

Polling goes south as mercury heads north

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As swaths of north India stewed in brutal heat during the peak of summer, voter apathy continued in the fifth phase of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, with voter turnout recorded at 57.46 per cent (tentative until 8:30 pm) in 49 constituencies across six States and two Union Territories. This phase saw sporadic incidents of violence in West Bengal and a poll boycott in a village in Uttar Pradesh.

The highest polling percentage was in West Bengal (73 per cent), while the lowest was in Maharashtra (49.04 per cent). This was the smallest phase in terms of the number of constituencies for which voting took place. Low voter turnout in the fifth phase sent political parties, including the BJP, into a tizzy. After Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla Lok Sabha constituency, one of the 49 seats voting in the fifth phase registered 54.49 per cent voter turnout seems heading for the highest turnout in the last eight Lok Sabha elections.

This is a record of sorts for the constituency in north Kashmir for any general election held so far. The best turnout in the last thirty-five year history of polling in Baramulla seat was 61.09 per cent, in the 1984 general elections. This comes after Srinagar recorded 38.49 per cent polling during the fourth phase. Baramulla is one of the three seats in the Kashmir division of J&K—other than Srinagar and Anantnag-Rajouri—where the BJP has not fielded any candidates. In



UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during a campaign meeting in support of BJP candidate for East Delhi seat Harsh Malhotra for Lok Sabha polls, in New Delhi, Monday

2019, the constituency recorded a turnout of 34.6 per cent, whereas in 1989, it was at a mere 5.48 per cent, the commission said.

As per the EC's voter turnout App, Ladakh recorded at 67.15 per cent, Jharkhand at 63.00 per cent and Bihar 52.60 per cent, Jammu and Kashmir 54.67 per cent, Odisha 60.72 per cent, Uttar Pradesh 57.79 per cent.

In Maharashtra, the Dindori seat recorded highest voter turnout of 57.06 per cent, Bhiwandi recorded 49.43 per cent, Dhule 48.81 per cent, Dindori 57.06 per cent, Kalyan 41.70 per cent, Mumbai North 46.91 per cent, Mumbai North Central 47.46 per cent, Mumbai North East 48.67 per cent, Mumbai North West 49.79 per cent, Mumbai South 44.63 per cent, Mumbai South

Central 48.26 per cent, Nashik 51.16 per cent, Palghar 54.32 per cent, Thane 48.04 per cent and Kalyan 41.70 per cent.

After the fifth round of polling in the ongoing Lok Sabha election, the Congress on Monday said only 15 days remain for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's departure, claiming that winds of change are blowing across the country and the INDIA Opposition Bloc is set to sweep the ruling NDA away. Modi has alleged that poor campaigning by the Congress and its allies could be a reason for low voter turnout in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls with even their party workers not turning out to vote for them and this could politically benefit the BJP.

Scattered incidents of violence marred the polls in seven parliamentary constituencies of West Bengal

where TMC and BJP workers clashed in various parts of Barrackpore, Bongaon, and Arambagh seats. The poll panel said it has received 1,036 complaints from different political parties alleging EVM malfunctioning and agents being stopped from entering booths.

In Maharashtra, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray claimed there were a lot of complaints from electors about facilities outside polling booths. BJP leader Kirit Somaiya alleged that Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders Sanjay Raut and Sunil Raut were found involved in "corrupt practices" outside their polling booth at Bhandup in Mumbai.

The former MP also claimed that two activists of the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) were arrested for "illegal and corrupt practices of using a fake EVM".

58 pc voter turnout in UP's fifth phase

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

An approximate voter turnout of 58 per cent was recorded in the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh, where polling was held in 14 constituencies spread across 21 districts on Monday.

Polling for by-election to Lucknow East assembly constituency was also held on Monday and 52.45 per cent voters turned out to exercise their franchise. The voting began at 7 am and concluded at 6 pm.

UP Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said here on Monday that during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the voter turnout was 58.38 per cent in these constituencies till 6 pm in the state and it was likely to exceed by 0.5 per cent. The figures may be revised later.

Amethi recorded a voter turnout of 54.17 per cent, Banda 59.46 per cent, Barabanki 66.89 per cent, Faizabad 58.96 per cent, Fatehpur 56.90 per cent, Gonda 51.45 per cent, Hamirpur 60.36 per cent, Jalaun 53.44 per cent, Jhansi 63.57 per cent, Kaisarganj 55.47 per cent, Kaushambi 52.60 per cent, Lucknow 52.03 per cent, Mohanlalganj 62.53 per cent and Rae Bareilly 57.85 per cent, according to the Election Commission of India.

stituency was around 52.25 per cent.

In 2019, the Bharatiya Janata Party had won 13 out of these 14 Lok Sabha seats, with only Rae Bareilly going to Congress leader Sonia Gandhi. The 14 constituencies where polling was held in the fifth phase included Mohanlalganj, Lucknow, Rae Bareilly, Amethi, Jalaun, Jhansi, Hamirpur, Banda, Fatehpur, Barabanki, Kaushambi, Faizabad, Kaisarganj and Gonda.

The CEO said the polling was peaceful with no report of untoward incident received from any of the 14 constituencies which went to poll on Monday. He, however, said a little over 100 complaints relating to malfunction of electronic voting machines (EVMs), fake voting, slow polling and discrimination among voters by the polling staff were received.

In a social media post, the Uttar Pradesh unit of the Congress, said, "Booth number 5, Rasulpur in Sareni in Rae Bareilly is closed since 8 am (and) voters are going back. So this is how (the target of) 400 (seats) will be crossed!"

Samajwadi Party candidate from Gonda constituency Shreya Verma complained to the Election Commission that fair polling is not taking place at booth numbers 180 and 181 in the Mankapur area. In Fatehpur, BJP candidate and



AAP's trouble mounts over foreign donations

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In yet another setback to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his party, of which he is the national convenor, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has alleged that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) received ₹7.08 crore in foreign funds from 2014 to 2022, allegedly violating the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), the Representation of People Act (RPA), and the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

In its dossier to the Union Home Ministry, the ED has revealed that the AAP received funds from multiple donors in USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Oman and other countries. According to the ED, the real identity of foreign donors was concealed in AAP's books to circumvent restrictions on foreign donations to political parties, with donations directly deposited into AAP's IDBI bank account.

that multiple donors have used the same passport numbers for donation, e-mail IDs, mobile numbers and credit cards to donate to the AAP. The ED has shared all the information with the Union Home Ministry relating to its investigations with details of donors, such as names of the donor, country of donor, passport number, amount donated, mode of donation and bank account number of receiver, billing name, billing address, billing telephone numbers, billing e-mail, time & date of donation and payment gateway used etc, gathered during the investigation under PMLA, 2002.

The ED, in its investigation, claimed several instances of irregularities in the collection of foreign funds by the AAP and its leaders and accused some of them, including AAP MLA, Durgesh Pathak, of siphoning off the funds collected during a fund-raising event in Canada in 2016, for personal benefits.



BJP National president JP Nadda chairs party's national general secretaries' meeting, at party headquarters, in New Delhi, on Monday

Two rounds to go, Nadda takes stock of BJP poll fortunes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the hectic Lok Sabha polls campaigning for the remaining two phases, an urgent meeting of top BJP leaders, including general secretaries was convened by party president JP Nadda on Monday at the party headquarters. Party sources said the meeting was called to review the party's performance so far in the election and devise a strategy for the remaining phases.

BJP national general secretary (organisation) BL Santhosh, national general secretaries Arun Singh, Tarun Chugh, party IT department head Amit Malviya, national media in-charge Anil Baluni, and Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnav were among those who were in the meeting. Sources said Nadda asked all senior leaders and office bearers of the party to play a "more effective role" and make an "active contribution" in the implementation of the party's poll strategy on the ground. BJP chief also reviewed the fifth phase of polling and also discussed the future strategy of the party with regard to the ongoing elections, the sources said.

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Iran Prez dies in chopper crash after stinging Israel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/DUBAI

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, the country's Foreign Minister and several other officials were found dead on Monday, hours after their helicopter crashed in a foggy, mountainous region of the country's north-west, state media reported. Raisi was 63. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei hours later announced Iran's first vice president, Mohammad Mokhber, would serve as the country's acting president until elections are held. Khamenei also announced five days of public mourning.

India announced one-day State mourning on Tuesday as a mark of respect for President Raisi. The Union Home Ministry said the national flag will be flown at half-mast on all buildings where it is regularly flown across India and there will be no official entertainment during the period of State mourning. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Congress president Malliarjun Kharge expressed shock and sadness at the demise of the Iranian President. Modi said, "India stands with Iran in this time of sorrow."

"As a mark of respect to the departed dignitaries, the Government of India has decided that there will be one day's State mourning on May 21 (Tuesday) throughout India," the



spokesperson said. Meanwhile, state TV gave no immediate cause for the crash that occurred in Iran's East Azerbaijan province. Among the dead was Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, 60.

The helicopter also carried the Governor of Iran's East Azerbaijan province, other officials and bodyguards, the state-run IRNA news agency reported.

It was last month when tension had increased in the region after Iran and Israel had clashed in worrying, unprecedented fashion. But temperatures cooled after the intervention of the US and other world powers.

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No relief on the horizon till May 24

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

There seems to be no respite from the sweltering heat for the residents of Northwest India, including Delhi, with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) issuing a stark warning on Monday of impending heatwave to severe heatwave conditions over the next five days in the region.

As temperatures increased to alarming 48-degree Celsius mark in Delhi's Najafgarh and red alerts issued for the national Capital and extensive regions of northwest India, the severity of the situation cannot be overstated. This has also pushed the country's peak power demand to hover near the projected 235 GW level in



Women cover themselves with dupattas to beat blistering heat on Monday in New Delhi

May, following excessive use of cooling appliances like air conditioners and desert coolers.

According to the Union Power Ministry data, the

peak power demand or the highest supply in the day has already reached 233 GW on May 6 compared to 221.42 GW recorded a year ago. The IMD said scorching

heatwave conditions will persist in Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh-Delhi, and West Rajasthan; in some parts of West Uttar Pradesh, East Rajasthan, and northwest Madhya Pradesh during May 20 to May 24, 2024.

Also, the heatwave conditions are likely to be over North Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat during the period.

Health experts said this extreme weather not only poses significant health risks but also disrupts daily life and challenges the day to day activities of the people.

"In the face of such adversity, urgent measures are needed to safeguard the well-being of citizens and mitigate the impact of this blistering heatwave," they said.

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Gonda: BJP leader Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh shows his inked finger after casting his vote in Gonda on Monday. PTI



Sadhus show their inked fingers as they pose for photographs in front of the Ram temple after casting votes during the 5th phase of Lok Sabha polls in Ayodhya on Monday. PTI



Union Minister and BJP candidate Smriti Irani after casting her vote during the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections in Amethi on Monday. PTI

Village head's teenager son casts fake votes in Farrukhabad, detained

Farrukhabad/Lucknow (PTI): The 17-year-old son of a village head has been apprehended for allegedly casting votes multiple times during the fourth phase of polling in Farrukhabad constituency on May 13, police said on Monday. The video in this regard was shared by Samajwadi Party supreme Akhilesh Yadav and senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on their social media accounts. The viral video showed the teenager pressing the EVM button seven to eight times in front of the Bharatiya Janata Party's candidate for the constituency, Mukesh Rajput. Uttar Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said repolling had been recommended to the Election Commission of India in the polling station concerned. Naval Kishore Shakya, the SP candidate from the Farrukhabad Lok Sabha seat which went to polls in the fourth phase

on May 13, submitted a written complaint in this regard, following which a case was registered against the teenager. Shakya also posted the incident's video on social media and complained to the district election officer. "The accused teenager has been detained and the matter is being investigated," SHO of Nayagaon police station Ritesh Thakur told PTI on Monday. The incident took place in Uttar Pradesh's Etah district where the son of Khiriyi Pamaran village pradhan Anil Thakur allegedly cast fake vote about seven to eight times at booth number 343 under the Nayagaon police station limits. The teenager himself recorded a video of the act and uploaded it on social media. It became viral after the SP chief and Rahul Gandhi shared it on their X handles. Farrukhabad District Magistrate VK Singh said that taking note of the video posted by the SP chief, the assistant returning officer con-

cerned had lodged an FIR at the Nayagaon police station. A case has been registered under the Representation of People's Act and IT Act, Singh said. The accused teenager has been detained and sent to the rehabilitation centre in Etah, the police disclosed. Meanwhile, Rinwa issued a statement saying, "A video of a person voting multiple times has circulated in social media. Action has already been taken in regard to the above incident." He added that instructions have been issued to suspend and institute disciplinary proceedings against all members of the polling party concerned. "Repolling has been recommended to the ECI in the polling station concerned," the CEO said, and added that strict instructions to rigorously follow the procedure for voter identification have been issued to all district election officers for the remaining poll phases in the state.

Aged, disabled show keenness in voting

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Neither age, nor disability nor sickness prevented people from stepping out to vote. Ninety-year-old Hari Shankar was seen coming on a wheelchair to one of the model booths in the city. Hard of hearing, Hari Shankar said that his issues were the same as the issues of the progress of the country. He said that though the administration had provided them with the opportunity of casting the vote at their residence, he insisted on coming to the booth to exercise his franchise. Ganga Devi, who was also brought on a wheelchair, said that she was sick for a long time. "However, I came to vote. I want that there should be progress in the country and want a good government that maintains law and order," she said. Mallika Parul, a housewife, came on a wheelchair because she has had an fibroids surgery. "Everyone in the house encouraged me to come and vote. I have voted for cleanliness and proper roads," she said.

Many disappointed as names missing from voters list

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Names of many voters were found missing in the electoral rolls. Atul Srivastava from Virat Khand in Gomti Nagar said that his name was missing from the voters' list. He alleged that the block level officer had deleted names of four members of his family from the voters list. "I had checked my name on the online portal and it was missing hence I thought I would contact the BLO on the polling day and know the exact position but today when I turned up to cast my vote, I found that the BLO had deleted the names of all my family members," he said. When asked why he had not checked his name earlier on the voters' list, he said that he

noticed one day before the polling day that he had not received his voters slip and it was then that he woke up to the issue. "We have not faced this problem in the last ten to fifteen years that we have voted in the elections in the past. My name has always been on the voters list," he said. The BLO of the area on his part maintained that he had visited the area four times but the said voter was missing from his residence and that was why he had struck down the name from the voter list. Yet another citizen, Mohammed Azhar, found his name missing from the voters' list at a polling booth in Mahanagar. "The names of the rest of my family members were there but my name was missing," he said.

The district administration had set up a control room for tackling complaints regarding the names missing from the electoral roll. A senior district administration official said that they received very few complaints about names missing from the voters list. "Most of the complaints about voter's names missing were of those people who had registered on the portal after April 23 when the portal was already locked. Now their names will appear in the list for the next elections," he said. He said that they received complaints for the change of electronic voting machines (EVMs) at some of the polling booths. "There were not many complaints about EVMs. A minimum of two per cent changes of EVMs occur," he said.



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NOTICE

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SIXTH PHASE LS POLL IN UP 23 pc candidates have criminal cases, 36 pc are crorepatris

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a startling revelation ahead of the sixth phase of the Lok Sabha elections in UP, the Uttar Pradesh Election Watch and the Association for Democratic Reforms have disclosed that 23 per cent of the candidates have criminal cases against them, while 36 per cent are crorepatris. The comprehensive analysis scrutinised the affidavits of all 162 candidates contesting from 14 constituencies, including Sultanpur, Pratapgarh, Phulpur, Allahabad, Ambedkar Nagar, Shravasti, Dumariyaganj, Basti, Sant Kabir Nagar, Lalganj (SC), Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Machhlishahr (SC) and Bhadohi, which go to polls in the sixth phase. According to the findings, 38 out of 162 candidates (23 per cent) have declared criminal cases, with 21 per cent facing seri-

ous criminal charges. Party-wise, the Samajwadi Party leads with the highest number of candidates with criminal cases - nine out of 12 candidates (75 per cent). It is followed by the Bharatiya Janata Party with six out of 14 candidates (43 per cent) and the Bahujan Samaj Party with four out of 14 candidates (29 per cent) having criminal cases. SP's 75 per cent candidates face serious charges followed by BSP's 29 per cent and BJP's 21 per cent. Among the candidates, Babu Singh Kushwaha (SP, Jaunpur) has 25 criminal cases, Ram Bhuwal Nishad (SP, Sultanpur) has eight criminal cases and Moinuddin Ahmed Khan (BSP, Shravasti) has 10 criminal cases. In terms of wealth, 59 out of 162 candidates (36 per cent) are crorepatris. Out of them, BJP's all 14 candidates are crorepatris,

followed by SP's 11 and BSP's nine. Maneka Gandhi (BJP, Sultanpur) is the richest among the candidates with property worth Rs 97 crore, followed by Praveen Patel (BSP, Phulpur) Rs 64 crore and Shivpal Singh Patel (SP, Pratapgarh) Rs 46 crore. Conversely, some candidates declare considerably lesser assets, with Ram Kumar Yadav of SUCI (C) disclosing assets worth only Rs 1,686, Subash, an independent candidate, with assets amounting to Rs 10,000 and Urmila of Samaj Parivartan Party declaring assets worth Rs 34,000. The educational qualifications of the candidates also paint an interesting picture, with 65 per cent holding graduation or higher degrees, and 31 per cent having qualifications ranging from 5th to 12th grade. Only a small fraction, 10 per cent of the candidates, are women.

Majority of Muslim women vote for peace, harmony

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Majority of Muslim women who came out to vote on Monday said that they had exercised their franchise for peace and harmony. Saffia, a housewife staying in the old part of the city, said that she wanted peace, calm and harmony to prevail in the country. "I want the country to progress and I want inflation to decrease because it affects so many people," she said. Saffia, who stepped out in the afternoon to cast her vote, said that heat was no deterrent and that voting was important. Sabia Ali, a housewife from Chowk, said that she wanted the government schools to develop properly so that children could get better education. "These are problems which

we face on a daily basis," she said. Parveen Bano, also from the same area, said that she had several expectations from the new government which would be formed after the Lok Sabha elections conclude. "We face problems about local issues. The sewer lines are badly damaged in the area in which I reside. I want the drains to be cleaned and stray dogs which lie in these drains to be removed," she said. She added that inflation was another problem which people were facing. "Everything is so expensive. I get no ration and my husband has passed away. We are living in abject poverty," she said. Najmun, a housewife, said that she had voted for an atmosphere of peace and harmony.

Saba, another voter who irons clothes, said that inflation was an issue that they were all grappling with. "We live on rent and it is difficult for us to get the children admitted to good schools. My husband washes clothes and I iron them and the electricity bills are huge which raises several difficulties," she said. Yuzra, Firdaus and Sabina, who came to cast their vote together, said that they had voted for education and development in their society. "Inflation is a very big issue but we understand this will never decrease no matter which government comes. At the time of voting everyone promises to make changes, but no one fulfills those promises," they said, adding that they wanted an atmosphere of peace and harmony.

'400 paar' means BJP will be defeated on more than 400 seats: Akhilesh

Siddharthnagar (PTI): Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Monday said the Bharatiya Janata Party's call of '400 paar' means they would be defeated on more than 400 Lok Sabha seats and the party was working only to win the rest 143 constituencies. Addressing a poll rally in favour of the SP candidate here, Yadav said that the Bahujan Samaj Party won one seat "by mistake" in the Uttar Pradesh assembly election two years back and cautioned voters to be "alert" against them in the ongoing general elections. The SP president often charges Mayawati's party of helping the BJP in the parliamentary elections like they allegedly did in the 2022 UP elections.



"By '400 paar' they mean that they will lose as many seats to the opposition in this election and are working to corner the remaining 143 seats," the SP president said addressing the rally. The SP president repeated allegations against the BJP government of collecting "heavy amount" from vaccine companies for the contract to supply Covid vaccines.

"Fortunately, I did not take the corona vaccine. Those who took it are reporting medical complaints now," he said. Yadav reiterated that the INDIA bloc government will provide for free good quality packed 'aata (flour) and data'. He alleged that during the rule of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath question papers of police and other government recruitment exams were leaked more than 10 times. He claimed that around 60 lakh youths of the state have suffered due to paper leaks. "Has he ever ordered bulldozing properties of those involved in the question paper leaks?" Yadav asked, taking an apparent jibe at the Uttar Pradesh chief minister.

Rahul reaches Rae Bareilly, visits Hanuman temple

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Amidst allegations of use of muscle power by Bharatiya Janata Party candidate Dinesh Pratap Singh to influence voters, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday visited Rae Bareilly, the constituency from which he is contesting the ongoing Lok Sabha polls. Polling in Rae Bareilly took place in the fifth phase of the ongoing elections on Monday. Rahul Gandhi is also contesting the Lok Sabha election from Wayanad in Kerala from where he is the sitting MP. On reaching Rae Bareilly, Rahul offered prayers at Peepleshwar Hanuman temple. He also visited some polling booths and met with the people who had cast their votes. Rahul Gandhi is contesting from Rae Bareilly which was represented in the Lok Sabha five times by his mother Sonia Gandhi before she took the Rajya Sabha route to the Parliament this year. Earlier in the day, the former Congress chief arrived at Lucknow airport from New Delhi and left for Rae Bareilly by road. Rahul Gandhi claimed in a post on X that a storm of change is sweeping the country. "The people of India are fighting this election together and a storm of change is sweeping across the country. I am appealing to the entire country, including



Amethi and Rae Bareilly, to come out in large numbers and vote for the prosperity of your families, for your rights, for the progress of India," Rahul posted. Meanwhile, amidst report of fault in some electronic voting machines (EVMs), the social media handle of UP Congress alleged that BJP candidate Dinesh Pratap Singh's "goon brother Awadhesh Singh" is bullying voters with his henchmen at booth number 312 of Rae Bareilly assembly constituency. He threatened Congress workers and took away their bags! The UP Congress also shared a video of BJP workers alleged hooliganism in Hajipur of Gurubakshganj in Rae Bareilly. In the video, BJP workers are seen beating up a Congress agent.

