coach at Chhatarsal Stadium and has monitored Aman's progress, is a firm believer that he needs to have his personal coach by his side if he has to win medals at global level.

"Look, these guys train at their centres for years. They get ready there with different coaches and then at the competitions, different coaches guide them. This is counter-productive I feel," said Lalit, who is a Dronacharya awardee.

"We know how their bodies react. What kind of warm up they require. This is my personal opinion, rest is up to WFI. We are preparing Ravi also for trials. Let's see who wins."

Daniil Medvedev latest to crash out of Italian Open after loss to Tommy Paul

AP ■ ROME

The curse of the defending champion struck again for Daniil Medvedev. The second-seeded Medvedev has never successfully defended a title and he failed again on Tuesday as he lost 6-1, 6-4 to American Tommy Paul to become the latest top player to crash out of the Italian Open.

"It's disappointing, to be honest," said Medvedev, who has won 20 tour-level titles. "I wanted to do better here. I was not even close. What can I say? The more titles I win, the more chances I have to defend.

"So the more tournaments in a year I'm going to play where I already won, maybe not defend, but at least win twice the same tournament, that's what I'm going to try to do."

The opener lasted just 28 minutes as the 14th-seeded Paul broke Medvedev on all three of his service games and then served out the set to love.

"Was a tough one. Mentally I had to be much better," Medvedev said. "I started to calm myself down and focus on the match only at the end of the match, and it was too late. I had to do better. I was expecting myself to play better."

Medvedev improved slightly in the second set when he broke immediately but Paul broke straight back and never looked back, securing his spot in the quarterfinals when Medvedev sent a backhand long.

The second-seeded Medvedev followed 10-time champion Rafael Nadal and top-ranked Novak Djokovic with early exits in Rome.

The only other players to have won the men's tournament at the Foro Italico in



the past 19 years are Andy Murray and Alexander Zverev.

The third-seeded Zverev, who won in 2017, eased past Nuno Borges 6-2, 7-5 and will face Taylor Fritz.

Fritz reached the men's quarterfinals for the first time after recovering from losing a lengthy second-set tiebreaker - during which he let slip match point - to see off Grigor Dimitrov 6-2, 6-7 (11), 6-1.

Alejandro Tabilo backed up his stunning third-round win against Djokovic by edging Karen Khachanov 7-6 (5), 7-6 (10) to reach a Masters quarterfinal for the first time. He will face Zhang Zhizhen, who ousted Thiago Monteiro 7-6 (4), 6-3.

Paul will play Hubert Hurkacz after the seventh seed - who eliminated Nadal in the second round - beat Sebastian Baez 5-7, 7-6 (4), 6-4. The other quarterfinal

pits Stefanos Tsitsipas against Nicolas Jarry.

In the women's tournament, top-ranked Iga Swiatek reached the final four when she swept aside former finalist Madison Keys 6-1, 6-3 with the same score she achieved against the American in the Madrid semifinals two weeks ago.

The 16th-ranked Keys grew more frustrated at her inability to convert break points - racking up 10 without converting a single one - and at one point hit her racket against the clay.

Swiatek won the Madrid Open and is attempting to become the first player to win the "dirt double" since Serena Williams and Nadal both did so in 2013.

The two-time champion will next face third-seeded Coco Gauff after the American beat Qinwen Zheng 7-6 (4), 6-1.

PTI ■ ROME

The Indo-Australian pair of Rohan Bopanna and Matthew Ebden bowed out of the ATP Italian Open following a pre-quarterfinal loss to local hopes Simone Bolelli and Andrea Vavassori here.

The second seeds went down 2-6 4-6 in a match that lasted one hour and 13 minutes on Tuesday.

They had defeated wildcards Matteo Arnaldi and Francesco Passaro in their opening round clash.

It was a disappointing day for Bopanna and Ebden, who were broken twice in the first set. Their opponents, however, did not concede a single break point in the opener. The Indo-Australian combination also double-faulted twice to concede the early initiative.

In the second set too, Bopanna

Bopanna, Ebden pair bows out of Italian Open with pre QF loss



and Ebden continued to be on the backfoot and were broken thrice. They did manage to break their rivals Bolelli and Vavassori twice but were out of depth overall.