Tea seller, aides attack employers

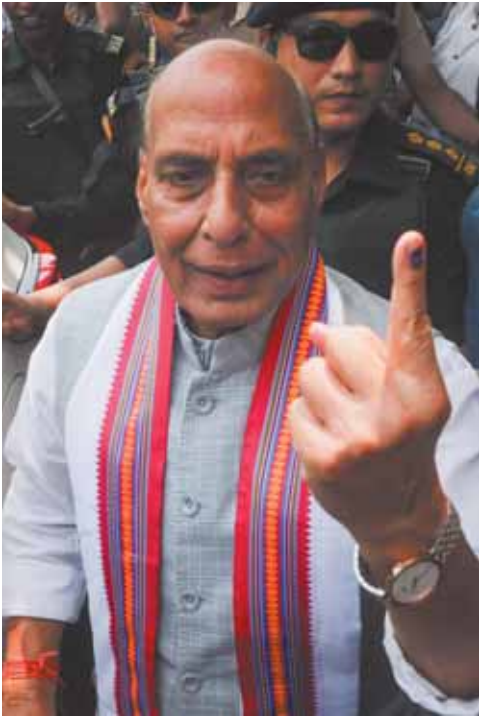
PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A tea seller and his aides attacked his employers on being asked to show the sale register in Indira Nagar under Ghazipur police station on Sunday night. As per reports, Rohan Gupta of Basti and Mohammed Azam of Itaunja have a shop in partnership at Bhoonthnath market. They have given the shop to one Abdul Rahim of Indira Nagar on contractual basis. Abdul along with his brother Shad Ali and their friends Shanker Singh of Indira Nagar and Amaan of Sitapur district runs the shop.

On Sunday night, Rohan and Azam reached the shop to check the sale and the income generated during the past month. It is alleged that Abdul Rahim picked up a fight with Rohan and Azam on being asked about the difference between the sale and income being shown to them. Later Abdul Rahim's and his associates attacked Rohan and Azam with kitchen knives, injuring them and escaped. Both were admitted to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital. The brother of Rohan filed a complaint with the police in this regard. The assailants are absconding.

MAN DROWNS IN INDIRA DAM

A fast food seller drowned in Indira dam in BBD University police station area on Monday. As per reports, Salman of Sadatganj along with his friends had gone to the Indira dam for an outing and they took a dip in the dam to beat the heat. Salman, however, drowned in the dam while his friends were saved by the local divers. The police sent the body for autopsy.



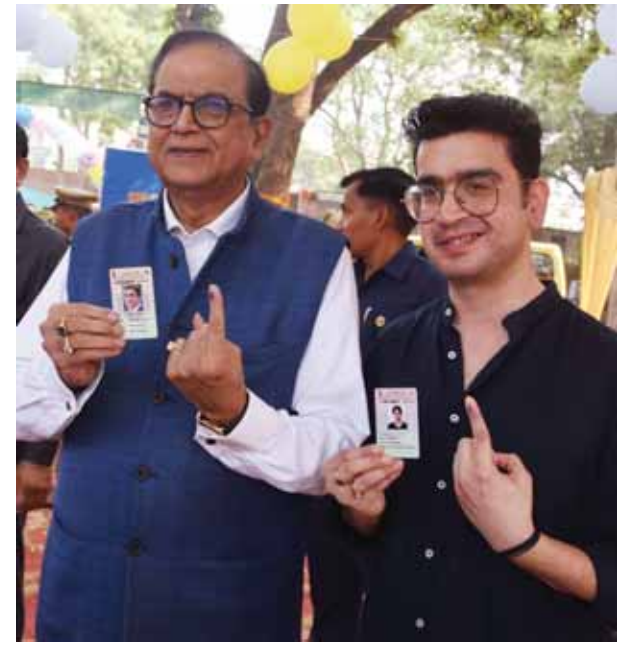
Lucknowites vote for development

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A majority of Lucknowites who voted on Monday said that they had cast their votes for the development of the country and its progress. Sarita Mishra, a resident of Vikas Khand in Gomti Nagar, said that she had voted for development of the country and security of women, and also for the abrogation of Article 370. "Lucknow has developed very well and Ram mandir has been constructed. These are issues on which we have voted," she said. Om Prakash, a retired officer, said that he voted for the development of the schools, roads, water systems and health services. "The new government should take this development further," he added. Vibha Srivastava, a housewife, said that she had voted for development of the country.

"I want that facilities should be provided for the progress of the youth. I want things to run smoothly as they are currently running in our country," she said. Mohammed Idris, a resident of Vijay Khand in Gomti Nagar, said that he voted on the issue of inflation and unemployment. "The budgets are going haywire. Earlier what used to be sufficiently managed in Rs 5,000 has now increased to Rs 10,000. Our children have completed their graduation but have secured no employment. There is no vacancy and when the youth fill the forms for recruitment exams, the papers get leaked that impacts their future," he said. Pushpa Singh, yet another voter, said that her issues were that government tax should not be levied on Hindu temples. "India should be declared a Hindu Rashtra. I want the Minorities Commission to be

abolished because Muslims are in high numbers and stand second to the Hindus in terms of population count. Then why are they being given so many facilities? It is not right that the public money given as tax should go into their welfare," he said. Asha Srivastava, a housewife, said that she voted on the issue of unemployment. "I want that good things should take place in the country and women should be secure as well as encouraged to progress," she said. Rama Shankar Ojha, a retired bank officer, said that he voted on the issue of the prestige of the country. "I have never seen India being so prominent on the world stage earlier in my life. One cannot take up issues of unemployment for voting because it can never be tackled and will always remain. This is one issue has never been fully solved earlier," he said.



Rajnath, leaders, bureaucrats and masses lead by example

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Defence Minister and Member of Parliament from Lucknow, Rajnath Singh, cast his vote at Scholar Home School polling station in Vipul Khand of Gomti Nagar at 10:15 am along with his wife Savitri Singh, son Neeraj Singh and daughter-in-law Neelam Singh. After casting his vote, Rajnath Singh appealed "to all the voters of the country, including Lucknow, to definitely vote along with their family members. When asked how many seats the National Democratic Alliance would win, he said the decision was in the hands of the public but the resolution of NDA was 400 plus seats and at this time he would not like to make any prediction. Addressing the media after casting his vote, senior BJP leader Neeraj Singh said that people were excited and were queuing up in large numbers at every polling booth to vote. Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak cast his vote along with his wife Namrata Pathak and daughter at Montessori

School in Mall Avenue. After casting his vote, Pathak said the opposition was completely confused as the public had completely rejected them. He said the NDA would win all 80 Lok Sabha seats in UP, including Rae Bareilly and Amethi. Rajya Sabha MP and Bharatiya Janata Party national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said that all citizens must exercise their right to vote as voting was their right as well as their duty. Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati cast her vote at Mall Avenue while BSP candidate Sarwar Mallik cast his vote at the Shia PG College. He said: "I participated in this great festival of democracy with my entire family. I voted at Shia PG College, Sitapur Road polling booth. Yes, casting the vote is our right as well as duty because if we don't vote then how can we complain to the elected government." Samajwadi Party candidate Ravidas Mehrotra cast his vote at the Rani Laxmi Bai ward polling centre in Lucknow Central assembly segment. Rashtriya Lok Dal national spokesper-

son Anil Dubey and his family members cast their votes in the Bhola Kheda booth at Basic Primary School in Kanausi. "Voting is your Brahmantra (never failing weapon) in the great festival of democracy. Your one vote will decide the happiness, peace, prosperity and development of your area. The wave of revolution and change is going on in the entire country. For the third time, the Narendra Modi-led National Democratic Alliance government is going to be formed in the country," he said. RLD national secretary Anupam Mishra along with his family exercised his franchise in Aliganj. He said his vote was dedicated to building a strong nation. State president of RLD (Business cell) Rohit Agarwal said, "Today, by exercising my right to vote, I got the opportunity to empower the successful Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the successful Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. By voting in the Lucknow East assembly by-election, I got a chance to give power to the double-engine government," he said.



Rural voters eye roads, ration cards

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

It is 11:30 am at the primary school polling station of Shahpur in the Mohanlalganj Lok Sabha constituency. The queues have decreased in length as the sun gets hotter. Rural voters here say that they have voted for roads and ration cards. Pushpa Devi, a resident of the area, says that she does not have a house or a ration card but still she casts her vote. "I have a plot which I have procured after selling my farm but I am unable to get my house constructed and have not got free ration also," she claimed. Manju Yadav, another resident of the area, said that she wanted her village to develop prop-

erly. "The roads should be constructed, education and talented teachers should be promoted. After demonetisation, unemployment has increased which needs to be addressed," she said. Suman from the same village said that inflation was an issue which was troubling everyone. "Living has become so expensive and we want the new government to bring down inflation. Employment is another important issue for us. Both my sons are studying and I want them to secure good jobs. Further there are local issues such as the construction of a sewer line in the area in which we live," she said. Manju Tripathi, a housewife, said that she had voted on the

issue of ration cards. "I have not been able to get a ration card to procure free ration. Apart from this, whatever facilities the government provides us would be of great help if I have a ration card," she said. Jitendra Kumar Yadav, a bank official, said that he voted for Swachh Bharat and Sunder Bharat along with a corruption-free Bharat. "We get a chance to vote once every five years in the festival of democracy hence we need to vote properly. I have focused on how the country can be made great. I have neither voted on caste, nor religion nor on mandir-masjid issue but for a great country," he said. Savita Srivastava, a housewife, said that the roads were very bad in their area and she wanted them to be renovated. "Inflation is also another issue. It is very high and there is a need to reduce it. Employment is also important," she said. Ayushi Srivastava, who is preparing for the UPSC examination, said that roads were in an extremely bad condition in her area. "There is a need to focus on sanitation because this creates problems. Stray dogs are another problem which we face. There are several incidents in which stray dogs have created nuisance. For youth, I think employment is one important requirement. Though there have been changes after the introduction of the New Education Policy, there is a need to focus on value education," she said.



Modi to interact with women at Nari Shakti Samvad today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will interact with the women at Nari Shakti Samvad (dialogue) at Sampurnanand Sanskrit University (SSU) here on Tuesday. It will be the second visit of the PM to his parliamentary constituency within a week as Modi is seeking his third consecutive win from Varanasi Lok Sabha seat. A few days ago, he was here on a two-day visit to take out a roadshow and address the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) workers after filing his nomination papers. For the last many days, the BJP leaders and workers of the party's Mahila Morcha are leaving no stone unturned to make the proposed women's conference a success. Top administrative and security personnel visited the venue to see the arrangements. Tight security has also made at Officers' Guest House in Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) where on almost all the previous visits as the PM he has stayed.

Meanwhile, preparations so far were reviewed in the meeting held at BJP's Central Election Office at Tuli Udyan in Mahmoorganj in which district and city units of Mahila Morcha, regional office-bearers and senior workers associated



BJP leaders reviewing preparations for Nari Shakti Samvad to be attended by PM Narendra Modi in Varanasi.

with the arrangement of Nari Shakti Samvad programme were present. Speaking on the occasion, former minister and party's in charge of Varanasi Lok Sabha Satish Dwivedi took information about the preparations so far from the workers related to parking, water, stage system, light and sound, security, media etc. Dwivedi said recently in the workers' dialogue programme, the PM had expressed his desire to interact with Matrishakti (women) of Kashi and responding to the PM's wish the proposed Nari Shakti Samvad programme will be organised on Tuesday at 4 pm. "Certainly, Mahila Morcha is working hard to make this programme unprecedented, we all have to support them and fulfil responsibilities of our respective departments with

full dedication", he said. Addressing the meeting, BJP's state secretary and in-charge of Youth and Mahila Morcha, Archana Mishra said for the success of the programme, Mahila Morcha has made extensive preparations under which different groups have been formed at the mandal level, conferences were organised and invitations for participation are being distributed door to door. Mahila Morcha's intensive contact campaign is going on at the booth level with the target of 25,000 women participants in the conference, she said.

The meeting was conducted by city BJP president Vidyasagar Rai and the vote of thanks was proposed by district president and MLC Hansraj Vishwakarma. Rajya Sabha MP

and state president of Mahila Morcha Geeta Shakya, Lok Sabha convenor Surendra Narayan Singh, state secretary Meena Choubey, Lok Sabha co-convenor Rahul Singh, regional president of Mahila Morcha Namrata Chaurasia, city chief Kusum Singh Patel, district president Vinita Singh, regional BJP spokesman Navratan Rathi and others were also present. Earlier, continuing his campaign UP Minister of State (Independent Charge) Dr Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu' visited Sant Ravidas Janam Sthan Mandir at Seer Govardhan and Sant Kabir Das Prakatya Sthal in Lahartara. First the minister reached Sant Ravidas Janam Sthan and met Ranvir Singh and then visited Sadguru Kabir Prakatya Sthal and sought the support of Mahant Govind Das for victory of Modi with record votes. At both the places, Dayalu said under the leadership of the prime minister, the pride of Kashi along with India has increased.

He said that today Kashi has become a role model of development and the PM has done a wonderful job of preserving the heritage along with development. He was accompanied by his PRO Gaurav Rathi, Dr Hardutt Shukla, Santosh Saini, Saurabh Rai etc.

Fake case filed against me: Koli

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Koli Shetty Shivkumar, national president of Yug Tuli Party, who is contesting Lok Sabha elections from Varanasi parliamentary constituency, said that a fake case was filed against him in an attempt to influence his election campaign, fearing his popularity. He said that a complaint in this direction has already been sent to the Election Commission.

Giving this information by releasing two videos in the last two days and writing on his official letter pad, Shivkumar said he is contesting the Lok Sabha elections to save the cow and mount pressure on the government to declare the cow as the 'Mother of the Nation'. He alleged that at the behest of the PM he has been implicated in a false case and his proposers have been threatened by influential people of BJP. He further alleged that he was being forced not to come to Varanasi without getting bail. He appealed to the people of Varanasi to support him as only 12 days left for the elections and he was stopped from coming to Varanasi. He said that he is fighting for the protection of cows but the prime minister did not take the name of Gomata during his 10 years of rule.

Kashi has lost originality: Ajay

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Congress candidate, supported by INDIA Bloc, Ajay Rai said the ancient city of Kashi has lost its originality during the last one decade as during this period in the name of development only 'pomp and show' has added and due to this, common residents of the city are extremely angry. He expressed these views during his public contact programme at Uday Pratap College premises and adjoining areas here on Monday.

Intensifying his poll campaign, he said people's anger will be seen in this Lok Sabha election. "Be it the issues of worsening employment, inflation or the conspiracy to abolish the Constitution, reservation or tampering with the originality of Kashi, the public is extremely angry with all these burning issues", he said. Before reaching the college premises, he first garlanded the statue of Rajarshi Uday Pratap at Bhojpur crossing and then met the local people present in the playground of the college premises and appealed to them to vote in his favour. During public relations, he also met the people and businessmen present in nearby markets in Bhojpur and Sabzi Mandi.

Later, he addressed a meeting of booth presidents at the party's camp office in Chandpur in which national Congress secretary Rajesh Tiwari, state secretary Pankaj Sonkar, district president



Congress candidate Ajay Rai addressing a poll meeting in Chandpur area in Varanasi on Monday.

Rajeshwar Singh Patel, Dilip Sharma and Mirzapur district president Shiv Kumar Patel were prominently present. Addressing the meeting, Ajay Rai said party's booth presidents are our biggest strength.

Meanwhile, district Congress president Rajeshwar Singh Patel and city chief Raghavendra Choubey said the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has lost its ground in the entire country, including Kashi. In a joint statement here on Monday, they said in the manner within a week of nomination, Prime Minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate Narendra Modi is visiting the city on the pretext of women's conference Nari Vandan has proved that the BJP's ground has been

slipped in the entire country, including this city. They alleged that like the pre-nomination roadshow, the administration was, once again, engaged in making the PM's visit a big event by putting BJP flags on the poles of government departments." The way the premises of Sampurnanand Sanskrit University (SSU) has been allotted for the BJP's event under the political influence of BJP candidate, it is a partisan act due to the interference of the administration", they said, adding that no government or its funded institution or property can be used for election campaign work, but by allotting the meeting place in the SSU, the administration has 'favoured' the BJP.

Former Samajwadi Party (SP) candidate for Varanasi Cantt assembly constituency Pooja Yadav said the prime minister has no moral right to organise a women's conference because none of his proposers was a woman. She herself was one of the proposers of Varanasi Lok Sabha INDIA Bloc candidate Ajay Rai. Reacting to BJP's claims of respect for women, she said the BJP did not field any woman in last assembly elections in Varanasi district and denied its woman mayor a ticket.

"As MP of Kashi, the PM remained mum and did not condemn the shameful act of 'rape' of an IIT-BHU student at gunpoint", she said, adding that the truth is that the prime minister is not sensitive towards the dignity of women.

PM's public meeting in Prayagraj today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is coming to Prayagraj on May 21 to hold a public meeting at the Parade Ground in Prayagraj. A crowd of about five lakh people is expected to attend this rally. The BJP workers are continuously engaged in preparations. Two days ago, the BJP leaders performed 'bhoomi puja' at the place of the public meeting and also took a pledge to make the programme successful.

The convenor of this rally is Digvijay Singh and co-convenor regional general secretary Sushil Tripathi. To make the rally successful, 200 buses and 200 private vehicles will be arranged at the assembly level and Yuva Morcha workers will reach the public meeting place — Parade Ground on 1,000 bikes. CM Yogi, Deputy CM Keshav Prasad Maurya and

many cabinet ministers will participate in the rally.

Many veteran leaders, including Cabinet Ministers Suresh Khanna, Nand Gopal Gupta Nandi, BJP National General Secretary Dr Radha Mohandas Agarwal are engaged to make the rally successful. Suresh Khanna held a meeting with workers, officials and public representatives on Monday.

He said, "PM Narendra Modi is the most accepted and best leader of the world and we have to make his rally a grand and historic mega rally". He gave a mantra to the workers to make the rally grand and successful. The meeting was conducted by Manoj Jaiswal, in charge of Allahabad Parliamentary Lok Sabha.

The political atmosphere of Prayagraj has also heated up. After Akhilesh Yadav and Rahul Gandhi, now on

Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rally will be held here. Modi will arrive at the rally at 2.30 pm.

On Monday CP and DCP, DM also inspected the meeting venue and reviewed the routes for the PM's movement as well as the ones for the public.

OWAISI'S MEETING: In view of voting in Prayagraj on May 25 so national leaders of all parties are holding public meetings in Prayagraj. On May 22 AIMIM national president Asaduddin Owaisi will be holding a public meeting. Apna Dal (Kamerawadi) MLA Dr Pallavi Patel will also be with him.

This public meeting will be held in support of PDM (Pichda, Dalit and Musalman) Nyay Morcha candidate Mahima Patel from Phulpur Lok Sabha. Owaisi's public meeting will be held in Mauaima area at 4 pm on Wednesday.

First tally of accounts of candidates held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The first tally of accounts of the candidates contesting in the Lok Sabha General Election-2024 took place in the New Circuit House Auditorium here on Monday under the supervision of General Observer Amit Singh Negi. Expenditure Observer Ajit Dan and Police Observer Sanjay Kumar Sain as per the pre-determined programme. In this first account reconciliation, Yug Tuli Party candidate Koli Shetty Shivakumar remained absent. All the remaining election contesting candidates or their agents were present and got their accounts reconciled.

Chief Treasurer Govind Singh said that in order to fix the date for inspection of

accounts of the candidates three times during the election period as per the instructions of the Election Commission of India, the day-to-day election expenditure register of the contesting candidates will be inspected as per the scheduled date.

Now the second account reconciliation will be done on May 24 and the third account reconciliation on May 29 from 10 am to 5 pm.

He himself or his authorised/nominated representative should get all the bills, vouchers, bank statements, cash books, income expenditure register etc, records related to election expenditure reconciled on the stipulated dates for matching the accounts of all the candidates and their agents.

Three killed as car rams into DCM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Three persons, including two women, were killed while two others, including a five-year old girl, seriously injured when their speeding car ramed into a DCM in the Maharajpur police station area on Monday morning. The police sent the bodies for autopsy and injured to the hospital. Tauhid Kadri (50) is engaged in business in Delhi. On Sunday he had reached Kanpur with family members to attend a marriage ceremony. On Monday morning he was going to his native village Khairahi (Khaga) in Fatehpur. His speeding car ramed into a stationary DCM from behind near Virat dhaba in Maharajpur police station area. Due to powerful collision, the front portion of the car got badly damaged. In the incident, Adnan (23), Noor Fatima, Reena, Tauhid (50) and Amayra (5) were seriously injured. The police rushed to the spot which after rescuing all the injured sent to Sarsaul CHC where Noor Fatima (40), Adnan (23) and Reena (26) were declared dead by the doctors. Tauhid Kadri (50) and

Amayra (5) were seriously injured and referred for the district hospital after the first aid. Kin of the deceased had been informed of the incident. The bodies have been sent for autopsy after panchnama.