The defeat continues a poor recent run that included a first-

round exit from the Madrid Masters earlier this month. Bopanna and Ebden have nonetheless enjoyed a good run on the circuit, winning the Australian Open men's doubles title this year. Last year, they won the Indian Wells Masters which made the 43-year-old Indian the oldest ever ATP Masters 1000 champion.

The duo made the men's doubles semi-finals at Wimbledon and the final of the US Open in the same season. Bopanna also became the oldest world number one in doubles, thanks to the Australian Open triumph in January.



FIFA moves toward ending soccer tradition and letting league games be staged in other countries

AP ■ BANGKOK

FIFA moved Wednesday toward ending decades of soccer tradition by reviewing the rules that currently block domestic league games being played in other countries.

Fans are likely to object to their teams' home matches potentially being moved thousands of miles (kilometers) away. The United States and Saudi Arabia are expected to be willing hosts to lure competitive games from top European countries, and FIFA recently agreed to withdraw from an ongoing court case in New York filed by promoter Relevent to challenge the policy. The new FIFA policy will likely be attractive to the growing number of international owners of European clubs, including the wave of U.S. investors in the English Premier League, Italy's Serie A and France's Ligue 1, and state-backed teams like Abu Dhabi-owned Manchester City, Qatar-owned Paris Saint-

Germain and Saudi-owned Newcastle.

FIFA is now creating a panel of 10-15 people representing soccer stakeholders to advise within months on amending the rules on so-called "out-of-territory" games. The rules were last amended in 2014.

Attempts since then to have European league games abroad, including taking Barcelona to Miami in 2019, were blocked as U.S. Promoters seek to give fans more than just preseason exhibition games involving the world's best club teams. FIFA directed its working group, which is yet to be appointed, to consider fairness and giving "advance notice to fans who may miss the opportunity to attend a home or away match in the home territory." Other factors for the FIFA panel include "respect for the recognized structure of international football" and potential disruption to fans, teams and leagues in the country hosting "out-of-territory" games.

F1 driver Alex Albon signs a multiyear contract extension with Williams

AP ■ GROVE (UK)

Formula One driver Alex Albon has ended speculation about his future by signing a multiyear contract extension with Williams.

The F1 team made the announcement on Wednesday, ahead of this weekend's Emilia Romagna Grand Prix.

The British-born Thai driver had been linked with moves to both Red Bull and Mercedes. He was under contract at Williams through 2025.

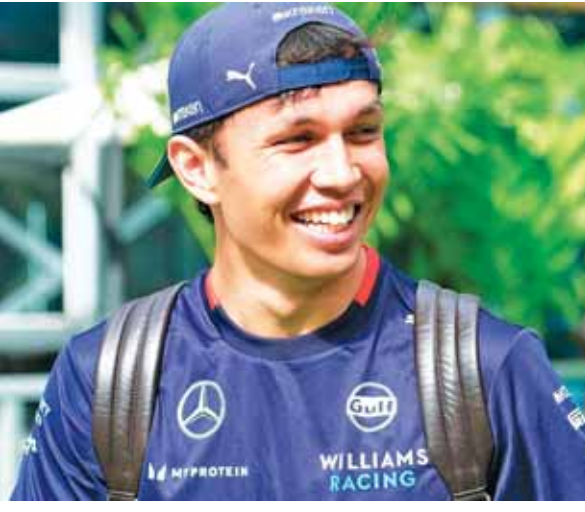
Williams said the new deal will keep Albon at the team "into the new era of Formula 1

regulations," which kick off in 2026. It did not give more details.

"I am incredibly happy to be remaining with Williams Racing and to continue working with such a talented and dedicated team of people," Albon said in a press release.

The 28-year-old Albon is in his third consecutive season with Williams. He has yet to score a point this year.

"It has been a difficult start to the year but since joining Williams we have made significant progress together and I have seen the huge changes happening behind the scenes to take us back to the front of the grid," he said.



Albon started his career in 2019 with Red Bull's junior team but was dropped by Red Bull in 2020. Albon last season scored 27 points to help Williams finish seventh in the constructors' championship, the team's best result in six years.

"We are delighted to secure Alex's long-term future with Williams Racing," said Williams team principal James Vowles. "He has exceptional talent, technical input and dedication to the cause and this is a huge vote of confidence in Williams and the journey back to competitiveness that we are on."



PSG says Mbappé will not play against Nice in French league because of hamstring pain

AP ■ PARIS

Departing Paris Saint-Germain striker Kylian Mbappé was left out of the squad traveling to Nice in the French league because of pain in his left hamstring, the club said. PSG has already secured a 12th league title and plays the Riviera club later Wednesday in a rearranged fixture. PSG will then conclude its league campaign on Sunday at Metz.

PSG also will be missing forward Ousmane Dembélé, who received a knock on his left thigh in the 3-1 loss against Toulouse last weekend.

Mbappé grabbed his league-leading 27th goal of the season against Toulouse in what was his last home game for the club. Mbappé publicly confirmed last week that he is leaving at the end of the season, having already informed the club in February. Although he has yet to announce his destination, Mbappé is widely expected to join Real Madrid.

PSG hopes he will be fit again to feature in the French Cup final against Lyon on May 25 with a chance to add to his club-record tally of 256 goals.

Fifth-place Nice is four points behind Lille and Brest and can still qualify for next season's Champions League.

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Anjum Moudgil and Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar came out on top of the women's and men's 50m rifle 3 positions Olympic Selection Trial (OST) T3 qualification round respectively at the M.P. State Shooting Academy (MPSSA) ranges here on Wednesday.

After the customary 20 shots in the kneeling, prone and standing positions, Anjum shot a score of 592/600, her highest of the OSTs so far, while Aishwary shot yet another quality score of 590 to top the five-man field.

The duo will come back along with their four other competitors on Thursday morning for the finals of the event, where crucial podium points are up for grabs in what is building up to be a fight to the finish. Indian number one and finals world record holder Sift Kaur Samra came

Anjum, Aishwary top qualifications of third 3P Olympic Selection Trial



in second with a score of 589 in the women's 3P, while three others, Ashi Chouksey, Nishchal and Shriyanka Sadangi, logged identical totals of 585.

In the men's 3P, Swapnil Kusale extended a good trials run with a score of 587 to come in second behind Aishwary, while Akhil Sheoran's 584 for a third-place finish was his worst of the three trials so far.

Chain Singh and Niraj Kumar were fourth and fifth with scores of 583 each.

Besides the 3P OST T3 finals, the qualification rounds of the men's and women's 10m air pistol OST T3 matches will also take place.



SUNRISERS LOOK TO SEAL PLAYOFF BERTH

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Masters of their own fate right now despite being erratic, Sunrisers Hyderabad will hope their destructive batting line-up delivers when they take on Gujarat Titans in pursuit of a playoffs berth in the Indian Premier League here on Thursday.

Another win will be enough for Sunrisers to seal a playoff berth as they need only one point to ensure qualification. But the Pat Cummins-led side will also want to challenge for the top two spots, which is a possibility considering they have one more game after this match and a healthy net run rate of +0.406. SRH have 14 points from 12 matches and can reach a maximum of 18 points, which may be enough to ensure a top-two finish if other results go their way.

Not only are the Sunrisers players well-rested ahead of the clash against GT as they got a week off, their morale will also be sky high after notching yet another record-breaking win against Lucknow Super Giants on May 8.

If the bowlers did a commendable job to restrict

LSG to a blow-par score, the opening duo of Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma made a mockery of the hosts by chasing down 166 in just 9.4 overs to notch a 10-wicket win at home.

SRH have made a habit of securing unbelievable victories throughout the season but they have also suffered sizeable defeats, including against GT (by 7 wickets) earlier in the competition.

The boom or bust approach by the batters has either done exceedingly well or has simply let the side down, including three times in the last five games, where SRH lost to RCB (by 35 runs), CSK (by 78 runs) and MI (by 7 wickets). The 2016 champions would hope Head and Sharma deliver as SRH are heavily dependent on the explosive starts provided by the duo.

They will also want to do a better job at re-building their innings, especially while chasing. The likes of Nitish Reddy, Heinrich Klaasen and Abdul Samad need to manage that better.

On the other hand, the Titans, who have only five wins from 13 games and are on 11 points, are out of the reckoning and

GT AIM TO END CAMPAIGN ON A HIGH



will look to end their forgettable campaign on a high.