AWARDED: The Shri Agrasen Sabha, Kanpur, felicitated people with the prizes won by them in the lucky draw for casting votes during the recently held Lok Sabha polling in the city. At a function organised on Sunday, chief guest Sharad Prakash Agarwal, senior income tax officer, awarded them the 'Jagruk Matdata Samman'. The event was chaired by the president Arun Agarwal. Earlier, welcoming the guests, general secretary Manoj Agarwal said the Sabha had announced to award prizes to people who had been instrumental in increasing the polling percentage in their respective locality and booths. Of the total 962 entries received under the scheme, a lucky draw was organised to select 51 winners who were felicitated with the prizes. Besides other office-bearers prominent activists present were Bawan Das, Radhey Shyam, Ravi Goel, Lokesh, Sanjay Bansal, Ajay

Mittal, Ashish Bhartia, Rajiv, Rakesh, Kamal, Punit and Manoj.

TEAM VISITS VILLAGES: In a bid to inspire the farmers to sell their land for the proposed New Kanpur City project of Kanpur Development Authority (KDA), a team of tehsildars and amins visited the Singhpur Kachhar, Gangpur Chakbada, Hindupur and Sambharpur villages on Sunday. These villages have been covered under the project. OSD (Land Bank), Zone-1, Dr Ravi Pratap Singh said the team held talks with the landowners and inspired them to sell their land to KDA. They were also informed about the special camp being organised at KDA premises daily to facilitate them to submit their consent for this purpose.

The KDA had executed registries of over 22 hectares of land acquired from the farmers. A dedicated team was deputed in the office to provide all facilities to the interested farmers. He said KDA had been paying the cost of farmers' land four-time more of the present circle rate and this process had already been started from January 6.

Unexpected crowd at meeting people's blessings: Tiwari

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Senior Congress leader SPramod Tiwari said that the way the unexpected crowd gathered at the public meeting of the INDI Alliance candidate held in Padila on Sunday, is the love and blessings of the people. Tiwari while addressing the media at a hotel located in Civil Lines on Monday claimed that there is a wave of public support for INDI Alliance. There were more crowd in one public meeting of the alliance than in two public meetings of BJP. Pramod cornered BJP on

the issue of rising inflation and corruption. He said that the people of the country are troubled by inflation and unemployment. Through Bharat Jodo Yatra, Rahul Gandhi has come to know the basic problems of the common man.

City president Pradeep Mishra, general secretary Mukund Tiwari, Gangapar President Suresh Yadav, Yamunapar president Arun Tivrishti, Kishore Vashney, Sanjay Tiwari, Fuzail Hashmi, Sudhakar Tiwari, Harikesh Tripathi and Taslimudin were present on the occasion.

Man killed in accident

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A 45-year-old man was killed after being mowed down by a bus in an area under Handia police station here on Monday. Thereafter a huge crowd of people gathered after the accident. As soon as the information was received by the people, the police reached the spot, took the body of the deceased into their possession and sent it for postmortem after the paperwork. The incident took place on the national highway in the Handia Kotwali area.

Trailer cleaner burnt alive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

A trailer cleaner was burnt alive while its driver was seriously injured when an uncontrolled truck on the flyover, broke the road divider and collided with their vehicle under Chakeri police station area early on Monday morning. Both the vehicles caught fire while the truck driver and its cleaner escaped from the spot. The police got the injured trailer driver admitted to the UHM Hospital. According to a report, a truck laden with 'daliya' (semolina) was coming towards Ramadevi (Chakeri) from Fatehpur. At the same time, a speeding truck went out of control on Chakeri turn flyover which broke the road divider and collided with the trailer laden with the tiles going to Varanasi from Rajasthan. Both the vehicle immediately caught fire. Truck driver and its cleaner escaped from the spot. In the incident trailer cleaner Monu Prajapati (18) of Sampla (Rajasthan) was charred to death while its driver Sanwaria Prajapati sustained serious burns. The police and fire brigade extinguished the fire and sent the injured to the UHM hospital. The body was sent for an autopsy. Station House Officer (SHO) Ashok Dubey said in the head-on collision the trailer cleaner was killed while its

driver admitted to the UHM Hospital.

Meanwhile a woman, married about five months ago, died under mysterious circumstances in Unnao on Sunday night. Her brother lodged complaint with the police alleging her killing by in-laws for her failure to meet their dowry demand. The police sent the body for an autopsy and carried out a probe in the matter. Preeti Singh, daughter of Aneesh Singh of Jatapur under Lambhuwa police station in Santapur, was married to Amit Singh of Kailash Vihar Colony, Gangaghat Kotwali, Unnao, on December 5, 2023.

THEFT: Cash and jewellery worth lakhs of rupees were stolen from a house in Sajeti police area on Sunday night. The incident came to light on Monday morning when family members woke up. They informed the police which rushed to the spot and carried out investigation. In his complaint, Umesh Singh of Kohra village of Sajeti said his brothers Rajesh Singh and Gulcharan also live with him in same house. The miscreants broke into his house on Sunday night and stole cash and jewellery worth lakhs of rupees from the rooms of all the three brothers. SO Brij Mohan said a probe was on and claimed that the case will be worked out soon.

Water service campaign to provide relief to passengers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

In order to provide relief to the passengers in the scorching heat, under the direction of Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Vineet Kumar Srivastava and Senior Divisional Mechanical Engineer (Carriage & Wagon) Anubhav Pathak, the North Eastern Railway (NER) Bharat Scouts and Guides District Association is running a water service campaign at the major stations of Varanasi Division. Under the campaign, drinking water is being supplied to the passengers in the general coaches of trains passing through major stations of the division to get relief from the heat. In this direction, Mau branch of NER Bharat Scouts and Guides District Association Varanasi quenched the thirst of general category railway passengers by giving them water as part of summer service work in the trains passing through Mau railway station on Monday. Along with this, the Rovers and Leaders of Shri

Ram Bajpai Group of NER Bharat Scouts and Guides District Association - Varanasi Unit and HWB Guider of District Association, Lucknow participated in Mission LIFE (Lifestyle for Environment) as a tool to combat climate change, the passengers were motivated to maintain cleanliness, adopt environment friendly lifestyle and save natural resources.

Earlier, for environmental protection through a mass movement for Mission LIFE (Lifestyle for Environment) as a tool to combat climate change, the passengers were motivated to maintain cleanliness, adopt environment friendly lifestyle and save natural resources.

to make the environment better. Along with this, under the leadership of station superintendent AH Hashmi, chief health inspector Raju Yadav and employees, about 150 railway passengers were administered an oath to adopt an environment-friendly lifestyle.

Apart from this, under Zero Plastic Consumption, passengers were informed about the ill effects of using plastic on foot over bridges, platforms and passing trains of Banaras railway station and appealed not to use it and for this, the circulating areas of Banaras station were cleaned.

An awareness rally was also carried out from Platform Number 8 to Platform Number 1 to convey the message of stopping the use of plastic, keeping the station clean, conserving natural resources and adopting an environment-friendly lifestyle. During this campaign, station superintendent Vivek Kumar Singh, health inspector Kamlesh Singh and supervisors of various departments and station employees contributed.

Janhvi, Rajkumar Rao in Kashi for film promotion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Versatile actors Janhvi Kapoor and Rajkumar Rao arrived in the city here on Monday to promote their highly anticipated sports drama, 'Mr and Mrs Mahi'. At a press conference, Rajkumar Rao highlighted the film's unique blend of romance and sports, stating, "The film is a sports drama that beautifully depicts

a love story while also exploring the theme of reviving and living one's dormant dreams under responsibility and pressure". Janhvi Kapoor added, "This is not just a sports drama but a journey full of emotions." Following the conference, Janhvi Kapoor took part in the holy Ganga Aarti at Dashashwamedh Ghat in the evening drawing a large crowd of enthusiastic fans.

Over 300 achievers felicitated

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Over 300 achievers from class OVI to XII who have excelled in academics, sports, games and extra-curricular activities were felicitated at the annual prize day function of the Boys' High School and College here on Monday. The chief guest on this occasion was an alumnus of the school, Kunwar Pankaj, Chief Revenue Officer, Prayagraj. The prize winners portrayed the characteristics of true gentlemen and were cheered as they walked up to the stage to receive their prizes. On arrival, the chief guest and his better half were warmly received by Principal DA Luke and Academic Supervisor CB Luke. The function commenced with a welcome by Dr AR Mukhopadhyaya, in charge, College Section, followed by Bible reading by Anant Thomas and prayer by J Lawrence. In his brief address Kunwar Pankaj reminisced his school days and said, "He is indebted to his alma mater for whatever success he has achieved." Congratulating the students for their achievements, he asked them to make maximum use of their school life and participate in every event organised in the school.

This year, the boys proved their mettle and class in the prestigious Global Cup Football tournament held in Goa in under-17 and under-12 categories. In both the categories, the boys emerged winners. In the prestigious Inter-institutional, Farida Abraham Memorial Quiz competition held at La Martiniere Girls College, Lucknow, the team represented by Shreyansh



Vinay and Prathibha Dauriyya made the school proud by bagging the runners-up trophy.

The prizes and trophies presented by the chief guest are as follows: AK Das Medal to ISC topper: Vinayak Chandra Srivastava (Science group), Shivansh Agrawal (Commerce group), Pratyush Pandey (Humanities group); ICSE topper: Anmol Krishna Singh; best athlete: Mohd Arsh Siddiqui; Tresham Medal for Mathematics: Shreyash Krishna, Kshiti Mehrotra; Maj. Gen. Rana Kapoor Trophy for best sportsman: Sudhanshu Singh; Maj Gen AJB Jain's Trophy for Best All Rounder in the college section: Ansh Mishra; Col Jai DS Jind for Black Charger Trophy: Mohd Zeeshan Raza and Mohd Arsh Siddiqui; Principal's medal for best boy: Ansh Mishra; best all-rounder (Senior Section): Adhya Singh, best all-rounder

(Middle School): Divyanshu Banaodha, Best Boy in Junior School: Ehan Ahmad; NCC Army Wing (Junior Division)--Best Cadet: JUO Anshuman Kumar Yadav, Best Social Service: CPL Rishabh Srivastava; Best Turnout: CPL Krishna Pandey; Best Marksmanship: SGT Abhinav Tiwari; Best Cultural Cadet: CHM Priyanshu Chatterji; NCC Naval Wing--Best Cadet: Pranav Mishra, Best Social Service: Shaurya Pratap Singh; Best Turnout: Om Sharma; Best Marksmanship: Tanmay Upadhyay.

SHIELDS: AT Flynn Memorial Inter House Debate: St Peter's House; Jefferson Gardner Memorial Quiz: St Peter's House; Ernest Egbert Memorial Creative Writing: St Patrick's House; Michael Bennett Memorial Inter House Swimming: St Andrew's House; Inter House Badminton: St Patrick's and St Andrew's House; Inter House Football: St Patrick's House; Inter House Basketball: St Patrick's House; Inter House Cricket: St Andrew's House. The function closed with the singing of the school song and the national anthem.

INAUGURATED: Summer hobby course for children of railway officers/employees and children of non-Railway employees was started by the North Central Railway Women Welfare Organisation (NCRWFO), Headquarters, Prayagraj, here on Monday. It was inaugurated by Shikha Goyal, president of the organisation.

Opposition hits out at Modi over his minorities remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Opposition on Monday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "never uttered a word against minorities" remark, saying he is "lying" as he is "unleashing hate speech" against Muslims from every available forum. Modi had stated he has never uttered a word against minorities, and the BJP has "not just today but never" acted against them. He, however, made it clear that he is not ready to accept anyone as "special citizens".



BJP MP Sudhanshu Trivedi said what the PM has said is the truth and all his policies for the poor have benefited all. He also said the Congress has constantly violated the secular spirit of the Constitution, and his campaign speeches are aimed at exposing the opposition parties' bid to appease the minorities with vote bank politics. Reacting to the prime minister's remarks, CPI general secretary D Raja said, "It is completely lie. Modi knows how they (BJP) have been talking about Muslims. Who spoke about mangalsutra, mothers giving births to more children? Muslims and other minorities have been disrespected and deprived of many of their due rights." The BJP-RSS have been pursuing a "sinister design" of

undermining the minorities and ridiculing them, Raja alleged. While TMC MP Sagarika Ghose also slammed the prime minister for his remarks, AAP MP Sanjay Singh said the prime minister's comments were laughable as he talks in the "language of hate daily". "When you think he cannot lie anymore, he speaks another lie... This is the party which garlanded the rapists of Bilkis Bano, this is the party which garlanded those who lynched

a Muslim cattle trader. Modi himself speaks of 'shamshan, kabristan', (UP Chief Minister) Yogi (Adityanath) speaks of 80/20," she said. "Not only Hindus and Muslims, he makes Hindus fight with each other as well. First make Hindus fight with Muslims, then make Hindus fight with Sikhs, then with Christians, then make them fight Buddhists, make Marathas fight non-Marathas, make Dalits fight backwards... This is Bharatiya 'jhadga' party and this is their job," Sanjay Singh said. DMK spokesperson T K S Elangovan also hit out at the prime minister, saying this is the problem with Modi "that his lie starts getting exposed immediately". "Whatever he says, his government does something that makes it a lie. So people do not believe him," the DMK leader said.

Confident of securing youth votes for Congress: IYC

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Confident of securing the youth votes for his party as well as INDIA Bloc alliance members, the youth wing of the Congress — Indian Youth Congress — claims to have toiled hard to set the narrative of perennial problem of unemployment amongst all caste, creed, section, religion and irrespective of degrees and qualifications. "Unemployment, just like poverty is a curse on humanity which has no religion. In the last 10 years of (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi's misrule such a vast country has only show growing inequality, restlessness amongst youths, no jobs, no vacancies, no manufacturers to fill the vacuum of earning in every household. Youths have understood that Modi cannot play the Pied Piper of Hamelin by exhibiting false narratives through several platforms of media including the social media where he (PM) and his entire army (Council of Ministers and BJP) keep on sharing vague figures, fake reports of unknown agencies. Youth need jobs to feed their



family, look after these kids for better education and care their elderly parents who needs proper medical attention," said Indian Youth Congress (IYC) president Srinivas BV, in an exclusive interview to *The Pioneer*. Srinivas said the above gist is the Congress Manifesto 2024 Lok Sabha poll which has shaped after millions of interactions done by the party's tallest leader, Rahul Gandhi, during his two Bharat Jodo Yatra — the first one from Kanniyakumari to Kashmir and the second from Manipur to Mumbai. He also questioned the very intention of the BJP State Governments about the exams or job vacancies paper leaks regularly which he claimed that the job seekers too now under-

stood the 'malafide tactics' of BJP Governments. During his yatra, along with RG, (Rahul Gandhi as mentioned by him), Srinivas claimed that most complaints were on the issues related to demonetisation, GST, pandemic and the combined effect of all these has led to depressions, other medical complications amongst the citizens. "Over these a lot of thoughts were given during the preparations for general elections and the strategy to dislodge the BJP led Government at Centre and in due course in the States. Modi government and BJP Governments have only brought complications in their governance which always hampered the common man. Congress from its inception one and half a century ago first thinks of welfare and social upliftment and work to bridge the gap wherever. If you look soon after Independence the realise how a visionary statesman like first PM Nehru ji worked to balance the regional imbalance by placing strategically industries, institutions, organisations the benefit of which shall continue for another century. BJP and Team Modi has this understanding but they will never utter a word on

these vision because the saffron party has now visions except to dent harmony," Srinivas said who earned lot of laurels for his humane approach during the covid pandemic for creating a team and bank of medicines and oxygen cylinders to distribute to the needy. On a question that what has been the reason that once upon a time Congress' top youth leaders left the party to join BJP, the Youth Congress president said those who were afraid by pressure tactics and intimidations by the ruling party has gone. "Our leader (Rahul Gandhi) says he will never compromise on party ideology and sincerity come whatever may. He always convey us Daro Mat (don't be afraid). During my criss-cross travel for the elections I heard even the citizens of the country have started feeling the same and says that this time they will pass on the idea of Daro Mat. They claimed they are being intimidated by the current regime that Congress will take away their cattle, ornaments (mangalsutra) but the voters have realised yet another chunavi jumla will not reap this time," Srinivas said.

Agniveers not just soldiers but leaders, innovators, defenders of national sovereignty: CDS Chauhan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan on Monday said Agniveers are not just soldiers but also leaders, innovators and defenders of the nation's sovereignty. Interacting with the Agniveers undergoing training at Maratha Regimental Centre and Airmen Training School (ATS), Belagavi, he underscored the noble purpose of military service and its pivotal role within the military framework. The CDS lauded Agniveers for choosing the Armed Forces. He stated that it was a testament to their exceptional duty towards the nation, defence ministry said here. Acknowledging the personal challenges faced by the soldiers and their families and the hardships they endure while operating in the challenging environments, General Chauhan assured that despite the challenges, the Agniveers will find their journey immensely rewarding and their each step, will lead to their personal growth and deep sense of pride in serving the nation. Elaborating the evolving nature of the warfare, the CDS highlighted the complexity and unpredictability of future conflicts to include



Cyber Warfare, Artificial Intelligence and Asymmetric Threats which are now an integral part of the battlefield. He also spoke about technology integration and continuous learning and mentioned that in addition of staying abreast with the latest advancements, there is also a need to showcase innovative approach towards combat. During his visit to ATS, Belagavi, CDS took a tour of the training institute to gain insight into Agniveervayu training of IAF. He interacted with the third batch of Agniveervayu trainees undergoing training as per the revised induction pattern introduced by the defence ministry in 2022. He exhorted them to focus on training for becoming technologically proficient soldiers,

ready to meet the challenges of future warfare. The CDS further stressed upon the trainees that learning is a lifelong process, especially in an ever evolving and dynamic field of warfare which is tech intensive, entailing a profound sense of responsibility in constant upgradation of skills. He advised the trainees to always nurture the values of integrity, physical fitness, discipline, and esprit-de-corps in their pursuit of professional excellence. Highlighting the importance of training, the CDS lauded the efforts put in by the training faculty of ATS, and the Maratha Regimental Centre and urged them to keep on striving for excellence towards furtherance of operational might of the nation.

No attempt be made to reduce area of open air prisons functioning in country, says SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has directed that there shall be no attempt to reduce the area of open air prisons functioning in the country. Semi-open or open prisons allow convicts to work outside the premises during the day to earn a livelihood and return in the evening. The concept was introduced to assimilate the convicts with society and reduce psychological pressure as they faced difficulties in leading normal lives outside. A bench of Justice BR Gavai and Justice Sandeep Mehta noted advocate K Parameshwar, assisting it as an amicus curiae in a matter related to jails and prisoners, submitted that a model draft manual has been prepared by the Centre wherein the nomenclature "open correctional institutions" was used for open air camps/institutions/prisons. "We further direct the (Union) Ministry of Home Affairs to present a status report on recent developments in respect of the open correctional institutions after coming of the Model Prison Manual, 2016, and the Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2023," the bench said in its order passed on May 17. The bench noted it has been informed that there is a proposal to reduce the area at

Sanganer open air camp in Jaipur. "We thus direct that there shall be no attempt of reduction in area of open air camps/institutions/prisons, wherever they are functioning," the bench said. "The data put on record, wherein such open correctional institutions are shown to be functioning in different names, would further show that the said institutions are not being utilised to their optimum capacity," it said. It noted the amicus curiae submitted that strengthening of the open correctional institutions, apart from addressing the issue of overcrowding of jails, will also help in the rehabilitation of prisoners and do away with caste discrimination faced by them. The top court directed Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Kerala and West Bengal, where such facilities are functioning most robustly, to share their best practices, applicable rules, guidelines and experience on setting up, expansion and management of open correctional institutions with the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA). "The registry shall communicate this order to the chief secretary of the states of Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Kerala and West Bengal for compliance," it said.

Kharge heaps praise on Adhir as combative soldier of party

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/KOLKATA

Days after snubbing him for questioning the trustworthiness of TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday heaped praise on West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, lauding him as a "combative soldier" of the party. Kharge had snubbed Chowdhury, five-time Lok Sabha MP from Bahrampur, last week for his remarks that Banerjee cannot be trusted and that she might go with the BJP. "Vo hamarey ladaku sipahi hain (combative soldier)," he said about Chowdhury, who has only intensified his offensive against the West Bengal chief minister by alleging that she has used violence to crush the Congress in the state and has been helping the BJP. Kharge said some TMC leaders were now trying to rake up the issue of the Congress alliance with the Left but that will not help. "They are trying to present it differently. But it will not happen like this as the Congress party is strong and understands each other. What has happened in West Bengal is that the Congress high command has taken a decision to have a coalition with the Left and we are moving forward with that," Kharge said. The TMC is contesting the Lok



Sabha elections alone in the state, while the Congress and the Left are jointly fighting the polls. On Saturday, Kharge had dismissed Chowdhury's criticism of Banerjee while addressing a joint press conference with Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray and NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar in Mumbai. "Mamata Banerjee is with the alliance. She has recently said that she will join the government. Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury will not take the decision. The decision will be taken by me and the high command and those who don't agree will go out," Kharge had said in remarks that riled Chowdhury's supporters in Bengal. Chowdhury, while reacting to Kharge's comments, had said, "I cannot speak in favour of someone who wants to finish me and our party in Bengal politically. This is a battle for every Congress worker. I have spoken on their behalf. I don't

want the state Congress to be used for her (Banerjee's) personal agenda and then finish the organisation". After Kharge's remarks, several posters and hoardings of the Congress president were defaced with ink in front of the party's state headquarters in Kolkata on Sunday. Chowdhury had expressed displeasure over the incident and asked party workers to lodge a police complaint. Banerjee, who had initially stated that she will extend outside support to the opposition front INDIA after it comes to power, later said she is very much part of the anti-BJP alliance at the national level and would form the next government with it. However, the West Bengal CM alleged that the state units of both CPI(M) and Congress, who are part of the alliance, have joined hands and helped the BJP in the state. The TMC had walked out of the INDIA bloc in West Bengal in January.

Congress vows to deliver Paanch Nyaya, Pachees Guarantee if INDIA Bloc comes to power

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As the Siddaramaiah-led government completed one year in office, the Congress on Monday said it has successfully implemented all guarantees made to the people of the State and when the INDIA bloc inevitably gets the clear mandate on June 4, the party will deliver by implementing 'Paanch Nyaya Pachees Guarantee'. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said when the Congress makes guarantees to India's voters, it delivers. "It has now been one year of our government in Karnataka, where we have successfully implemented all guarantees made to the people. When the Congress and INDIA

Janbandhan inevitably get the clear and convincing mandate of the people on June 4th, we will deliver again, by implementing our 'Paanch Nyaya Pachees Guarantee'. Ramesh also gave a summary of the Karnataka government's guarantees which have been implemented such as 'Gruhalakshmi' under which every month, 1.21 crore women heads of the family receive 2,000 directly in their accounts from the government, combating inflation and inequality. "With a monthly allocation of Rs 2,430 crore, close to Rs 23,365 crore has been spent till date for Gruhalakshmi!" he said. Ramesh said under the 'shakti scheme', 60 lakh women in the state travel for free in



buses daily, accounting for 210 crore free rides and cost-

ing approximately 5,096 crore. Under the 'Annabhagya', he

said in order to end hunger in Karnataka, the government transfers 5 kg free rice grain to 1.38 crore families and 4.08 crore beneficiaries. Ramesh also listed the other schemes implemented by the Karnataka government such as 'Yuvanidhi' — to support youth looking for jobs, graduates are given Rs. 3000/month and diploma holders Rs. 1500/month — and 'Gruhajyoti' under which 200 units of free electricity is benefiting over 1.67 crore families. "Many of our signature guarantees for the Lok Sabha elections are built on the Karnataka Model: Mahalakshmi: Rs. 1 lakh per year transferred directly to the account of one woman in each poor family; Doubling of

the individual allowance of free ration under the National Food Security Act to 10 kg per person; Pehli Naukri Pakki: Guaranteed one-year apprenticeship of Rs. 1 lakh per year to all graduates and diploma holders," the Congress leader said. The Congress' vision for India is being implemented in Karnataka today -- freedom from hunger and from price rise, affordable healthcare, jobs for youth, and prosperity for all, Ramesh said. The Congress has pitched its election campaign on 'Paanch Nyaya' — Yuva Nyaya, Naari Nyaya, Shramik Nyaya, Kisaan Nyaya and Hissedari Nyaya -- under which it has promised 25 main guarantees for the people.

Three Indian Navy ships in Philippines to strengthen maritime cooperation: Official

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Three Indian Navy ships are in the Philippines with an aim to further strengthen maritime cooperation with that country, an official said on Monday. Their visit is part of an operational deployment of the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet to the South China Sea. Indian Navy ships — INS Delhi, INS Shakti and INS Kiltan — arrived in Manila on Sunday, a spokesperson of the Navy said. The aim is to further strengthen the long-standing friendship and mar-

itime cooperation, the official said. The ships were accorded a warm welcome by the Philippines Navy. During the visit, personnel from both the navies will engage in wide range of professional interactions, including subject matter expert exchange, sports fixtures, cross-deck visits, cultural visits and collaborative community outreach programmes, the spokesperson said. "The ships will also participate in a Maritime Partnership Exercise (MPX) with the Philippines Navy," he said.

ICMR distances itself from research stating 50 per cent of Covaxin recipients complained of infection

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on Monday distanced itself from the study, conducted by researchers from the Banaras Hindu University that stated that nearly 50 per cent of 926 study participants who received Covaxin complained of infections during the follow-up period, predominated by viral upper respiratory tract infections. Covaxin has been indigenously developed in India by the Hyderabad based Bharat

Biotech in collaboration with the ICMR. ICMR Director General Dr Rajiv Bahl criticised the study for its poor methodology and design, and clarified the article was misleading and erroneously "acknowledges" the government's premier medical research institute. Dr Bahl said the study had no control arm of unvaccinated individuals for comparing the rates of events between the vaccinated and unvaccinated groups. Hence, the reported events in the study cannot be linked or attributed to COVID-19 vaccination.

The ICMR is not associated with the study and has not provided any financial or technical support for the research, Dr Bahl said. The ICMR DG has also written a letter to the authors of the paper and Editor of the journal to immediately remove the acknowledgement to ICMR and publish an erratum. The research paper, titled 'Long-Term Safety Analysis of the BBV152 Coronavirus Vaccine in Adolescents and Adults: Findings from a 1-Year Prospective Study in North India' stated that nearly one-



third of the 926 participants in the study who received Bharat Biotech's anti-Covid vaccine Covaxin reported 'adverse events of special interest', or AESI. Dr Bahl said that ICMR was acknowledged for research support without any prior approval of or intimation to ICMR, which is inappropriate and unacceptable. He stated that ICMR cannot be associated with this poorly designed study which purports to present a "safety analysis" of Covaxin due to several critical flaws. He said the study does not

even provide background rates of observed events in the population, making it impossible to assess the change in incidence of observed events in the post-vaccination period. Baseline information of study participants is missing. The study tool used is inconsistent with 'Adverse Events of Special Interest (AESI)' as defined in the reference provided in the paper for AESI. The method of data collection has a high risk of bias, he said. Dr Bahl also noted that similar acknowledgements to ICMR have been made in

previous papers without permission, raising concerns about the authors' practices. "The authors have been urged to immediately rectify the acknowledgment to ICMR and publish an erratum. Additionally, they are asked to address the methodological concerns raised. Failure to do so may prompt ICMR to consider legal and administrative action," he said. The Editor has been asked to retract the paper which implicitly makes conclusions on vaccine safety which are not supported by evidence.



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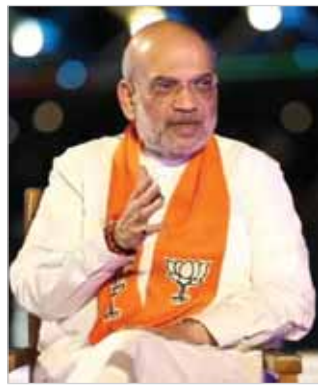
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PAPER WITH PASSION

The PoK hobgoblin

In election season, BJP leaders intensify campaign for PoK integration with India

If it is election season in India, can references to Pakistan be far behind? In 2019, it was Pulwama and the resultant surgical strikes. This time, an IAF convoy came under terror attack in the Poonch area on May 4, following which Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) made a rather late entry into the poll narrative. The call for reclaiming PoK is being given wide currency by the BJP; its top leaders are making bold assertions on the issue. Senior party leaders Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh and Himanta Biswa Sarma have all recently underscored the BJP's commitment towards integrating PoK with India. To begin with, Amit Shah made a striking declaration, asserting that India will take PoK as it "belongs to us". The statement is seen as a bold political promise, aligning with the BJP's long-standing position on PoK. Then, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma echoed the sentiment, adding that the move is not merely aspirational but a realistic objective under the current Government. Then came Rajnath Singh's slightly different approach,



focusing on the human rights situation in PoK. Singh called on international bodies to take cognisance of the rights violations in the region. These statements during the ongoing polls are clear indication that the BJP wants to draw people's attention to this long-pending issue. They also underline the party's strategic use of PoK as a rallying point in the lead-up to the elections, aiming to consolidate support among nationalist segments.

Indeed, the situation in PoK is not good. The locals there are demanding greater autonomy and political rights, more self-governance and local control. They are also concerned about rights abuses and restric-

tions on civil liberties, calling for the protection of their basic rights, freedom of expression and an end to political repression. Additionally, economic development is a major issue, with calls for better opportunities, improved infrastructure, healthcare and education, along with increased investment to drive regional growth. But can India intervene in PoK matters and reintegrate it in our territory is another question. Unfortunately, such statements often cross borders and have unintended ramifications on the other side. Domestically, it may serve to galvanise the party's core supporters and assert the BJP's strong stance on national security and territorial integrity. It is also likely to influence electoral dynamics, with the party hoping to leverage this narrative to bolster its performance in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. Internationally, these statements may further strain India-Pakistan relations, potentially escalating tensions in an already volatile region. The call for international intervention on human rights grounds adds a new dimension to the discourse, potentially inviting global scrutiny and diplomatic engagements which India has been avoiding ever since this issue started. These remarks are more driven by poll expediency and election rhetoric rather than the Government's stated policy. These statements could exacerbate regional tensions and complicate diplomatic efforts.

PICTALK



People show their inked finger after casting their vote during the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections, in Ladakh PTI

Museums are pillars of culture and education

Museums play an essential role in preserving the history of human civilisation, offering tangible evidence of our existence and activities throughout time

Museums play an indispensable part in understanding the history of human civilisation. It is proof of our existence on this planet and material evidence of human activity carried out during our lifetime. Understanding the diverse cultural tapestries that make up human history helps build more inclusive societies. Museums come in various types, each focusing on different aspects of human knowledge, culture and the natural world, like Art museums, history museums, natural history museums, science museums, military and war museums, aviation and space museums, etc. This range of purposes results in a remarkable diversity of museums in terms of their form, content and function.

The history of museums is a fascinating journey that reflects humanity's evolving ways of collecting, preserving and interpreting objects of significance. The concept of collecting valuable or significant objects dates back to ancient civilisations. In ancient Greece, for instance, temples often housed collec-



tions of art and artefacts dedicated to the gods. The word "museum" originates from the Greek "mouseion," a term used to describe a place dedicated to the Muses, the goddesses of the arts and sciences. The concept of the public museum began to take shape in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Many consider the Ashmolean Museum, which opened in 1683 at Oxford University, as the first public museum of its kind. The founding of the British Museum in London in 1753 was a watershed moment in the evolution of museums worldwide. Numerous national museums were founded in the 19th century, frequently serving as emblems of cultural identity and national pride. The history of museums in India is deeply intertwined with the country's rich cultural and historical legacy. The colonial period saw the estab-

lishment of the first formal museums in India. The British East India Company and other colonial powers began collecting artefacts, often to showcase their conquests and understand local cultures. The Indian Museum in Kolkata, founded in 1814, is the oldest museum in India and one of the earliest in the world. It was established by the Asiatic Society of Bengal and housed collections that ranged from geological to archaeological artefacts. Post-independence, the National Museum under the Ministry of Culture was established in Delhi in 1949. It houses a vast collection of artefacts representing over 5,000 years of Indian history. It was a significant step towards preserving and showcasing India's cultural heritage. To propagate science and develop scientific temper, the National Council of Science Museums (NCSM) was established on April 4, 1978. Today, it administers 26 Science Centres/Museums spread across the country and is considered the world's largest network of science centres/museums. Museums not only play a vital

role in education and research, serving as repositories of knowledge, culture and history, but also in the conservation and preservation of the region's cultural heritage. Their contributions extend beyond simply displaying artefacts; they provide immersive learning experiences, support scholarly research and engage the public in various educational activities. Museums offer interactive exhibits that engage visitors in hands-on activities. These interactive elements make learning more engaging and memorable, helping visitors, especially children, to grasp complex concepts in science or history through experience. Museums also act as centres of active research. Researchers in archaeology, anthropology, biology and art history rely on museum collections for their studies. Much breathtaking research in science, especially on paleogenomics, was done using the artefacts from museums.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru; views are personal)

Communal friction must end now

Despite facing criticism, Modi's tenure has seen minimal communal clashes, emphasising the importance of mutual understanding for communal harmony



PRAFULL GORADIA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the hectic campaigning for the current Lok Sabha elections has asked the Muslim community to seriously introspect; he has also exposed the Congress of endlessly pampering their notions of separatism. As expected, he has been pilloried for doing some blunt speaking.

No honest political observer can deny that Prime Minister Modi's administration has been free of communal clashes, except the Delhi riots of 2020. Earlier, this used to be a regular feature. The only other communal clashes have been over the abduction of cows. Hindus detest the killing of cows and oxen. In the 16th century, the Mughal emperor Akbar banned the killing of cows, because it offended Hindu sentiments.

In the 20th century, the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Hind, founded by Maulana Azad advised Muslims to avoid killing cows as it offends Hindus. An unwritten clause of the Partition of India was that those Muslims who wanted to stay back in post-Partition India shouldn't do anything to offend Hindu sentiments. Qaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah had clearly stated in his Lahore speech of March 22, 1940, that "Hindus and Muslims are very different and cannot exist in the same country". Dr BR Ambedkar endorsed this view in his 1941 book Thoughts on Pakistan that an exchange of population should be organized on the Turko-Greek lines in 1923, under the auspices of the League of Nations. Jinnah, Ambedkar and Dr Rajendra Prasad endorsed this view. Rajendra Babu, India's President from 1950 to 1960, had written India Divided, wherein he proposed that Muslims who couldn't emigrate to Pakistan could be specially permitted to stay back, not as citizens but as aliens with visas.

Jinnah and other League functionaries in 1946 and 1947, had repeatedly demanded an exchange of population. Their views were published in the Dawn, newspaper Jinnah (now published in Karachi but initially printed in Delhi), Sir Feroze Khan Noon, later Pakistan's first prime minister, threatened in



April 1946 that if Hindus took an obstructive attitude to population exchange, Muslims would re-enact the murderous orgies of Genghis and Halaqu Khan. Iftikhar Husain, the Nawab of Mamdot, in December 1946 said he supported an exchange of population because many Muslims wanted to settle in Sindh. Ismail Chundrigar, later Pakistan's sixth prime minister, said that the British had no right to hand over Muslims to a subject people over whom they had ruled for 500 years. Shaukat Hayat Khan, son of Sikandar Hayat Khan, said the exchange of population was an integral part of the demand for Pakistan. Ismail Mohammed, a Muslim Leaguer from Madras said that Muslims were in the middle of a jihad. Similar were the views of Raja Ghazanfar Ali, who was later Pakistan's food, agriculture and health minister.

To the extent that Professor M Mujeeb, Vice-Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi met the Turkish representative to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization (UNO), the latter was surprised and asked Mujeeb, "How are you representing India? I thought all Muslims went away to Pakistan".

The point here is that all



THE INCUMBENT GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN BOLD ENOUGH TO BRING IN SOME REFORMS, HOWEVER LIMITED. INSTANT VERBAL DIVORCE HAS BEEN ABOLISHED AND EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES AND INITIATIVES HAVE BEEN EXPANDED TO INCLUDE MUSLIM GIRLS

clashes or friction between the two communities ought to have been put finally at rest. They would have been so but for the insertion of Articles 25 to 30 into the Constitution of India by the Leftist followers of the country's first PM Jawaharlal Nehru. They wanted a substantive vote base for their great leader. This explains why a Uniform Civil Code was made a non-justiciable part of the Constitution. While zamindaris and jagirdaris were abolished, waqfs, which have been nationalized in many Islamic countries, were left untouched. Every other aspect of the separatism of the community's separate identity, like Urdu, polygamy, instant verbal talaq, etc., was not only not touched but continuously pampered. Madrasas, which foster a parallel and obscurantist education system, continue to thrive, preaching sectarianism and schism, to the detriment of their community.

The present Government has been bold to bring in some reforms, however limited. Instant verbal divorce has been abolished and educational facilities and initiatives have been expanded to include Muslim girls. The womenfolk of the community, who have benefitted from these reforms, are being suspected of voting for a Hindu party in these elec-

tions. Islam accords priority to the ummah (community) over the vatan (country). There can be no denying that former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had said that Muslims have "first claim over our national resources" and he would have no hesitation in allotting 15 per cent of resources to them. During his regime, he appointed no less than five commissions to 'enquire' how and why Muslims in India were disadvantaged and what should be done to pull them up.

Qutbuddin Aibak captured Delhi in 1192 AD and thereafter, one Muslim dynasty after another ruled Delhi till 1857, i.e., a total of 665 years before they were erased by the British Crown. With such a long rule, has any Government asked why the community is backward and needs a lift-up? Is taqlid (orthodoxy) in preference to ijthad (re-interpretation) the reason for this? Does the neglect of women also further this state of near-perpetual backwardness? Who is answerable for these crimes of omission? Is the present prime minister, the first Indian leader to ask these uncomfortable questions, in any way answerable for this?

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS PERSIST

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Economic crisis takes a backseat in elections," published on May 20, this is my response. In this dance of democracy, scarce resources are rambling up election tempos. The focus shifts from core issues like employment to distractions like religious and cultural symbols. Despite being touted as the fifth-largest economy, India faces grim realities: high unemployment, displacement due to conflicts in Manipur and agrarian distress. Political promises of increased reservations appear futile without sufficient job creation.

The International Labour Organisation highlights severe forced labour issues, questioning India's progress. With inflation soaring and trade deficits widening, the economic situation remains dire. Public-sector job cuts and reliance on self-employment indicate systemic failures. To truly uplift the marginalised and revitalise the economy, a robust public sector and equitable competition with the private sector are essential. Would politics support such a transformation?

Kunal Singh | Patiala

THE TRUMP SYNDROME

Madam — In US politics, Donald Trump was not the cause of a democratic crisis of faith. He just rode to power on it. Once in control, he leveraged the same disillusionment that helped him into office. Debasing democratic norms and abusing tall institutions led to the subversion of democratic systems. This Trump syndrome of relentless polarisation, which spawns apathy and disconnect in the polity, is seen creeping into nations across the globe to keep the political brew on a boil. Scandals and crises would shake voters' faith in the political system occasionally, but an engineered schism and dysfunction in the polity with agenda-driven governance turned corrosive.

Universally, people feel that democracy is failing because the Governments it produced were unable or unwilling to address their greater concerns. In the ongoing

Combating wildlife trafficking



Apropos the news article, "YouTube happy hunting ground for wildlife traffickers," published on May 20, this is my response. Reading about the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) taking down over 1,100 YouTube videos linked to illegal wildlife trade is both reassuring and deeply concerning. On one hand, it's encouraging to see concerted efforts to tackle this digital menace. However, the sheer volume of such content on a major platform like

YouTube highlights a troubling trend. It's alarming that tech-savvy wildlife traffickers exploit YouTube's vast user base to market and sell protected species, such as parakeets, rare turtles and pangolins. This underscores a significant challenge: the intersection of advanced technology and traditional crime. Despite YouTube's policies against animal abuse, the persistence of these videos suggests enforcement gaps.

The WCCB's proactive steps, involving volunteers and "WILD NET," show progress in wildlife crime control through digital tools. Stronger tech-enforcement collaborations are vital for effective monitoring and policy enforcement. As we applaud the WCCB's efforts, we must also recognise the ongoing battle against a lucrative and persistent illicit wildlife trade that adapts as quickly as we counter it.

Neha Gupta | Delhi

phase of political asphyxiation, the disillusioned electorate is dispirited to defend a system that has failed to champion its cause. Worse, it could be more than ever before that ballots may no longer be the sole guarantee of true democracy. Apathy towards democracy is a gateway to larger unrest.

R Narayanan | Mumbai

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT

Madam — Various things on earth now feel the effect of climate change. Due to climate change, it has been seen that the negative impact on the mental health of people has increased. This research has been published in the journal "Lancet Neurology." Fluctuations in temperature are now affecting brain diseases as well. I recently read in the news that the severity of diseases like cerebral palsy and encephalitis is increasing. Cases of cerebral palsy are also increasing due to the rise in nighttime temperatures. Overall, the scope of climate change is becoming very large. Due to the increase in temperature, various birds and animals have also start-

ed to be affected. It is time for them to go to human settlements for drinking water. All this is happening due to many things. It seems that more than 5 million trees have been cut in India only from 2018 to 2022. This was recently stated in the report "Nature Sustainability." According to this report, most trees have disappeared in Telangana and Maharashtra.

It has come to light that big trees have been cut down to expand agriculture in many areas. The remaining trees are also affected by forest fires and fungal infections. One factor that mitigates overall temperature rise is the current state of the tree. The temperature rise will affect many things and many cities near the sea are also likely to go under water. The increase in temperature should be stopped by humans. Otherwise, it seems that he will have to face many problems and the Government should also take measures for this.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune

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FIRST COLUMN

ADDRESSING EMOTIONAL IMBALANCE IN SOCIETY

Independence is not possible without education in emotional self-control



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Today, whether you open a newspaper or tune into a news channel, you are almost guaranteed to encounter reports of crimes ranging from petty thefts to dacoity, murder, terrorism and sexual offences. Crime is alarmingly on the rise. This surge in criminal activity to a variety of factors, each adding to the growing sense of unease in our society. Giving the rationale behind this frightening phenomenon, they explain that some cases are due to the motive of money, others due to rage, hate, enmity and revenge and yet others due to odious discrimination based on caste, religion, ethnicity, culture or nationality or due to business rivalry or professional jealousy. However, they do not go into the common root cause of all these multifarious manifestations and motives of crime. As a result, they fail to address themselves to the real problem and to remedy the worsening and threatening situation. So, it would be correct to say that, in reality, there is no other problem but that people do not know and eradicate the roots of the tree of all problems and, instead, they try to get rid of some of its branches only. Of course, no one can deny that in a society where corruption and criminal tendencies have become strongly entrenched and where the virus of crime has entered and spread into the whole body of society, it has become difficult to breathe the pure air of freedom or liberation from worry, fear and tension and, despite lack of able-bodied military men and police and trained and thoughtful investigating officers, life is neither safe from ruffians nor Governmental apathy. Everyone is fed up with the delaying tactics of those whose job is to facilitate rather than obstruct. Everyone is tired of the corrupt ways of everyone who can do something good and gracious but who, in practice, is doing the reverse.