With former skipper Hardik Pandya moving to Mumbai Indians this season, GT struggled to find a replacement for the all-rounder who was key to their title-winning run in 2022 and runners-up finish last year.

The absence of pacer Mohammed Shami, who was ruled out of the tournament due to injury, has also hurt them.

GT's bowling hasn't been as effective this season, with inconsistent pacers and leaky spinners.

Their last match against Kolkata Knight Riders was a washout but the bowlers showed promise by taking three wickets in the first three overs against CSK.

Mohit Sharma's variations and knuckle balls were particularly effective, and Rashid Khan's clever bowling was noticeable. They'll hope for an encore.

In the batting department, much will depend on skipper Shubman Gill and B Sai Sudharsan, who revelled in the role of an opener. David Miller has looked off-colour this season and his big hits would

be crucial to ensure that the side signs off on a positive note.

SQUADS:
Sunrisers Hyderabad: Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Aiden Markram, Abdul Samad, Nitish Reddy, Shabbaz Ahmed, Pat Cummins (c), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jaydev Unadkat, T Natarajan, Mayank Markande, Umran Malik, Anmolpreet Singh, Glenn Phillips (wk), Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Upendra Yadav (wk), Jhathavedh Subramanyan, Sanvir Singh, Vijaykanth Vijaykanth, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Marco Jansen, Akash Maharaj Singh, Mayank Agarwal.
Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill (c), David Miller, Matthew Wade, Wriddhiman Saha, Kane Williamson, Abhinav Manohar, B. Sai Sudharsan, Darshan Nalkande, Vijay Shankar, Jayant Yadav, Rahul Tewatia, Noor Ahmad, Sai Kishore, Rashid Khan, Joshua Little, Mohit Sharma, Azmatullah Omarzai, Umesh Yadav, Shahrukh Khan, Sushant Mishra, Kartik Tyagi, Manav Suthar, Spencer Johnson, Sandeep Warrier and BR Sharath.

Skipper Curran, bowlers lead PBKS to win over RR

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Skipper Sam Curran played the lead act hitting a well-paced fifty and taking two wickets, as Punjab Kings consigned Rajasthan Royals to a five-wicket defeat in their IPL match here on Wednesday.

The target was a mere 145, but Kings made heavy weather of it on a sluggish track here but Curran (63 not out, 41b, 5x4, 3x6) had a calm head and skills to lift them to their fifth win of the season. PBKS made 145/5 in 18.5 overs.

The Englishman received good support from Jitesh Sharma (22, 20b) as the pair added 63 runs in a fluent fifth wicket partnership.

For Royals, it was their fourth defeat on the trot, but they remained second on the table with 16 points with a qualification to the playoffs to boot with.

The Kings' chase began on a shaky note as they lost Prabhsimran Singh in the first over to Trent Boult.

But bigger jolts were in store as an impressive Avesh Khan (2/28) scalped two wickets in the fifth over.

The right-arm pacer first plucked the important wicket of Rilee Rossouw, who played some strong shots in his 13-ball 22, and then jettisoned in-form Shashank Singh for a two-ball naught.

Shashank failed to connect a fuller, straighter one from Avesh while attempting a flick, and the 141 kmph

delivery thudded on his bat. Shashank did not even bother to use DRS as he walked away. Punjab gained some ground through the alliance between Curran and Jitesh, who smoked R Ashwin for two sixes.

Curran too gave a dose of punishment to the veteran offie, lofting him for a wonderful six over extra cover.

But the blossoming stand was snapped by Yuzvendra Chahal (2/31), leaving PBKS at 111 for five in the 16th over. However, Curran and Ashutosh Sharma (17 not out, 11 balls) knocked off the remaining runs without further drama.

Earlier, despite a well-tuned 48 from local hero Riyan Parag, RR struggled against an array of accurate bowlers on a rather slow pitch, meandering to a sub-par 144 for nine.

R Ashwin (28, 19b, 3x4, 1x6) and Parag (48, 34, 6x4) tried to accelerate during their 50-run stand for the fourth wicket but it could only bring in a temporary momentum for RR.

In fact, lethargy had set in very early in the Rajasthan innings after the early loss of Jaiswal, who chopped a Curran (2/24) delivery back on to his stumps.

Sanju Samson (18), who went past 500-run in a season for the first time in his IPL career, and Tom-Kohler Cadmore (18, 23b) scintillated 36 runs for the second wicket but took six overs for it.