But still, everyone is doing, more or less, what he or she considers distasteful, disdainful, obnoxious or horrible. If we go deep into this problem, then we will find that emotional disturbance is the origin of all disturbances. Yes! emotional imbalance or instability of the mind is the forerunner of all imbalances and instabilities. Emotional imbecility is the mother of all kinds of anarchy, deviant behaviour and crime — big or small. It is a lack of emotional intelligence that is at the back of every kind of waywardness, wanton behaviour and vicious tendencies.

In this context, let us understand that like and dislike are the natural tendencies in all men and women. But liking for a particular gender may become so irresistible as to grow into -lust and dislike for certain persons may become so strong as to grow into deep hatred and, in the case of these emotions going berserk, people may, one day, find that they have landed in jails. So, when we talk of emotional maturity or control, what we mean is that we have to have a measure of discipline or control over our tendencies of inclination and aversion, liking and disliking or love and hate so that these natural tendencies enable us to keep the company of what is good and salubrious and keep away from what is bad and harmful.

When we refer to emotional intelligence, we, refer to our sound judgment as to what are the things or who are the persons with which or with whom we should associate and what or who are of the opposite kind so that we may ward them off. But, alas! Most men and women miss that education that trains emotions or develops emotional potential positively. As long as this continues to happen, we will have a society where crimes are rampant and where people live in a State of tension with the push and pull of criminal tendencies pounding their minds. But what else is the means of emotional training than spiritual education? Our struggle for independence will remain incomplete unless people are educated to have emotional self-control.

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

Celebrating the power of cultural diversity



RAJDEEP PATHAK

As Nobel laureate Desmond Tutu once articulated, our differences underscore our mutual interdependence, highlighting the profound value of cultural diversity

The "World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development", celebrated annually on May 21st, stands as a beacon of hope in a world often marred by conflicts stemming from cultural, religious and socio-economic differences. In such a situation of growing discord, dialogue emerges as a powerful tool for fostering understanding, cooperation and ultimately, development. Dialogue serves as the cornerstone of development in a world, characterized by its diversity. The 1984 Nobel Peace Prize winner from South Africa and Theologian Desmond Tutu had eloquently stated, "We are different so that we can know our need for one another," thus necessitating the essence of cultural diversity - an opportunity to learn, grow and empathize with others.

UNESCO established the "World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development" in response to the 2001 terrorist attack that destroyed the Bamiyan Buddha statue in Afghanistan. In December 2002, the United Nations General Assembly officially designated May 21st as this day. The 2002 Universal Declaration recognized the need to "Enhance the potential of culture as a means of achieving prosperity, sustainable development and global peaceful coexistence".

Moreover, with 89% of all current conflicts in the world occurring in countries with low intercultural dialogue, to forge effective cooperation and sustain peace, strengthening intercultural dialogue becomes a necessity. Further, according to UNESCO data (https://www.un.org/en/observances/cultural-diversity-day), the cultural and creative sector is one of the most powerful engines of development worldwide. It accounts for more than 48 million jobs globally - almost half of which are held by women - representing 6.2% of all existing employment and 3.1% of global GDP. It is also the sector that employs and provides opportunities for the largest number of young people under the age of 30. However, the cultural and creative sector still does not have the place it deserves in public policies and international cooperation. Thus, in a bid to change this, in September 2022, delegations from 150 States gathered in Mexico for MONDIACULT 2022 - the largest world conference devoted to culture (in the last 40 years) - where they unanimously adopted the historic 'Declaration for Culture' affirming 'culture' as a 'global public good' and calling for it to be integrated "as a specific goal in its own right" in the Development Agenda beyond 2030.

But what exactly are the concepts of diversity and inclusion along with culture? Diversity encompasses the intentional and inclusive gathering of individuals from various backgrounds, encompassing differences in race, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, age, educational background and this list can go on. It emphasizes the importance of bringing these diverse identities together to interact positively and contribute to a shared environment. Inclusion goes beyond merely acknowledging and respecting each person's distinct experiences and identities. It requires fair treatment and widespread recognition. It means embracing and appreciating these differences as essential



THROUGHOUT HISTORY, NUMEROUS INSTANCES UNDERSCORE THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENCY OF DIALOGUE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION. ONE SUCH EXAMPLE IS THE GANDHIAN MODEL OF 'NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION'. MAHATMA GANDHI ADVOCATED 'SATYAGRAHA' AGAINST OPPRESSION

elements for the progress and well-being of all.

Thus the 'World Cultural Diversity Day', commemorating the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, also emphasizes four key objectives. First, it advocates for policies fostering the creation, production and dissemination of diverse cultural goods and services. Secondly, it encourages initiatives facilitating a balanced exchange of cultural products while enhancing the mobility of artists and cultural professionals. Thirdly, it promotes sustainable development policies and international aid programs that embrace cultural integration. Lastly, it underscores the importance of aligning international and national legislation with human rights and fundamental freedoms, ensuring the preservation and flourishing of cultural diversity worldwide. All this is because, 'Cultural Diversity', drives development, not only economically, but also personally.

Simultaneously, 'Dialogue' also transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, catalysing cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. As Rumi, the 13th-century Persian poet, poignantly expressed, "The wound is the place where the Light enters you," a profound insight underscoring the potential for growth and enlightenment that arises from engaging in dialogue, even amidst adversity.

In today's complex landscape, dialogue emerges as an urgent necessity, given the multitude of global challenges like climate change, economic disparity and geopolitical tensions. Martin Luther King Jr.'s timeless words, "Injustice any-

where is a threat to justice everywhere," emphasize the interconnectedness of human experiences and the pivotal role of dialogue in addressing systemic inequalities in this landscape.

Engaging in dialogue, not only enhances self-awareness but also fosters profound connections with others. For instance, movements like 'Black Lives Matter', sparked by tragic incidents like George Floyd's and Breonna Taylor's deaths, underscore the imperative of dialogue in combating systemic racism and police brutality. Meaningful conversations among communities, law enforcement agencies and policymakers are essential for driving substantial reforms and promoting racial equity.

Throughout history, numerous instances underscore the transformative potency of dialogue in conflict resolution. One such example is the Gandhian model of 'nonviolent communication'. Mahatma Gandhi advocated for 'Satyagraha' or truth force, advocating peaceful resistance against oppression. His commitment to dialogue and nonviolence inspired millions, to follow the path of non-violence against the might of British colonial rule. Through nonviolent protests, civil disobedience and constructive dialogue, Gandhi showcased the power of dialogue in effecting profound social and political change. His method challenged colonial oppression's legitimacy, spurring a global movement for civil rights and social justice, across the country and inspiring others worldwide. Gandhi's legacy underscores dialogue's enduring potential in resolving conflicts and advancing justice worldwide.

CEO of the East African Centre for Human Rights, Judith Oloo, writing for "The Standard" in her article "The World Day of Cultural Diversity: Children's role as carriers of culture" (standard media.co.ke), lays importance on the role of children as torchbearers of cultural diversity. She says that children, "As participants in and carriers of our culture... are a critical part of our population - the future of our societies". According to her, culture profoundly shapes children's development, influencing emotional, social, physical and linguistic growth from birth. Customs, beliefs and practices surrounding food, art, language and religion play significant roles. Recognizing this, professionals working with children, such as social workers and child rights advocates, must grasp these influences to bring about a change.

In today's world, addressing global challenges requires collaborative approaches rooted in dialogue and mutual understanding. According to the UN, "Three-quarters of the world's major conflicts have a cultural dimension. Bridging the gap between cultures is urgent and necessary for peace, stability and development."

Each of us has a role in fostering understanding to cultivate thriving communities. It's crucial to recognize how culture, in its various diversified forms, enriches discourse and contributes to sustainable development across different realms - social, environmental, economic and so on. Is it then not the time for us to at least sit across the table and start communicating?

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

Outrage over superstar Mammooty's alleged Jihadi ties

The controversy has ignited a fierce political debate and exposed deep-seated tensions within Kerala's political landscape

The disclosure by Mohammed Sharshad, a Chennai-based businessman, who is also a CPI(M) activist, that Malayalam cinema's "super mega star" Mammooty has shocked the secular, liberal and democratic political leaders of Kerala. The CPI(M), CPI and Congress leaders have come out openly against the Sangh Parivar for portraying Mammooty as a Jihadi. The disclosure about Mammooty's links with Jihadi organisations was made by a Muslim youth, a local leader of the CPI(M). The first person to attack Sangh Parivar about the report about Mammooty's Jihadi links was K T Jaleel MLA, a former CPI(M) minister and former president of the banned SIMI. Jaleel is famous for his



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

speeches and writings that India could be liberated only through Islam. Then other ministers took up the issue and it has caused ripples in Kerala. Mammooty, who was a below-average student during his college days in an Arabic graduate from Maharaja's College Ernakulam. While he was a student, Prof Ummer was the head of the Arabic Department and it was the latter who set the question papers

and valued the answer sheets. No Arabic student has failed in BA Arabic examination in Maharajas College those days. The title super mega star reminds one of the age-old adage in the land of the blind, the one-eyed is the King. Mammooty is no match for his counterparts in Hindi movies or Hollywood.

Being a Jihadi or communalist is not a crime. The issue here is that one who questions the organized bargaining capacity of the Muslim community becomes persona non grata in Kerala. Leaders who were bold enough to point out the hidden agenda of the Muslim political and spiritual leaders ended up in dustbins. EMS Namboodirippadu tops the list of such persons who

were decimated by the Islamist leaders. Before the 1991 assembly elections, there was a suggestion from certain CPI(M) leaders like E K Nayanar and M V Raghavan (both left to meet Marx, Lenin and Stalin) that the party should ally with the Muslim League. But Namboodirippadu was quick to retort that the Muslim League should get rid of its name and flag (that resembled the Pakistani national flag) to be considered an ally. Leaders of the Muslim League became furious and they saw to it that Namboodirippadu was cut to size and the CPI(M) removed him from the coveted position of general secretary in 1992. The next to earn the wrath of leaders of the Muslim community was A K Antony who was the chief minister during the

period 2001 to 2004. The 2003 Marad beach massacre that saw the slaughtering of eight Hindu fishermen by Islamic radicals happened during Antony's tenure. Antony was for an investigation by the CBI but made a hasty retreat as Muslim League leaders throttled the move. But he warned the League leaders openly that the organized bargaining power of communal outfits would not be entertained by his Government. This hurt the Muslim League leadership who asked the Congress High Command to remove Antony from the chief minister's post at the earliest. That's how Antony tendered his resignation post-2004 Lok Sabha polls and moved over to New Delhi. V S Achuthanandan, a widely respected leader of the

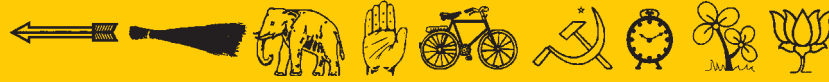
CPI(M) was sworn in as chief minister in 2006 after the assembly election. Achuthanandan was always against any kind of communalism and fanaticism. During a press meeting in the national capital in 2010, Achuthanandan said that Love Jihad was a reality. "The Muslim fundamentalists have an agenda to convert Kerala into a Muslim majority State within the next two decades," he had said.

Though the CPI(M) lost the 2011 elections by a whisker, the party returned to power in 2016 making use of the goodwill enjoyed by Achuthanandan all over Kerala. The highway from Kasaragod to Thiruvananthapuram was dotted with larger-than-life-size

posters of Achuthanandan giving an impression that he would be the automatic choice of the CPI(M) as chief minister after the election. But Pinarayi Vijayan, whose pictures or posters were conspicuously absent, was nominated as chief minister by the party's leadership and since then the former has become the uncrowned king of Kerala. Achuthanandan was sidelined not because of the influence wielded by the Muslim community in the CPI(M). The ire of the Muslim League and community leaders also claimed the political career of G Sudhakaran, a CPI(M) minister who was disliked by the district-level leaders of Alappuzha (all belonging to the Muslim community) from where he hails. PC George, the

seven-time legislator who had defeated both the LDF and the UDF in assembly elections was made to bite the dust in his home turf of Poonjar for lambasting Love Jihad and the role of various Islamist outfits in this operation. For more than four decades, George was a secular leader acceptable to the Muslim community. But when he pointed out the plight of the victims of Love Jihad, George became an enemy of humanity and the entire Muslim community voted against him in the 2021 assembly election. This is Kerala's brand of secularism. Caveat Emptor would be the ideal word of caution for those daring to question the Islamic outfits.

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



LS poll phase V: Maharashtra sees 48.66 per cent voter turnout

T N RAGHUNATHA ■
MUMBAI

Amid complaints of long-winding voters' queues, defective EVMs at some places and inordinate delay in the polling process in Mumbai, a low 48.66 per cent of total 2.47 crore voters exercised their franchise till 5 pm in the fifth and final polling in 13 Lok Sabha constituencies — including half a dozen seats in the country's commercial Capital — in Maharashtra on Monday. On a day when all political parties complained about the delay in the voting process, the "maximum city" bore the major as Mumbai south — which has over the years been known for low voter turnout — recorded the lowest 44.22 per cent of polling till 5 pm, while Mumbai north-west witnessed a maximum of 49.79 per cent polling among the six city constituencies. The equally discouraging polling percentages recorded by

four other constituencies in Mumbai are as follows: Mumbai north — 46.91%, Mumbai north-central-47.32%, Mumbai north-east-48.67% and Mumbai south-Central — 48.26%. Except in Dindori (57.06%), Palghar (54.32%) and Nashik (51.16%), the situation was more or less the same in other constituencies that went to polls on Monday. The polling percentages of other constituencies are: Bhiwandi (48.89%), Dhule (48.81%), Kalyan (41.07%) and Thane (45.38%). Among the 13 constituencies that went to polls on Monday, the lowest polling voter turnout of 41.07 per cent was recorded till 5 pm in Kalyan constituency where Maharashtra chief minister Eknath Shinde's son Dr Shrikant Shinde — who is seeking election to Lok Sabha for the third consecutive term — is taking on Vishal Darekar Rane of the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena.

As against the average polling percentage of 48.66 witnessed till 5 pm, the final polling (till 6 pm) may go up to a maximum of 58 per cent which is not healthy voter turnout witnessed in the fifth and final phase of the Lok Sabha polls. This is considering that all the six Mumbai seats and neighbouring four seats in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR) were up for grabs for the major contending parties in the keenly contested final phase of the polls. The Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, which is taking on the Uddhav Thackeray headed rival Sena in all the six seats it is contesting, while its bigger brother BJP has fielded candidates in the remaining seven seats. Apart from having a battle royale with the Shinde Sena in six constituencies, the Sena (UBT) is contesting two more seats, while allies - Congress and Sharad Pawar-led NCP have put up candidates in three



and two constituencies respectively. The six most watched out constituencies where the two Senas are fighting each other are: Nashik, Kalyan, Thane, Mumbai north-west, Mumbai south-central and Mumbai south. Meanwhile, all political parties complained about the long queues and sluggish voting witnessed in the six constituencies in Mumbai and four neighboring constituencies in Mumbai. Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav

Thackeray charged that the polling process was delayed deliberately by the election officials. Talking to media persons here, Uddhav said: "There were long queues in a majority of polling booths. The polling went on in a sluggish manner all through the day. I have a strong reason to believe that the election officials are sub-serving the interests of the ruling BJP. The BJP is mortally scared of losing the elections. No wonder the elec-

tion authorities are conducting themselves in a partial manner to help the BJP". The Opposition MVA constituent NCP's national general secretary Dr. Jitendra Awhad alleged that the election process was being 'deliberately slowed down' by the polling officials. "I visited some polling stations in and around Thane. There were massive queues of people who were waiting for three-four hours for their turn. But the elections officials were going about their duties in a casual manner, putting the voters to considerable inconvenience and delaying the polling process," Awhad said. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aditya Thackeray said that in many polling stations, especially the ones located in lower-middle class areas, there was a lack of adequate seating arrangements for voters. Water was not available for the voters to drink. "Many voters, especially senior citizens, left the polling booths

without voting. In one of the booths, one voter had fainted because of the heat," he said. The polling process was delayed in some booths of localities in Mankhurd, Tardeo (both in Mumbai), Bhiwandi and Dombivli (Thane), Satpur (Nashik). In a related development, Maharashtra deputy chief minister and BJP leader Devendra Fadnis said that he had brought the issue of delayed polling process to the notice of Election Commission of India (ECI). Fadnis said that he has asked the polling authorities to ensure speeding up the voting process to enable the maximum number of people to cast their votes. Union Minister and BJP's Mumbai North seat candidate Piyush Goyal also complained about the 'sluggish election process' which he said had annoyed the several of the voters in the Magthane area of his constituency and quite a few of

them had left the polling booths without voting. Key contests are being witnessed in the constituencies like Mumbai north, where Union Minister and BJP leader Piyush Goyal is pitted against Bhushan Patil of the Congress, in Kalyan where chief minister Eknath Shinde's son Dr Shrikant Shinde - who is seeking election to Lok Sabha for the third consecutive term -- is taking on Vishal Darekar Rane of the Sena (UBT) and in Thane where Shinde's close aide Naresh Mhaske is slugging it out against two-time Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Rajan Vichare. Renowned lawyer Ujjwal Nikam of the BJP - who functioned as the Special Public Prosecutor in the 26/11 Mumbai case and contributed to the hanging of the lone convicted accused Mohammed Ajmal Kasab — is fighting Mumbai Regional Congress Committee president Varsha Gaikwad.

Nadda, Yogi, Shah hold rallies to support BJP picks

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■
NEW DELHI

Top three BJP leaders — Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and party President JP Nadda — held rallies and addressed public gathering in support of party candidates in the national Capital on Monday. Referred as Hindu Hriday Samrat and Maharaj ji, Adityanath attacked the INDIA Bloc with full force and said, "INDIA alliance is nervous because of Uttar Pradesh's bulldozer. They speak the language of Pakistan. Everyone knows their connection with terrorists in Punjab. These people gave support to Shaheen Bagh's protest. Inko pata hai ki UP ka bulldozer dangaiyanon ka ilaj hai (They know that the solution for trouble makers is UP's bulldozer)," said Adityanath, who was addressing a public gathering at Mayur Vihar Phase 3 in support of BJP candidate Harsheep Malhotra for East Delhi. Further he said that the people know who they are going to bring and I know it. "Jo Ram ko laye hai hum unko layenge aur Mathura bhi jayenge," Yogi said, adding that the INDI alliance opposes the construc-

tion of the temple and hence people should decide wisely who they want to vote. Attacking the AAP, he said, "AAP has hauled so many developmental projects of the Central government. Agar galat jagah button dabega, to abhi to Arvind Kejriwal ki team jhadu laga rahi hai kal aapko bhi lagana padega. (If you press the wrong button, you will have to use the broom just like the AAP team is doing)" "Remember AAP. They have a dual character. They carried out a movement against the Congress under Anna Hazare. AAP is the first party that has been named in a corruption charge sheet as an accused. "From top to bottom, it is immersed in corruption. We do not have to let them get powerful. They will spread like Raktbeej (a demon) if you vote for them. In his speech, Yogi talked about his style of maintaining "law and order" while stating, "ab danga nahi hota, ab ek patla bhi nahi hilita. Ab koi road pe UP me namaz bhi nahi padta. Aur to aur humne masjid se speaker bhi hata diye hai." Meanwhile, about 20,000 BJP workers and supporters gathered with enthusiasm and anticipation to witness Amit Shah addresses them in support of BJP candidate Ramvir Singh Bidhuri ji at Sangam

Vihar's Chath Ground. In a scathing attack to Kejriwal, Shah said on odd days, Arvind Kejriwal lectures on corruption by listing the corrupt. On even days, he allies with the corrupt and becomes part of the INDI Alliance. "I haven't seen a man like Kejriwal taking a U-turn in politics till date. He left his job and made NGO and took the oath of his children. They used to say that we will not enter politics, politics is dirty and then made a party." "Congress and the INDI alliance are saying that we shouldn't talk about Pakistan-occupied Kashmir because Pakistan has atom bomb. However, we - the BJP - is not going to get afraid. The PoK belongs to us, and we will take it back," said Shah, adding that the grand old party won't be seen even with binoculars after elections. He further stated that in just four phases of voting that have taken place in the country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has got a majority of 270 seats and with the completion of all the seven phases, BJP will get 400 plus seats. In support of BJP candidate Bansuri Swaraj for New Delhi, BJP chief held a huge roadshow at Malviya Nagar, which witnessed scores of supporters showering flower petals on Nadda.

Kerala court upholds death sentence in rape, murder case

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■
KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Monday upheld and confirmed the death sentence awarded to Mohammed Ameer-UI-Islam, a migrant worker from Assam for raping and murdering Jisha, a law college student at Perumbavoor in April 2016. The Ernakulam Sessions Court where the trial took place had slapped death sentence on Ammer-UI-Islam for the gruesome act describing it as a rarest of rare cases. The Sessions Court had found that the death was caused due to smothering, strangulation, multiple injuries to neck, abdomen and external genitalia which were sufficient

in the ordinary cause of nature to cause death. The Court stated that the facts established by the prosecution fully established the guilt of the accused and the chain of circumstances was also complete. The brutal acts of the convict definitely fit this case within the umbrella of "rarest of rare cases" on par with the Nirbhaya's case in Delhi, the trial court had said in its judgment. The Division Bench comprising Justices P B Suresh Kumar and S Manu concurred with the observations of the trial court and confirmed that Ameer-UI-Islam should hang. Ameer-UI-Islam was found guilty and convicted for death penalty by Ernakulam Session/Special Judge For Scheduled

Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 under sections 449 (trespass), 342 (wrongful confinement), 302 (punishment for murder) and 376 (punishment for rape) and Section 376 A (punishment for causing death or resulting in persistent vegetative state of victim) of the Indian Penal Code. According to the prosecution, the accused under the influence of alcohol criminally trespassed into the residence of the victim in Perumbavoor in Ernakulam district on April 28, 2016. The accused attempted to rape her and when she resisted, he brutally murdered her. She sustained 38 injuries and was also inflicted with grievous injuries

The victim was doing her LLB Course at Government Law College, Ernakulam, and lived with her mother. After the crime, the accused escaped to Assam but he was arrested by the Kerala Police based on the DNA samples collected from the spot of murder and a spectacular tracking which took them from Perumbavoor to a far away village in Assam. While the Special Public Prosecutor N K Unnikrishnan expressed satisfaction over the High Court decision, B Aloor, lawyer for the accused, said that the Division Bench did not consider some of the points furnished by him and the decision would be challenged in the Supreme Court.

Elections held in West Bengal amid reports of stray violence incidents

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■
KOLKATA

A comparatively lesser voter turnout amid scattered incidents of violence and allegations of molestation against central force jawans — that was promptly interpreted by the Opposition parties as a Trinamool Congress ploy to demoralise the men in uniform — marked the fifth phase of polling in Bengal. Notwithstanding stray violence booth-jamming and treats

issued by alleged TMC goons across the seven constituencies about 73 per cent voters exercised their franchise — compared to about 75 per cent in the fourth phase — when reports last came in at 5. The polling percentage could go up by a few percentage points as there were long queues outside the polling stations. Out of the seven constituencies Arambag, Hooghly and Seerampore in Hooghly district recorded about 76.90%, 74.17%, and 71.18% respectively where-

as Bongaon and Barrackpore in North 24 Parganas district 75.73%, and 68.84% voters exercised their franchise. While 68.84% voters cast their votes in Howrah about 74.50% voters voted in neighbouring Uluberia also in Howrah district. Sporadic incidents of violence were reported from Barrackpore Hooghly and Howrah, Election Commission sources said. At Barrackpore BJP candidate Arjun Singh was twice gheraoed by TMC men leading to scuffle between the two parties.

Special Drives against ticketless travellers yield ₹66.27 crore to NF Railways

STAFF REPORTER ■
MALIGAON

NF Railway in the current financial year from April, 2024 till 19 May 19, 2024 recovered more than Rs. 10.65 Cr. from ticketless travellers. NF Railways conducts regular intensive ticket checking drives in order to ensure hassle-free, comfortable travel and better services to all bonafide passengers. Keeping a constant check against ticketless and irregular travellers drives

are conducted to discourage such activities that leads to inconvenience for genuine passengers. During the period from April, 2023 to March this year 793170 number of cases of ticketless/irregular ticket passengers were detected leading to more than Rs. 66.27 Cr earnings towards realization of fareand penalties from offenders. The preceding FY of 2022-2023 realised Rs. 62.98 crore from 778808 number of detected cases.

Congress, TMC sinking ships, says Modi

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■
KOLKATA

Even as communal narrative continued to smear the election process in Bengal after Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee launched a frontal attack against several religious orders like Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi continued to rain fire on the Congress and the Trinamool Congress for their appeasement policies to sustain their narrow electoral interests. Addressing a rally at Jhargram constituency the Prime Minister on Monday said that the Congress had a hidden agenda to rob the SCs, STs and OBCs of their reservation rights to pay the Muslims. Stopping short of naming Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and referring to a purported decade-old video the Prime Minister said that the "prince of the Congress Party had once expressed his intention to take the reservations meant for the Hindu castes and grant them to the Muslims." Saying that the "Congress has

already taken the reservations of the OBCs in Karnataka to give it to the Muslims," the Prime Minister said "I had challenged them to come clean on whether they were planning to rob the Hindus of their reservation ... but they have not given a reply which proves their diabolic designs." Saying that the Congress was a sinking ship and that the Trinamool Congress vessel too had started developing holes, Modi said that the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance they had constituted would soon disintegrate because of its three vices. "Firstly it is hundred percent communal , secondly it is casteist and thirdly it has dynastic character ... so it is going to collapse soon," he said adding "this INDI alliance is today asking me to account for the ten years of BJP rule after ruining the country." Attacking the TMC for letting the infiltrators take control of the State Modi said that the people of Bengal were in danger of losing their identity. "Today the whole country is worried about Bengal.

58 pc voter turnout in UP's fifth phase

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union minister of state Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti alleged attack by Samajwadi Party workers in Jehanabad. She alleged that the SP workers attempted to attack her when she was visiting polling booths in Jehanabad. The CEO said 100 per cent polling was recorded in three polling booths of Mehrauni assembly segment in Lalitpur district which is part of Jhansi Lok Sabha seat. He said the unique feat was achieved due to special efforts of the district election officer who paid for the air ticket of one voter from Mumbai to Bhopal. Uttar Pradesh, the state with the highest representation in the 543-member Lok Sabha, along with West Bengal and Bihar are having polling in all the phases. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh (Lucknow), Union Minister for Women and Child Development Smriti Irani (Amethi), Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs



Kaushal Kishor (Mohanlalganj), Minister of State for Consumer Affairs Sadhvi Niranjan Jyoti (Fatehpur) and Union Minister of State for MSME Bhanu Pratap Singh Verma (Jalaun) are among those in the fray. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is in the fray from Rae Bareilly, represented by his mother and former party president Sonia Gandhi earlier. Former Union minister Pradeep Jain Aditya represents Congress in Jhansi, while ex-SP state president Naresh Uttam Patel contests

from Fatehpur. Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's son Karan Bhushan Singh is the BJP candidate in Kaiserganj. Other notable candidates include Tanuj Punia in Barabanki, Shreya Verma in Gonda, and Pushpendra Saroj in Kaushambi. The BJP has fielded 11 sitting MPs, with new candidates in Barabanki and Kaiserganj. The SP is contesting 10 seats, and its INDIA bloc partner Congress, four. The BSP is contesting all 14 seats in this phase.

No relief hopes on... Iran Prez...

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This relentless heatwave has not spared other regions, with Agra in Uttar Pradesh, Datia in North Madhya Pradesh, and Ganganagar in Rajasthan, among others, reeling under soaring temperatures which were on the throes of crossing 45 degree Celsius. On Sunday, while the highest temperature recorded was in Najafgarh, Delhi at 47.8°C, followed closely by Agra in West Uttar Pradesh at 47.7°C. These conditions have already been observed extensively in Haryana, Chandigarh, and Delhi, with significant heat affecting Punjab and isolated areas of West Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, and northwest Madhya Pradesh. Additionally, many parts of West Rajasthan and some areas in Himachal Pradesh and East Rajasthan have been experiencing intense heat. Isolated regions of East Uttar Pradesh and northeast Madhya Pradesh have also been affected. Specifically, the Gujarat region

has been enduring heatwave conditions since May 15, while Saurashtra and Kutch have been affected since May 16. The heatwave has spread to Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan since May 17, according to IMD. Moreover, warm nights have been recorded in parts of Rajasthan. As per the IMD, isolated heatwave conditions are expected in East Uttar Pradesh on May 21 and 22, as well as in Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, and northeast Madhya Pradesh from May 20 to 24. Odisha is expected to experience heatwaves from May 21 to 23. Furthermore, hot and humid weather is anticipated in Konkan and Goa, Bihar, and Jharkhand on May 21, and in Gangetic West Bengal and Odisha on May 20. Warm nights are also predicted in West Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Rajasthan from May 20 to 24, which could exacerbate the discomfort caused by the ongoing heatwave.

Early Monday morning, Turkish authorities released what they described as drone footage showing what appeared to be a fire in the wilderness that they "suspected to be wreckage of a helicopter." The coordinates listed in the footage put the fire some 20 kilometres south of the Azerbaijan-Iranian border on the side of a steep mountain. Footage released by the IRNA early Monday showed what the agency described as the crash site, across a steep valley in a green mountain range. Soldiers speaking in the local Azeri language said, "There it is, we found it." Condolences started pouring in from neighbours and allies after Iran confirmed there were no survivors from the crash. Modi said in a post on X that India "stands with Iran in this time of sorrow." Pakistan announced a day of mourning while leaders of Egypt and Jordan also offered condolences, as did Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Two rounds to go...

From Page 1

"He discussed with party office bearers about the remaining two phases of the Lok Sabha polls and directed that party officials and all senior leaders should hold similar meetings at their respective booths and play a more effective role in the implementation of the party's strategy at the booth level while making an active contribution," the source added

The directorate has substantiated the allegations through the contents of e-mails exchanged between various AAP volunteers and functionaries, including Aniket Saxena (coordinator of AAP overseas India), Kumar Vishwas (then convener of AAP overseas India), Kapil Bhardwaj (then AAP member) and Durgesh Pathak.

AAP trouble mounts over foreign...

From Page 1

The investigations so far revealed that not only amounts were collected through fund-raising campaigns in the USA and Canada and identities of actual donors have been concealed in the books of accounts maintained by the AAP in order to circumvent the restrictions imposed under FCRA on donations by foreign citizens to a political party. But also the analysis of data of foreign donations revealed that multiple donors have used the same passport numbers for donation, used the same passport numbers, e-mail IDs, mobile numbers and credit cards to donate to AAP.

The investigation also revealed that the AAP has set up a body, AAP Overseas India along with volunteers in countries like USA, Canada, Australia etc, whose primary task was to mobilize foreign funds to AAP India. It is also revealed that a target of overseas donation of Rs 50 crore was fixed for these volunteers in 2016. The ED said donations through email IDs and mobile numbers of Canadian nationals totalling to Rs 51,15,044 have been received using e-mail IDs and mobile numbers of 19 Canadian nationals. However, the names of these Canadian nationals and their

nationality have been concealed and have not been reflected correctly in the records. Instead, different names have been mentioned against these donations and this was intentionally done by AAP to hide donations by foreign nationals which is in violation of Section 3 of FCRA, 2010 and Section 298 of Representation of People Act 1951. Sources said this amount has been raised in violation of provisions of FCRA, 2010 and Representation of the People Act, 1951 by concealing, mis-declaring and manipulating the identities & nationalities of foreign donors as well as

several other facts relating to foreign donations. The FCRA violation and other irregularities in receiving foreign funds by the AAP emerged during the course of an investigation in a case registered in Fazilka district of Punjab against an international drugs cartel involved in smuggling of heroin from Pakistan through the barbed fencing on the Indo-Pakistan border. In this connection, a Special Court in Fazilka had issued summons to the then AAP MLA from Bholath in Punjab, Sukhpal Singh Khaira as an accused to face the trial. Khaira in his statement

disclosed that the foreign funding of dollar 1,19,000 was raised during overseas fund-raising campaign in USA organised by AAP, in April-May, 2015 just before the upcoming Punjab Assembly elections 2017. According to the ED, 155 people residing abroad made donations totalling Rs 1.02 crore on 404 occasions using 55 passport numbers. As many as 71 donors used 21 mobile numbers for making donations totalling Rs 99.90 lakh on 256 occasions, and 75 donors residing abroad used 15 credit cards for making donations totalling Rs 19.92 lakh on 148 occasions.



Congress did not revoke Article 370 for appeasement politics: Shah

PTI ■ KARNAL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday attacked the Congress, saying the party did not revoke Article 370, which allowed special status to Jammu and Kashmir, for the sake of appeasement politics. Addressing an election rally here, Shah reiterated that Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) belongs to India and "we will take it back". The senior BJP leader also attacked the Congress on the Ram temple issue, saying its top leaders such as Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi did not take part in the temple's consecration ceremony to please the party's minority vote bank. Targeting the Congress on Kashmir, he said "For appeasement politics, they did not revoke Article 370." The Congress did not revoke the article despite a rise in terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, he said. "You all made Narendra Modi ji the Prime Minister for the second time, and on August 5, 2019, he scrapped Article 370. And now our tricolour proudly flutters in Kashmir," he said. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, who is contesting the Karnal assembly bypoll and former chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar, who is in fray for the Karnal Lok Sabha seat, were also present in the rally.



Addressing the gathering, Shah told the crowd, "Tell me, is Kashmir ours or not? Say it loudly, your voice should reach Kharge." "Kharge sahab, you are 80-year-old but you do not understand the country. Haryana's youth can give their life for Kashmir," Shah said hitting out at the AICC president. Shah was alluding to the AICC president's recent remark on why the prime minister spoke about the abrogation of Article 370 during a rally in Rajasthan and not the issues plaguing the state. The home minister also slammed Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar's atom bomb remark that has sparked a political row.

"I want to tell Rahul (Gandhi) baba from this land of Karnal, listen with open ears, this is the BJP government, PoK belongs to India, will remain ours and we will take it back," he said. In a purported video clip that has gone viral on social media, Aiyar is heard saying India should give respect to Pakistan and it is a sovereign nation and engage with it as it also possesses the atom bomb. He indicated in the video that if a "mad person" comes to power there and uses the atom bomb, it will have its effect in India too. Shah also asked the Congress and particularly, its party leader B S Hooda why they let the Ram Temple issue linger for 70 years.

He highlighted that all the major developments regarding the temple took place in Modi's second term - the 'bhoomi puja' of the temple land, the victory of the Hindu side in the Ram Janmabhoomi case, and the idol consecration on January 22. The BJP leader also pointed fingers at Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi for not taking part in the "Ram Utsav (consecration) which was happening after 500 years as they feared about their minority vote bank". The Union minister also praised Modi on the occasion for making India prosperous and bringing the country's economy from the 11th to fifth spot.

Post polls, vacation beckons Andhra Pradesh leaders

PTI ■ AMARAVATI

After a whirlwind electioneering and polling, some of the prominent leaders from Andhra Pradesh are currently on a well-deserved break, scattered across diverse destinations, enjoying some much-needed relaxation and rejuvenation. Polls for the 175 Assembly and 25 Lok Sabha seats in the state were held on May 13 and the counting of votes will be taken up on June 4, nationwide. YSRCP supremo and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy on May 17 left for a foreign tour with family. Jagan, who is currently in Europe, is expected to return during the month-end, sources close to him said. The YSRCP chief contested from Pulivendula Assembly segment in the recently concluded polls. Similarly, TDP supremo and Leader of the Opposition Nara Chandrababu Naidu also, along with his family left the country for a vacation after the polls. Telugu Desam Party sources told PTI, "Naidu will be coming back at the end of May. He may also undergo a health check-up in the USA during his vacation," they said. He also visited Shirdi and offered prayers at the Sai Baba temple before embarking on the voyage. The TDP leader is contesting from Kuppam Assembly



constituency. Janasena founder and actor Pawan Kalyan also left for a foreign country after the polls and is expected to return in a couple of days, party sources said while refusing to share details. Kalyan contested from Pithapuram Assembly segment. Naidu's son Lokesh, along with his family is also currently on an international tour. He is contesting from Mangalagiri Assembly seat from where he lost in 2019. The YSRCP contested in all 175 Assembly seats and 25 Lok Sabha segments in the state. As part of a seat-sharing deal among NDA partners, the TDP was allocated 144 Assembly and 17 Lok Sabha constituencies while the BJP contested from six Lok Sabha and 10 Assembly seats. he Janasena fielded candidates in two Lok Sabha and 21 Assembly seats.

62 per cent voter turnout recorded in Jharkhand till 5 pm

PTI ■ RANCHI

A voter turnout of 61.90 per cent was recorded till the end of polling at 5 pm on Monday in the three Lok Sabha constituencies in Jharkhand, officials said. Voting had commenced at 7 am in Chatra, Hazaribag, and Koderma constituencies as part of the second phase of elections in the eastern state. It was peaceful in all the three constituencies, officials said. Hazaribag Lok Sabha seat registered the highest voter turnout of 63.66 per cent, followed by Koderma (61.60 per cent) and Chatra (60.26 per cent). The overall voter turnout in these three constituencies was 61.90 per cent. Among the voters in Hazaribag was 81-year-old Abhijit Sen, who exercised his franchise at polling booth no 153 in Hazaribag town. "From voting during the time of first Prime Minister Pt Jawaharlal Nehru to present PM Modi, I have voted in all the Lok Sabha and assembly elections since 1962," Sen claimed. First-time voter Aadya Chandra, 18, said she was happy to participate in the festival of democracy. Similarly, 91-year-old Shankar Lal Chaudhary, who voted at Koderma, also expressed his happiness to take part in the process. This phase involved 22 candidates in Chatra, 15 in Koderma, and 17 in

Hazaribag. In Hazaribag, villagers boycotted polling at booths 183 and 184 in Kusumbha village under Katkamdag due to unmet demands for a bridge. About 58.34 lakh voters, including 28.35 lakh women, are eligible to vote in these constituencies. Chief Electoral Officer K Ravi Kumar said this phase covered seven districts and three parliamentary constituencies. Kumar said there were 6,705 booths, including 6,130 in rural areas. Among these, 73 were managed by women, 13 by persons with disabilities, and 13 by youths. Chatra constituency has 16.89 lakh voters, including 8.27 lakh women, with 1,899 booths. Koderma has 22.05 lakh voters, including 10.65 lakh women, with 2,552 booths. Hazaribag has 19.39 lakh voters, including 9.42 lakh women, and 2,254 booths. The BJP has fielded Manish Jaiswal from Hazaribag and Kalicharan Singh from Chatra. The Congress has nominated KN Tripathi from Chatra and Jai Prakash Bhai Patel from Hazaribag. CPI (ML) Liberation has given ticket to Bagodar MLA Vinod Kumar Singh from Koderma. BJP Koderma nominee Annapurna Devi promised to focus on employment generation and educational improvements after winning the polls.

Restoration of JK statehood is solemn promise we have made, will stand by it: Modi

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said his government has made a "solemn promise" for restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood and will stand by it, adding the Centre was working very hard to create the right conditions. Noting that the record voter turnout in Srinagar is one of the "most gratifying things" he has seen in his tenure, Modi said people of Jammu and Kashmir have seen the NDA government's commitment to democracy enhancement in the region, "even at the cost of us sacrificing power for ourselves". "The restoration of statehood is a solemn promise we have made and we stand by it. We are working very hard to create the right conditions so that it can be done expeditiously," he told PTI in an exclusive interview here Sunday night. The Modi government had abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, in August 2019 and the erstwhile state was

bifurcated into two Union Territories — Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. "Through the abrogation of Article 370, we today have witnessed not just the dreams and aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir coming into fruition but also their enthusiasm for participating in one of the biggest festivals in any democracy - elections," Modi said. He said the voting percentage in Srinagar, once a hotbed for all kinds of radical elements, witnessed the highest voter turnout in decades. Srinagar recorded a 36.7 per cent turnout—the highest since 1996—in the fourth phase of Lok Sabha elections on May 13. The world witnessed the growth and enthusiasm of the people in J and K when they welcomed the delegates from across the world during the G20 events, he added. "The progress that Jammu and Kashmir has made in the last five years gives me immense hope that we are on the right path to restore statehood. We want to institutionalise the positive changes that have taken place and make the gains irreversible so that the people

of the region have to never ever witness the torrid years that generations had to bear. "We want to create a Jammu and Kashmir where violence is history, prosperity is destiny. This is our long term strategy for Kashmir. Our aspiration is that Jammu and Kashmir regains its stature as the hub of culture, knowledge and tourism along with becoming a centre of futuristic technologies like AI (Artificial intelligence)," Modi said. On holding assembly elections in J and K, the prime minister said the Supreme Court has set a date for assembly polls in the region and the Election Commission is mandated to follow the directions of the highest court and it is the best organisation to assess as to when and how it will conduct assembly elections. In December 2023, the apex court had directed the Election Commission to conduct elections in J and K by September 30, 2024. Asked for his assessment on the high turnout in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls in J and K after the abrogation of Article 370, Modi said



Parliament had put its seal of approval on scrapping this provision in August 2019 and the people had given their implicit approval in 2019 itself and beyond by defying all doomsday predictions and helping maintain peace in the region. Then in December 2023, he said, the Supreme Court imprinted the judicial seal on the abrogation with an unanimous verdict by a constitution bench. "What the elections in Jammu and Kashmir have done in

2024 is to put a seal of explicit democratic approval as well - the final seal in the trinity of according approval to our historic decision," Modi said. Modi said the BJP is perhaps the only party in the country which walked out of a government so that more power could be devolved to the people. "And we fulfilled our commitment by conducting peaceful local body and Panchayat elections in Jammu and Kashmir in December 2018."

In June 2018, the BJP, which was part of a coalition government in J and K with the People Democratic Party (PDP), pulled out of the alliance, leading to the fall of the then Mehbooba Mufti government and imposition of central rule. The saffron party then alleged that it became untenable for it to continue its alliance government as "terrorism, violence and radicalisation have risen and fundamental rights of the citizens are under danger in the Valley".