Abhishek's performance in IPL this season will help him play for India: Markram

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sunrisers Hyderabad's South African import Aiden Markram believes Abhishek Sharma's destructive IPL form would fetch him an India cap in the not so distant future.

Sharma, who is striking at over 200 in the ongoing edition, has 401 runs in 12 matches. He and Australian Travis Head make for an explosive opening pair and most recently chased down over 160 runs in a less 10 overs against Lucknow Super Giants.

Markram, who is the captain of the South African team, described the duo as "brothers of destruction" in an interview to PTI Videos.

"Abhi (Abhishek) has made massive strides this season. He was showing some really positive signs in the previous seasons and what he's achieved so far this season puts him in good stead for hopefully

representing India one day," Markram said of the 23-year-old left-hander.

"He's got a very calm and level head on his shoulders and he'll take everything in his stride. But my fingers are certainly crossed for him to go to higher honours," he added.

IMPACT PLAYER RULE GIVES FREEDOM: Joining the debate surrounding the impact player rule, Markram said that the addition of an extra batter in the line-up has allowed teams to adopt a more aggressive approach.

"Naturally, when you have that extra batter in your batting line-up, you feel more freedom as a player. And obviously from the start of the innings, the openers feel that extra bit of freedom as well," he explained.

"I think we've seen it with quite a few other teams that have been doing it. So I'll definitely say that the impact players have created that and created



probably a new brand of T20 cricket that happens here in IPL," he said.

Markram also commended the team's bowling unit, particularly the leadership of Bhuvneshwar Kumar.

"I don't think he's

(Bhuvneshwar Kumar) ever lost it, to be honest. He sort of leads from the front in his own calm and silent way. It's been fantastic for us to watch.

"But the bowling unit as a whole has really confronted this challenge of the batters

that's been happening this season with the scene of impact player. They found their own unique ways to try to keep the batters calm and also try to find ways to keep taking wickets," he said.

"But definitely someone like

Bhuvu leading from the front, as he's done for many, many years, has been excellent for you," he added.

Markram hasn't had the best of seasons so far and has managed 199 runs from nine matches so far. The 30-year-old said he is happy with the effort he is putting into his game.

"I'm still feeling really good. IPL is a tough beast to crack and you as a player have to appreciate that. It's all for good reasons. For me, it's spending lots of time working on my game, working hard off the field as well.

"And if you get another opportunity, you'll feel ready to take that and grab that opportunity hopefully. And if it doesn't work out, then whatever cricket lies ahead, you trust that this preparation puts you in a good state for that," he said acknowledging being out of form.

Pant will get better with time: Ganguly

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Capitals' Director of Cricket Sourav Ganguly feels Rishabh Pant is an instinctive captain and his leadership skills will refine with time and experience.

The dashing wicket-keeper batter returned to competitive cricket after a painstakingly long rehab following a horrific car crash in December 2022. The 26-year-old resumed his duties as the Delhi Capitals captain.

"Pant is a young captain, he'll learn with time. The way he returned from injury to play a full season; we had our doubts during the off season," Ganguly told JioCinema.

"Indian players are crucial, especially since the TATA IPL filled to 10 teams. I am very happy for him that he returned to play so well over a full season. He has all my



well wishes for whatever is next," Ganguly added. Pant has time and again showcased his astute captaincy during the IPL, while he has also erred in his decisions a few times. "With time, he'll become a better captain. Nobody is a great captain from day one, but he is an instinctual captain, he makes

decisions on the ground. With more time, he'll get better."

DC ended their league stage with seven wins and seven losses. Although they are still alive in the playoffs race as they have a mathematical chance, but in all probability they have all but played their last game this season.

The likes of pacers Mukesh Kumar and Rasikh Dar Salam rose to the occasion a few times this season and Ganguly was lavish in his praise for the duo. "You've seen Rasikh's development over time. The more matches he played, the better he got. It's not easy to bowl on the Delhi wicket. This wicket is great, and the ground isn't that big, so I think for any bowler, it isn't easy to bowl here. Rasikh has improved a lot. "Mukesh has been our best bowler this season. He bowls all the difficult overs, whether at the start or at the death. There has been no match this season where we didn't need his bowling in the death," he said. "We knew that conceding sixes would lead to more losses, so he has consistently delivered there. Our Indian bowlers have been great this season."

that's been happening this season with the scene of impact player. They found their own unique ways to try to keep the batters calm and also try to find ways to keep taking wickets," he said.

"But definitely someone like

Injured Rabada returns home from IPL, impact on T20 World Cup preparation unlikely

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

South Africa pace spearhead Kagiso Rabada has returned home from the Indian Premier League due to a lower limb soft tissue infection, the country's cricket board said on Wednesday.

Rabada represented Punjab Kings in the IPL, taking 11 wickets in as many games. Punjab have already been eliminated from the IPL play-offs race and will play their last league game on May 19.

"The 28-year-old consulted a specialist on arrival in South Africa and is being closely monitored by the Cricket South Africa medical team," said Cricket South Africa (CSA) in a statement.

CSA also said that the injury is unlikely to impact Rabada's preparation for the T20 World Cup in the Americas next month.

Time will tell if players can play aggressive cricket in WC: Langer

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ultra-aggressive cricket, especially in the powerplay, has transformed the shortest format but it remains to be seen if the players can replicate it in the upcoming T20 World Cup in the Americas, said Lucknow Super Giants head coach Justin Langer.

IPL teams have scored 200 or more 37 times this season so far but LSG managed to achieve the feat only once — against Chennai Super Kings last month — and Langer admitted that they had struggled in the powerplay.

"The Lucknow wicket has been a real contest between bat and ball whereas a lot in this tournament has been very one

sided towards the bat. So that's certainly, we haven't capitalised in our powerplay like some of the other teams have," Langer said after LSG lost by 19 runs to Delhi Capitals here on Tuesday night.

"...It's been absolutely amazing watching some of these powerplays. It's almost transformed the game. And whether people can continue to do this and whether they can do it during the World Cup, time will tell. But it's certainly been ultra aggressive cricket."

Defending 209, DC had reduced LSG to 71 for 5 but pace all-rounder Arshad Khan gave a real scare when he slammed an unbeaten 33-ball 58 before the hosts held their

nerves to limit the visitors to 189 for 9.

"I think Arshad is a very good cricketer. You saw that he swung the ball early. He's a good fieldsman and to be able to bat like that, he's a very good package," Langer said.

"I've thought the whole way through watching this tournament that he's got huge potential and he showed some of that tonight. So when he becomes more consistent, particularly with his bowling, he could be a real handful and a very, very good all-around cricketer."

For DC, Tristan Stubbs was sensational as he smashed a 25-ball 57 and then returned to take a wicket.

"I think Tristan Stubbs, that

wicket was important obviously. We tried (Deepak Hooda) when the two left-handers were in and he got a wicket for us two games ago, he didn't get one this game, whereas Stubbs did," Langer said.

"So I thought if we had been a little more intelligent with our batting today, that was a chaseable score on this wicket. He's (Stubbs) a very good cricketer. I've been seeing the power plays in the first six, but we're also seeing the way some of these teams are finishing off, and I think Stubbs is an outstanding cricketer."

Talking about the focus on match-ups these days, Langer said: "There's so much data these days, so when you do

your analysis leading into every game and what often happens traditionally is left-handers don't have as much impact on the game against off-spin when the ball's spinning away.

"You saw Bispy (Ravi Bishnoi) bowled beautifully when they're spinning away, whereas when the ball's spinning back into the left-hander or the off-spin is spinning back into the right-hander, it tends to be more in the arc to be hitting some of these sixes.

"So generally the thinking is that the ball that's turning away from the batsman, left or right, is the way that most teams tend to match it up. Often when a wicket quickly falls, you look to get an off spinner on... And the

truth is, there's not too many Ravi Ashwins or Nathan Lyons in the world. So it's a specialist role, that's why often part-timers are used."

ALL INDIAN BOWLERS ARE DOING GOOD JOB: AMRE: DC are missing some key players but they ended things on a high and assistant coach Pravin Amre credited the back-up players and Indian bowlers for producing the goods. "It's a new team, I look personally at many positives. As a find, Jake, Stubbs, Porel are good finds for us and even Rasik. I think last four games, he really contributed well and as an Indian, bowling in as a death, I think that's a specialist job. He backed himself very well," he said.

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