Modi said people of the region have seen his government's honest intentions, the consistent efforts it has made to integrate them into the mainstream of India's democracy and they have now proactively endorsed the steps taken through this peaceful, high voter turnout. "I have no doubt in my mind that Jammu and Kashmir has a very bright future and the region will serve as a beacon of democratic empowerment and aspirations." Asked how the recent situation in J and K aligns with the government's long-term strategy for the region, the prime minister said Jammu and Kashmir, since 1947, has been a victim of the conflict economy, where the stakeholders were a few politicians, many who were working for their own personal agendas or those of outside forces. "For almost seven decades, the people of Jammu and Kashmir were denied the right to development, progress, and prosperity because a few families, in India and their masters outside, wanted to use the people to peddle their own separatist agenda. This was an irreversible loss for generations of innocent families who were pulled into a conflict. We want to ensure that now there is an irreversible dividend of peace for future generations to come." Modi said ever since his government came into office in 2014, its agenda has been quite clear — development for all, opportunities for all, prosperity for all. He said for 70 years, there was a conflict, but for 70 years, not all regions were accessible via all-weather roads, or with all the basic necessities. "Think about the struggles of the tribal population in the mountains, or the youth in region who could not get any aspirational jobs like the youth in the rest of the country. We have managed to reverse this trend, especially post 2019," he added. The prime minister said from tourism to education, from sports to agriculture, from manufacturing to FPOs (Farmer Producer Organisations), and from SHGs (Self Help groups) to entrepreneurship, the government wants to create an ecosystem for everything within the region itself.

Over 45 per cent polling recorded in five LS seats in Bihar till 3 pm

PTI ■ PATNA

A voter turnout of 45.33 per cent was recorded in five Lok Sabha constituencies in Bihar till 3 pm on Monday, officials said. The polling began at 7 am in Muzaffarpur, Madhubani, Sitamarhi, Saran and Hajipur Lok Sabha constituencies and will continue till 6 pm, a senior official at the CEO's office said. Over 95 lakh voters in these five seats will decide the electoral fate of 80 candidates at 9,436 polling stations. Over 49.99 per cent of voters have exercised their franchise in Muzaffarpur, 45.19 per cent in Sitamarhi, 44.59 per cent in Hajipur, 43.77 per cent in Madhubani and 43.13 per cent in Saran till 3 pm. Of the total voters, 45.11 lakh are women, 21 lakh are under 29 years of age and 1.26 lakh are in the age group of 18-19 years. Talking to reporters in Patna, Bihar BJP president and Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary said, "Voting is going very smoothly in all five constituencies in the state



today." Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Nityanand Rai cast his vote on Monday at a polling booth in Hajipur Lok Sabha constituency. After casting his vote, Rai said, "I urge people to exercise their franchise in large numbers, it's a festival of democracy". Rai is seeking re-election from Ujjiarpur Lok Sabha constituency where voting took place on May 13. Notable candidates include NDA ally Chirag Paswan in Hajipur, Lalu Prasad's

daughter Rohini Acharya, who is pitted against two-term sitting BJP MP and former Union minister Rajiv Pratap Rudy in Saran, and Muzaffarpur's sitting MP Ajay Nishad, who crossed over to the Congress after being denied a BJP ticket for a third term. Sudhir Kumar Ojha, an advocate who remains in the news for his petitions against top political figures, Bollywood stars and even foreign heads of state, is contesting from Muzaffarpur.

Amitabh Bachchan, SRK, Aamir Khan, Akshay Kumar and other celebs vote in Mumbai

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Popular Hindi cinema stars Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan and Akshay Kumar were among the celebrities who stepped out to cast their votes in the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections here on Monday. Polling was underway since 7 am in 13 Lok Sabha constituencies of Maharashtra, including six in Mumbai. Bachchan, 81, and wife Jaya, 76, cast their votes in a polling booth in the Juhu area of Mumbai. Daughter-in-law Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, who is nursing a hand injury and just returned from her trip to the Cannes Film Festival, was also seen at a polling booth. Aamir Khan and ex-wife Kiran Rao posed for cameras after voting at a polling booth in Bandra in suburban Mumbai. The actor also urged people to come out and cast their votes. "I just want to appeal to all Indians to come out in large numbers and cast their vote and become part of this democracy. It is our responsibility to vote. I appeal to everyone to step out and



vote, and don't waste your vote. I want youth, elderly, women, men and everyone should come out and vote," the superstar told reporters. Shah Rukh Khan, wife Gauri, son Aryan, daughter Suhana and younger son AbRam were also photographed entering a polling station in Bandra. Superstar Salman Khan's father Salim Khan and mother Salma too cast their votes. Ranbir Kapoor posed for pictures with his inked finger after casting his vote. Ranveer and Deepika, who are expecting their first child, cast their votes at a polling booth in Bandra, while Varun Dhawan and Shahid Kapoor took to their social media accounts to encourage others to vote. Kumar, who voted for the first time since receiving Indian

citizenship, was one of the early voters. "I want my India to be developed and strong and I've kept these things in my mind when I went to cast my vote, and all the Indians should think what is right for them and vote," Kumar said after voting at a polling station in Juhu. Akhtar, who queued up at a polling station in Bandra West to cast his vote, told PTI: "My vote is for good governance, the government that looks after all people, gives us a better city." The actor-filmmaker urged people, especially youngsters to step out and vote. "I just heard from somebody that young people are complaining that it's too hot but it's not hot at all, so please do step out, do vote," Akhtar

said. His sister, filmmaker Zoya Akhtar and mother Honey Irani also voted. Actor Hema Malini, who's BJP candidate from Mathura Lok Sabha constituency, said she is hopeful that voters' turnout will be good. "We are very much concerned (about voter turn-out). We've done maximum publicity for people to come and vote. Across India, celebrities have requested (people to vote). I'm sure the voter turnout will be good," Malini, who was accompanied by daughter Esha, said after casting her vote in Mumbai. Dharmendra, 88, said, "They (voters) know how to be a good Indian citizen. They know how to take India to great heights, and they know how and what to do for that." Other Bollywood celebrities,

who have voted so far, include Tabu, Kajol, Saif Ali Khan with his wife Kareena Kapoor Khan, Kiara Advani, actor Kiara Advani, Rekha, Sunny Deol, Sanjay Dutt, Sanya Malhotra, Govinda, Manoj Bajpayee, Anil Kapoor, Ali Fazal, Konkana Sen Sharma, Paresh Rawal, Shradha Kapoor, Bhumi Pednekar, Ananya Panday, Sara Ali Khan with her mother Amrita Singh, Suniel Shetty, Shilpa Shetty, Arshad Warsi and Tiger Shroff. Filmmakers Ashutosh Gowariker, Rakesh Omprakash Mehra, Subhash Ghai, Onir noted poet and lyricist Nuzar, his filmmaker daughter Meghna Gulzar, Kunal Kohli, musician Vishal Dadlani, singer and music composer Shankar Mahadevan, among others.

Mohammad Mokhber appointed Iran's acting President

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran's first Vice President Mohammad Mokhber was appointed as acting president of the Islamic Republic on Monday after the death of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash in the country's northwest. Mokhber, 68, largely has been in the shadows compared to other politicians in Iran's Shiite theocracy. Raisi's death under the constitution thrust Mokhber into public view. He is expected to serve as caretaker president for some 50 days before mandatory presidential elections in Iran.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei made the announcement of Mokhber's appointment in a condolence message he shared for Raisi's death in the crash Sunday. The helicopter was found Monday in northwestern Iran. Despite his low-key public profile, Mokhber has held prominent positions with in the country's power structure, particularly in its bonyads, or charitable foundations. Those groups were fuelled by donations or assets seized after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, particularly those

previously associated with Iran's shah or those in his government. Mokhber oversaw a bonyad known in English as the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order, or EIKO, referring to the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The US Treasury said the organisation oversaw billions of dollars in assets as "a business juggernaut under the direct supervision of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei that has a stake in nearly every sector of the Iranian economy, including energy, telecommunications, and financial services." "EIKO has systematically violated the rights of dissidents by confiscating land and property from opponents of the regime, including political opponents, religious minorities, and exiled Iranians," the Treasury said in 2021 in sanctioning Mokhber. The European Union also had sanctioned Mokhber for a time with others over concerns then about Iran's nuclear programme. As the head of EIKO, Mokhber oversaw an effort to make a COVID-19 vaccine during the height of the pandemic, pledging to make tens of millions of



In this photo provided by Moj News Agency, rescue team members work at the scene of a crash of a helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Varzaghan in northwestern Iran, Monday

doses. Only a fraction of that ever made it to the public, without explanation. Mokhber previously worked in

banking and telecommunications. He also worked at the Mostafafan Foundation, another bonyad that's a major con-

glomerate that manages the country's mega-projects and businesses. While there, he found himself entangled in a bit-

ter legal dispute between mobile phone service providers Turkcell and South Africa's MTN over potentially entering the Iranian market. MTN ended up entering Iran. A Turkcell filing alleged Mokhber sought MTN's help in securing "certain defence equipment" in exchange for potentially working with it as opposed to Turkcell. Mokhber used "improper influence up to and including negotiating with and on behalf of the Supreme Leader in MTN's favour," Turkcell later alleged in a legal filing. An MTN report later said there were no arms transfers, though it acknowledges Mokhber was a player in Iran's decision to go with MTN. Iranian media reports suggest Mokhber, who holds a doctorate in international law, was crucial in Iranian efforts to bypass Western sanctions on its oil industry. Mokhber has been a member of Iran's Expediency Council since 2022, which advises the supreme leader, as well as settles disputes between parliament and the Guardian Council, Iran's constitutional watchdog that also oversees the country's elections. Mokhber

'China lost a good friend'

PTI ■ BEIJING



President Xi Jinping on Monday condoled the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who was killed in a helicopter crash, saying China has lost a good friend as he made positive efforts to consolidate and deepen the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two nations. In a message to Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber, Xi on behalf of the Chinese government and the people of China, expressed deep condolences and extended sincere sympathies to Mokhber, the family of President Raisi, and the Iranian government and people, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said. Xi said since President Raisi took office, he made important contributions to maintaining

Iran's security and stability and promoting national development and prosperity. He added that Raisi also made positive efforts to consolidate and deepen the China-Iran comprehensive strategic partnership. Raisi's tragic death is a great loss to the Iranian people, and the Chinese people also lost a good friend, Xi said.

was born Sept 1, 1955, in Dezful in Iran's southwestern Khuzestan province to a clerical family. He served as an officer in the Revolutionary Guard's medical corps during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war, according to the

pressure group United Against Nuclear Iran. "Mokhber used the vast wealth accumulated by EIKO — at the expense of the Iranian people — to reward regime insiders like himself," UANI said.

WikiLeaks founder wins bid to challenge extradition to US

PTI ■ LONDON

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange on Monday won a major reprieve as a London court permitted him to appeal against his extradition to the US on espionage charges, a legal saga which has been going on for over a decade. The 52-year-old Australian national has been held at Belmarsh high-security prison in London since 2019 when he was taken into custody from the Ecuadorian Embassy here where he had sought asylum. While the US authorities want Assange to face trial for allegedly endangering lives by publishing thousands of classified documents on Wikileaks, his lawyers have argued that the case against him is politically motivated. On Monday, two High Court judges at the Royal Courts of Justice granted the Australian-born Assange permission to appeal against his extradition



order. They agreed with his legal team on the issue of assurances from the US administration that Assange would be protected by and allowed to rely on the First Amendment of the country's Constitution, which protects freedom of speech in the US, and the death penalty would not be imposed. "Based on the principle of the separation of powers, the US court can and will apply US

law, whatever the executive may say or do," barrister Edward Fitzgerald told the court on behalf of Assange. The barrister representing the US government countered that the judicial branch of the country would take due notice of the executive's "solemn assurance". "The assurance does make it clear that he will not be discriminated against because of his nationality. He can and will be able to raise all those arguments and his nationality will not prejudice a fair trial," said James Lewis in written submissions. The High Court ruling in favour of Assange means he will be able to challenge US assurances at a full hearing over how his prospective trial in America would be conducted and whether his right to free speech would be infringed on being extradited. His appeal is expected to be heard sometime next year as he continues his fight against

being extradited after the UK government had signed off on the order in June 2022. Assange has denied any wrongdoing all along and argued that his disclosures in 2010 revealed war crimes by the US. Supporters of Assange, led by his wife Stella Assange, gathered at the High Court and continued their calls for his release on medical grounds. Had the court ruled in the US's favour, Assange would have exhausted all legal avenues in the UK. He has resisted extradition from the UK for more than a decade after his Wikileaks website published thousands of confidential US documents in 2010 and 2011. The US Department of Justice described the leaks as "one of the largest compromises of classified information in the history of the United States". The files suggested the US military had killed civilians in unreported incidents during the war in Afghanistan.

Condition of Slovakia PM Fico improves

Bratislava (AP): Slovak populist Prime Minister Robert Fico's condition is improving following an assassination attempt last week that shocked the European Union nation deeply polarised over his policies. "After today's consultation, the patient's condition is stabilised," the hospital treating the Slovak leader in the central city of Banská Bystrica said on Monday. A statement released by the clinic said Fico is "clinically improving, communicating, inflammatory parameters are slowly decreasing". It said Fico remains hospitalised in the clinic for the time being. On Sunday, the clinic said that Fico, 59, was no longer in life threatening condition after he was shot in the abdomen as he greeted supporters on Wednesday outside a cultural centre in the town of Handlova, nearly 140 km (85 miles) northeast of the capital, Bratislava.

South Africa's apex court ends Zuma's bid to be elected again

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

South Africa's highest court on Monday ended a bid by former president Jacob Zuma to stand as a candidate for Parliament in a national election on May 29 citing his previous criminal conviction. The country's apex judicial institution, the Constitutional Court (ConCourt), upheld the initial decision by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to disqualify 82-year-old Zuma's candidacy on the grounds of his 15-month prison sentence for contempt of court in 2021. Zuma had been nominated as the leader of the recently-established Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) Party, named after the erstwhile armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC) during the freedom struggle that ended in 1994 with Nelson Mandela becoming the country's first democratically-elected President.

When MK named him as its candidate whose photo should appear on the ballot paper, the IEC declared that Zuma could not run because of the constitutional provision that prohibited anyone sentenced to more than 12 months in prison from being a member of parliament. On appeal to the Electoral Court, the IEC decision was overturned and Zuma has been actively campaigning for the party, despite a dispute with a founding member that Zuma was no longer the leader of the party. "It is declared that Mr Zuma was convicted of an offence and sentenced to more than 12 months' imprisonment for purposes of Section 47(1)e of the Constitution and is accordingly not eligible to be a member of and not qualified to stand for election to the National Assembly until five years have elapsed since the completion of his sentence," Justice Leona

Theron said as she read the unanimous decision of the court. Zuma was ousted in 2018 by the ANC just months before the end of his second term in 2018 after he refused to step down amid a huge public outcry about his alleged closeness to the controversial Gupta family, originally from India and now believed to be in self-exile in Dubai, as South Africa seeks their extradition to face charges of looting billions from state coffers. After walking out of hearings at the Commission of Inquiry into state capture in 2020, Zuma was slapped with a contempt of court sentence of 15 months. He served only three months after being controversially released on medical parole. The incident led to unprecedented violence and looting for several days in Zuma's home province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and in the economic hub of Gauteng province, Johannesburg.

Ship that caused deadly Baltimore bridge collapse reloaded

Baltimore (AP): The container ship that caused the deadly collapse of Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge was reloaded Monday and has begun slowly moving back to port. The Dali has remained at the collapse site since it lost power and crashed into one of the bridge's supporting columns on March 26, killing six construction workers and snarling traffic into Baltimore Harbour. The ship appeared to start moving shortly after 6 am as crews started to maneuver it out of the wreckage. It started and stopped a few times before slowly backing away from the collapse site. Officials said it would move at about 1 mph on the roughly 2.5-mile (4-km) trip, a fraction of the speed it was travelling when it lost power and crashed into the bridge. Pieces of the bridge's steel trusses protruded from its bow, which remained covered in concrete from the collapsed roadway. Officials have said they plan to unload the ship's containers and complete some short-term repairs while it's docked in Baltimore. Monday morning's high tide had been expected to bring the best conditions for crews to refloat and start moving the ship, according to a statement from the Key Bridge Response Unified Command. Several tugboats were escorting the Dali on its path to the marine terminal. The work is expected to last at least 21 hours. Crews conducted a controlled demolition on May 13 to break down the largest remaining span of the collapsed bridge. The Dali experienced four electrical blackouts within about 10 hours before leaving the Port of Baltimore for Sri Lanka and hitting the bridge, according to a preliminary report issued by the National Transportation Safety Board.

ICC prosecutor seeks arrest warrant for Netanyahu

AP ■ THE HAGUE/ JERUSALEM

The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court said Monday he is seeking arrest warrants for Israeli and Hamas leaders, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in connection with their actions during the seven-month war. Karim Khan said that he believes Netanyahu, his defence minister Yoav Gallant and three Hamas leaders — Yehya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif and Ismail Haniyeh — are responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip and Israel. Speaking of the Israeli actions, Khan said in a statement that "the effects of the use of starvation as a method of warfare, together with other attacks and collective punishment against the civilian population of Gaza are acute, visible and widely known. ... They include malnutrition, dehydration, profound suffering and an increasing number of deaths among the Palestinian popula-



tion, including babies, other children, and women." Of the Hamas actions on October 7, he said that he saw for himself "the devastating scenes of these attacks and the profound impact of the unconscionable crimes charged in the applications filed today. Speaking with survivors, I heard how the love within a family, the deepest bonds between a parent and a child, were contorted to inflict unfathomable pain through calculated cruelty and extreme callousness. These acts demand accountability."

'ICC SEEKING WARRANTS IS 'HISTORIC DISGRACE'

Israel's foreign minister says the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court's decision to seek arrest warrants against Israeli leaders is "a historic disgrace that will be remembered forever". Israel Katz said Monday he would form a special committee to fight back against any such action and would work with world leaders to ensure that any such warrants are not enforced.

UK's health service accused of cover up in infected blood scandal

AP ■ LONDON

Britain's state-funded National Health Service (NHS) was accused of cover up in an infected blood scandal dating back to the 1970s in a public inquiry report submitted to the government on Monday. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is expected to issue an apology on behalf of the government after inquiry chair Sir Brian Langstaff delivered his scathing verdict on the issue, which involves over 30,000 people being infected with life-threatening viruses such as HIV and Hepatitis C while they were under NHS care between the 1970s and 1990s. It involves infected batches of Factor VIII, an essential blood clotting protein which haemophiliacs do not produce naturally, imported from the US and used widely to treat patients at the time. They were infected as donated

blood was not tested for HIV/AIDS until 1986 and Hepatitis C until 1991 in the UK. "The scale of what happened is horrifying. The most accurate estimate is that more than 3,000 deaths are attributable to infected blood, blood products and tissue," notes Langstaff in his report following a five-year investigation. "Standing back, and viewing the response of the NHS and of government, the answer to the question 'was there a cover up?' is that there has been. Not in the sense of a handful of people plotting in an orchestrated conspiracy to mislead, but in a way that was more subtle, more pervasive and more chilling in its implications. To save face and to save expense, there has been a hiding of much of the truth," he said. The 2,527-page and seven-volume document goes on to detail the enormous scale of the scandal and also makes a series of recommen-

dations, including a speedy compensation scheme for those directly affected and who lost loved ones as a result. The report also calls upon the NHS to ensure anyone who received a blood transfusion before 1996 is urgently tested for Hepatitis C. New patients at any medical practice should also be asked if they had a transfusion before that time. The report also picks apart the approach to the scandal under the Margaret Thatcher led Conservative Party government, which insisted that people were given "the best treatment available" at the time. "The reality is that this use of this blanket line to take — sometimes applied to the position of people with bleeding disorders, sometimes to all those infected with Hepatitis C from blood or blood products — was inappropriate. It was wrong and its use was unacceptable. It became a mantra and was never ques-

tioned," it notes. "An apology should not only give some detail as to what is being apologised for, but to be understood by those to whom it is addressed as sincere and meaningful, it should lead to action. Compensation is part of this," it adds. Two sets of people were caught up in this historic health scandal of contaminated blood — people with haemophilia and similar blood clotting disorders who received a new treatment at the time to replace the missing clotting agents made from donated human blood plasma and a second group who had a blood transfusion after childbirth, accidents or during medical treatment. Ministers from the Sunak-led government have promised to address the issue of final compensation once the inquiry's report is published, the total cost for which is likely to run into billions of pounds.

Saudi Arabia's all-women rock band 'Seera' breaks barriers

AP ■ RIYADH

Leaning into the microphone in Saudi Arabia's capital, Nora let loose a primal scream. Guitars wailed and drums throbbed behind her as part of a set with her bandmates during a recent show. The performance by Seera, an all-women psychedelic rock band that blends traditional Arabic melodies with the resurgent psychedelia of bands like Tame Impala, would have been unthinkable just years earlier in the kingdom. But as Saudi Arabia liberalises some aspects of its society, Seera represents the way women now are finding their voice and expressing themselves through the arts in a nation long associated with ultraconservative Islam and the strict separation of the



sexes. "We didn't know how people would react," said Meesh, the band's bassist, who like other members asked to be identified by their stage names. "We believe strongly in self-expression. To our surprise, they really had open arms for us." The band's name, Seera, can mean "life" or "biography" in Arabic. Band members say they try to embrace the multi-

ple meanings one can draw from a word in the language in its sound, whether through the driving drums and cymbals or the synthesizer backing the guitars. Seera's music style

revolves around the life experiences of the four-member band, who are all Saudi nationals. They sing in the Saudi dialect of Arabic, while drummer Thing wears a traditionally embroidered red face covering. "I thought this would be great as a reflection of the culture, the heritage and the roots," she said. "At the same time it would be a cool representation between the traditional and the modern and the expression of it. That's also within our sonic identity as well." Seera is quick to point out they aren't the first female band in the kingdom. Instead, they say that goes to The Accolade, which formed in 2008 and could only play underground. Things have changed radically in the kingdom in recent years since the accession of King Salman and

his assertive son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. In 2018, women gained the right to drive. Movie theatres and other entertainment centres opened. Women are no longer required to wear the fully cloaking black abaya. Clear limits still remain on speech and any political activity in the tightly governed kingdom. But in the arts space, Saudi Arabia is slowly opening up, as could be seen by Seera's show earlier this month at The Warehouse, a live music space in Riyadh's Diriyah neighbourhood. There, dozens of youths in leather jackets and black rock T-shirts swayed and danced to the music. One young man with heavy eyeliner wore a shirt declaring: "I HATE LIFE." The fashion choices resembled any

other punk show at a club in the West, though there was an absence of smoking or any alcohol in the dry kingdom. "Things have become definitely better, more towards inclusivity and in a broader perspective and in a broader way," Thing said. "There's definitely room for more growth." Seera plans to release their debut album later this year. They've also booked their first international concert in Dubai, where they'll get their first chance to perform outside of Saudi Arabia. Nora said she wanted the band to be "an inspiration for the younger generation" to express themselves. "It's OK to look, act, behave the way you want as long as you're not harming anyone," she said.



Be it sports or education, discipline is necessary: Gopichand to students

PTI ■ PATNA

Discipline defined him both as a player and coach. So, it was hardly a surprise that Pulella Gopichand stressed on the virtue as he delivered a motivational speech to youngsters preparing for competitive exams here, drawing sporting analogies to drive home his point. The 50-year-old former All England champion, who is also a Dronacharya awardee, was addressing a gathering of students preparing for competitive exams in streams such as engineering and medicine.

"Be it sports or education both are same. In both, discipline as well as dedication is necessary.

With time, another need has been added to both these fields and that is mentoring," Indian badminton's chief national coach said. "Only when there is training along with teaching, a student becomes capable of competing in the present times. Similarly, in sports also, if coaching becomes good along with discipline and dedication, then the player moves ahead," he added at an event held at the Allen Career Institute here. The Hyderabad, who is credited for shaping Olympic medallists Saina Nehwal and P V Sindhu among others, said he foresees bright future for youngsters growing up in cities like Patna. "One-sided results cannot always be expected in sports.

Sometimes you may be the best with your best performance and sometimes the player in front of you may be better, this does not mean that we should stop working hard. "Even in studies, if the results are not as per expectations then we should not stop. Try to learn more, solve problems, your hard work will never go in vain, one day you will be able to fulfill your dream," he told the gathered students. "Cities like Kota and Patna are modern-day Gurukuls of India nurturing dreamers with potential like you into world champions in field of engineering, medicine and beyond. It takes a good coach to know when he sees a world champion," he added.

Zverev's stock rising for French Open

AP ■ ROME

Top-ranked Novak Djokovic hasn't won a tournament all year. Record 14-time French Open champion Rafael Nadal has been far from his best. Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz have been out injured. And Daniil Medvedev has won only one clay-court title in his career. Considering the state of his rivals in the top five, Alexander Zverev's credentials entering Roland Garros are looking pretty good following his second Italian Open title. The clay-court Grand Slam in Paris starts this weekend. "I'm somebody that I know when I don't play well, I can lose to anyone, but when I play well, I know I can beat anyone. That's my mindset. That's how I think about it," Zverev said after raising the trophy in Rome. "I know I have to focus on myself, to find my rhythm in Paris the way I did here. Then everything is on my own racket." Zverev won 44 of his 49 service points in a 6-4, 7-5 victory over 24th-ranked Nicolas Jarry 6-4, 7-5 in Rome on Sunday to earn his biggest trophy since a gruesome ankle injury two years ago. It's been a long road of recovery for the fifth-ranked Zverev after tearing three ligaments in his right ankle during the 2022 French Open semifinals against Nadal. In all, Zverev has reached three consecutive semifinals at Roland Garros — which has



led him to declare it's the tournament he wants to win more than any other. "It's the one where I have the most memories, good or bad," Zverev said. "U.S. Open, yes, I was two points away from winning the title. Of course, that's also one that kind of sticks out. (But) Roland Garros, so close to being in the final in 2021, I felt like I was playing some of the best tennis of my life in 2022. Those kind of things, they are still in the back of my mind. That's the one that I want to do well in." That loss in the 2020 U.S. Open final to Dominic Thiem remains the closest that the 27-year-old Zverev has come to

winning a Grand Slam title. Having been in the top five of the rankings for years, claimed Olympic gold in Tokyo three years ago and won the ATP Finals twice, a Grand Slam title is the only big thing missing in his career. And if Zverev is going to contend in Paris, he's going to have to do it while dealing with a major distraction. Zverev has disputed a penalty order from a German court over allegations that he caused bodily harm to a woman and he will go on trial in his home country starting on May 31 — entering the middle weekend of the French Open. Zverev is accused of physically

abusing and damaging the health of a woman during an argument in Berlin four years ago. He said in Rome that he won't attend the start of the legal proceedings. Zverev, who moved up one spot to No. 4 in the rankings released on Monday, shared an emotional moment over the weekend with his father and coach, who is also named Alexander Zverev. While Zverev kept his composure on the court, dad was teary eyed in the stands during the trophy ceremony. "A father is always important, no matter who it is," Zverev said. "Obviously in my career super important. It's funny

because we actually have a great relationship — which is not always the case, a father-son, father-daughter relationship when they're coaching them as well. You see it a lot of times, it's very shaky. But we have a great relationship outside as well." A few years ago, the elder Zverev was missing from the player's box due to medical issues. "I'm going to have him around as long as he wants to," the younger Zverev said. "It's obviously a special moment for all of us, given the circumstances that this is my first Masters after the injury. There was obviously a lot of uncertainties whether I was going to be back at this level." Zverev's mom, Irina, was also court-side, along with the family's two dogs. In Paris, however, the Zverevs won't be the only high-profile entourage. Djokovic has entered a small tournament in Geneva this week to get more match preparation in before heading to the French Open, and Sinner and Alcaraz have been back on the practice courts following hip and right forearm injuries, respectively. "Nole is going to be at his best. You'll see. It's just the way it is," Zverev said. "Rafa is going to play a lot better than he did in Madrid and Rome. I'm certain about that. The other two, they just depend on health. If they're healthy, they're two of the best players in the world for sure and there's no question about it.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

For a long time, Deepthi Jeevanji's parents were taunted by fellow villagers for having a "mentally impaired" child. But now they are counting the compliments as the same bunch converged at their modest house in Telangana's Kalleda hamlet to celebrate her world record-beating gold medal in the Para Athletics World Championship in Kobe, Japan. Born to daily wage labourers at in Warangal district of Telangana, the 20-year-old Deepthi on Monday clinched gold with a world record time of 55.07 seconds in the women's 400m T20 category race. She also qualified for the upcoming Paris Paralympics. The T20 category is meant for athletes who have intellectual impairment. Deepthi's coach Nagpuri Ramesh said her parents were at the receiving end of taunts from the villagers, who would often say that she will never get married since she is "mentally impaired". "Deepthi's parents were daily wage labourers and they were

Taunted for being mentally impaired once, Para world champion Deepthi is now feted in village

struggling to run the family. On top of that they faced constant taunts from the villagers that a mentally impaired girl cannot get married," Ramesh told PTI from Hyderabad, where Deepthi trains currently. "After Deepthi won gold in the Hangzhou Asian Para Games last year, the scenario changed. Now, the same villagers are praising them for being parents of Deepthi. They told me this when they came in Hyderabad after the Para Asian Games. "They told me even the district collector and politicians of the area visited their house which was a shock to them, considering how things have changed." She had won gold in 400m T20 category in the Hangzhou Para Asian Games with Asian record time of 56.69 seconds. Deepthi's father J Yadagiri and mother J Dhanalaxmi were so

poor that they did not even have money to afford bus fare to send their child to Hyderabad from Warangal when Ramesh wanted to train her. "She was spotted in a school meet through a PET teacher in Warangal. When I told them to send Deepthi, they said they didn't have money for bus fare. I told them to just board a bus and give me the phone number of the conductor. "After that I explained to the bus conductor to let her board the bus and told him I will pay the fare when she reaches Hyderabad. During the 130km journey from Warangal to Hyderabad I kept calling the bus conductor inquiring about her safety." Ramesh said Deepthi's parents had earlier sold their half acre land due to financial difficulties but they bought an identical piece of land with the Rs 30 lakh reward she got for



winning the Para Asian Games gold medal. "Deepthi's parents are now doing better. They have bought land with the money Deepthi got as reward for her achievements and they have started farming," said Ramesh. After Deepthi was brought to Hyderabad, she was enrolled at the Sports Authority of India's Training Center in Hyderabad where Ramesh is a coach. She was studying in ninth standard at that time. Ramesh, who is also the Athletics Federation of India's national junior team coach, said he had a tough time initially in training Deepthi because she could not communicate. "You cannot teach her too many techniques as she is slow in learning things. If you do that she will get confused," he said. Her parents once told Ramesh that Deepthi fell down from

the roof of a building but acted as if she didn't feel any pain because of the inability to express her feelings. Chief national badminton coach Pulella Gopichand also played a role in Deepthi's career. It was Gopichand who suggested Ramesh to take her to the National Institute for the Empowerment of Person with Intellectual Disability in Hyderabad. After medical tests, she was certified as "mentally impaired" and that allowed her to compete in para meets. Gopi-Mytrah Foundation chipped in as her sponsor and funded two international events for her to get international license, which is a must for para athletes to compete. "She competed in two tournaments, one in Morocco and another in Australia and she got her international license. Around Rs three lakh were spent in the two tournaments and Gopi-Mytrah Foundation funded it," said Ramesh, a Dronacharya awardee, who was also the coach of top sprinter Dutee Chand.

BCCI lays foundation stone for indoor cricket academies in six North Eastern States

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Cricket Board (BCCI) on Monday laid the foundation stone for indoor cricket training academies in six North-Eastern states, with the sole emphasis on helping budding cricketers from the region. The indoor cricket academies will serve players from Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim and will be based in Shillong, Itanagar, Kohima, Aizawl, Imphal and Gangtok. "Honoured to have laid the foundation stone for BCCI's upcoming state-of-the-art indoor training facilities in the



North-East," Shah wrote on X, formerly Twitter. Earlier, cricketers from these states were required to travel to centres in Kolkata, Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai or Ahmedabad for training

during the monsoon season. The BCCI had also created North-East Cricket Development Committee, which is being headed by Avishek Dalmiya, the president of the Cricket

Association of Bengal (CAB). "Our cricketers from six states — Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Sikkim — will soon benefit from world-class indoor nets, indoor swimming pools and fitness centres for year-round training options," Shah wrote. "This, along with the launch of the new pavillion in Mizoram, are big steps towards our vision to enhance cricket infrastructure in the region, exciting times ahead," he added. Meanwhile, the BCCI is already in the process of developing a new National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru with expanded area and facilities.

Co-hosts from Caribbean aiming to defy history and win third Twenty20 World Cup title

AP ■ ANTIGUA

After leading the West Indies to two Twenty20 World Cup titles as a captain, Daren Sammy has to defy history to win again as a head coach. No host has won the tournament on home soil in the first eight editions, a trend Sammy hopes to break with the 2024 T20 World Cup being staged in the United States of America and the Caribbean. Sri Lanka went the closest by reaching the final in 2012 before losing to West Indies in Colombo. That win is widely remembered for the Gangnam Style celebrations of the Caribbean players after Sri Lanka was bowled out for 101 in pursuit of a 138-run target. Four years later, a fearless brand of West Indies cricket set the Eden Gardens alight in India. Carlos Brathwaite hit four consecutive sixes against Ben Stokes in the final over to steer the Caribbean team to a second T20 World Cup title. Sammy was appointed head coach of the West Indies limited-overs squads last year. His past teammates Johnson Charles and Andre Russell, T20's most accomplished all-rounder, are the only two-time champions still in the squad. "We know how to select winning teams," Sammy said in a news conference with Caribbean media to announce the squad. "We've done it before and I think, as a selection group, we're really



excited about it." "It's an exciting time, and this preparation did not start now. It started from the last World Cup in Australia," Sammy was quoted as saying by CNC3. "What we've been able to do throughout the last year as a T20 group, the players we've exposed, has brought us to this moment, and I think we're about to knock it out of this world." Curtley Ambrose, the great West Indies pace bowler, was confident the squad could play the consistent, smart cricket required to win a third title. West Indies and England are the only teams to have won the title twice, and no host has ever won, he said, "so all that is motivation for the guys to do well." The last two T20 World Cups in the United Arab Emirates in 2021 and Australia in 2022 didn't go well for West Indies. Kieron Pollard's team was eliminated in the group stage

in the UAE with just a win. Nicholas Pooran's side didn't qualify for the main round in Australia the following year. It was a setback for West Indies cricket, dating back to the late 1800s when a collection of mainly English-speaking Caribbean nations and territories began playing under a unified banner. And, it's something Sammy's squad is determined to put right, coming off some solid individual performances in the Indian Premier League. Without the pressure of the captaincy, Pooran could be a key to success in the middle-order. The left-hander had an impressive outing in the IPL, scoring 499 runs at a strike rate of 178.21 for Lucknow Super Giants. The absence of Sunil Narine, who helped Kolkata Knight Riders top the IPL standings this season with his batting and bowling exploits, will be difficult to cover. Sammy said he'd had conversations with Narine since the last Caribbean Premier League season, but couldn't convince him into a West Indies comeback: "As the news clearly stated, Narine is retired." But, led by captain Rovman Powell, West Indies has enough batting firepower to challenge the leading teams and the advantage of playing in the CPL. Young fast bowler Shamar Joseph, who has just played three T20s and is yet to make his T20 International debut, was selected ahead of Matthew Forde as the West Indies looked for extra speed in the bowling attack. "Shamar Joseph has the pace, he has skills with the new ball," Sammy said. "Not saying Matthew Forde doesn't but when you look at the role, it makes it easier for us to now pick the personnel to fit that role." West Indies will be playing its first two Group C games against Papua New Guinea and Uganda at Providence on June 2 and June 9 before taking on higher-ranked New Zealand and Afghanistan at Torouba and Gros Islet on June 13 and June 18. The top two teams from each of the four groups in the league stage will advance to Super 8. The tournament starts June 1 with a North American rivalry between the US and Canada in Dallas and concludes with the final on June 29 at Bridgetown, Barbados.

Indian Open Surfing to kickoff on May 31

PTI ■ MANGALORE

The fifth edition of the Indian Open Surfing (IOS) will be held at the Sasithlhu Beach here from May 31 to June 2, the sport's governing body SFI announced on Monday. The three-day surfing competition will include four categories — Men's Open, Women's Open, Groms (U-16) Boys and Groms (U-16) Girls. "Indian Open Surfing will be the 2nd stop of the National Championship series of the 2024 calendar year, following the International Surfing Festival Kerala 2024, held in March at the beautiful cliff beach of Varkala," the Surfing Federation of India (SFI), the governing body for the sports of surfing and stand-up paddling in the country, said in a media release. The IOS will feature intense rivalry



between surfers from the east and west coasts, as these championships carry important ranking points that will determine the surfers' standings at the end

of the season. "Our goal is simple, we want to elevate India to the top in surfing. After a successful start to the National Series in Kerala, we are glad to continue the championships in Mangaluru before the championship tour moves to the East Coast," SFI president Arun Vasu said. Ramesh Budihal, Harish M, Srikanth D, and Manikandan M will be the surfers to watch out for in the men's category, having performed exceptionally well in the last national championship recently held in Kerala. In the women's category, Kamali Moorthy, Srishthi Selvam, and Sandhya Arun are among the participants competing for the top honors. Teenage sensation Kishore Kumar will have all eyes on him, having stunned everyone with his recent performances.



Salt-less KKR take on Sunrisers in power-hitting slugfest

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

High-flying Kolkata Knight Riders and an unpredictable Sunrisers Hyderabad, teams that have built their IPL 2024 campaign on power-hitting, will look to outmuscle each other in Qualifier 1 here on Tuesday. If KKR were the first team to make IPL playoffs this year, SRH gave themselves a huge boost by inflicting a four-wicket loss on Punjab Kings on Sunday to eventually finish second with 17 points, ahead of Rajasthan Royals. While the two top teams from the 70-match league round have enjoyed some time off courtesy incessant rains during their respective clashes over last 10 days, the lack of turnaround time to compete in a high-intensity playoff game will also pose a unique challenge. KKR and SRH will get only a day's time to traverse thousands of kilometres and get here for the first half of the playoffs as they both featured on the final day of the league round on Sunday. SRH would feel they have hit their strides following a comprehensive win over PBKS and having also got recent game-time, which isn't the case for KKR whose last complete game was on May 11. Shreyas Iyer's KKR had won four games on the trot before rains washed away their last two league games and the two-time winners. Table-toppers KKR (19 points) will also have to fill in the huge void at the top with their second-highest run-



scorer and wicketkeeper Phil Salt (435 runs) leaving the camp for national duties with England ahead of the T20 World Cup. Salt had forged a devastating partnership with Sunil Narine (461) at the top and KKR were immensely benefited by their ultra-aggressive approach with the bat, backed up well by a potent middle-order even though skipper Iyer (287) had not had a major impact yet. The washed out contest against

RR in particular robbed KKR of an opportunity to give expected replacement Rahmanullah Gurbaz a go at the top with Narine, something that would have settled a few concerns certainly. For KKR, the form of Nitish Rana adds more solidity to the middle-order while a fiery Andre Russell among the finishers promise them vital runs. In many ways, SRH match KKR's firepower on paper and

that is what adds more to the lure of this contest. Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma have both got their runs at a strike rate exceeding 200 while inspiring their side to rewrite a few records. Australian southpaw Head has in many ways redefined aggressiveness with the bat while also remaining successful (533 runs with one century and four fifties). His fearlessness has also brought the best out of the

young Indian batter Abhishek (467), who has clobbered an overall 41 sixes this IPL - 10 more than his overall tally of 31 in the previous six seasons. SRH have also managed to find answers to a couple of questions which were lingering on for a while. At No 3, the 2016 winners have found a dependable option in Rahul Tripathi who can both accelerate as well as weather storms when bowlers are on-song. Additionally, Heinrich Klaasen has rediscovered his form after a dip in the middle of the tournament. With a crucial knock of 42 against PBKS, Klaasen has signalled having found his mojo back, which only makes SRH even more formidable. At Ahmedabad, as seen in the World Cup final last year, teams batting second have had more success, winning four out of six completed games while only twice the team which batted first could defend successfully. Also, against the style of play for both these teams - to bury oppositions under mountains of runs - this venue has had only two scores of 200 or above in 12 innings, which means the bowlers will also have their say. If KKR have a battery of spinners to back their fast bowlers led by Mitchell Starc, SRH's pace bowling attack led by skipper Pat Cummins has time and again produced unified efforts to make their mark. In their only meet earlier this season back in late March, KKR had pipped SRH by four runs in a high-scoring game.



Swapnil Singh contemplated quitting cricket until RCB picked him up in IPL auction

PTI ■ BENGALURU

When Swapnil Singh went unsold in the initial rounds of the 2024 IPL auction, the dejected left-arm spinner felt it was time to end his 18-year-old-career. But then Royal Challengers Bengaluru raised the paddle late in the auction to add a welcome twist to his cricketing journey. "The day of the IPL auction I was travelling to Dharamsala for a game. It was around 7-8 pm after I landed. Nothing had happened by then and the last rounds were on. When I missed out at first, I thought that's it. Frankly I thought it was all over," Swapnil told RCB Bold Diaries. "I thought I would play out the ongoing (domestic) season, and if needed, I would end my career after playing the next season because I did not want to keep playing all my life," he said.

"There are other things to do well in life as well. I was very disappointed," said Swapnil, who made his debut in 2006 and had even shared the dressing room with RCB teammate Virat Kohli at one point in time. Bought at a base price of Rs 20 lakh, the 33-year-old has repaid the faith the franchise showed in him. Swapnil has played a pivotal role in RCB's recent string of wins which have propelled them into the playoffs, with the 2016 finalists set to face a struggling Rajasthan Royals in Ahmedabad in the Eliminator on Wednesday. Swapnil said it was an emotional moment for his entire family after they learnt that he was picked up by RCB. "As soon as my family called, we broke down. Because no one else understands how emotional the journey has been."

Swapnil has also credited former Zimbabwe captain and RCB head coach Andy Flower for showing the faith in him. "Before RCB picked me in the auction, they had organised a trial-cum-camp. I spoke to Andy sir and told him all about how my (domestic) season had gone. I told him, 'Just give me one chance. This might be my last chance. Just have faith in me.' He told he had faith in me. He called me for the camp," Swapnil said. Swapnil also revealed his wish that he expressed to his brother, that he wanted to contribute with the bat in IPL. The moment eventually arrived when he smacked a four and a six against Sunrisers Hyderabad. "I would tell my brother that I have neither scored a four nor a six in the IPL, and I have taken only one wicket. So I really want to hit a four and a six," he said.

OTHER SPORTS

Rohan to pair with either Balaji or Yuki at Paris Games

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's top doubles player Rohan Bopanna will pick either N Sriram Balaji or Yuki Bhambri as his partner for the Paris Olympics and All India Tennis Association (AITA) will most likely approve his choice even as the combinations will be discussed by the selection committee. Ranked four in the world, 44-year-old Bopanna, being a top-10 player, can pick a player of his choice as per the rules. The men's doubles draw at the Paris Games will be a 32-team affair, where one nation can have a maximum of two teams. The qualification criteria gives top-10 players the privilege to pick their partners, who should be inside top-300 on the ATP and WTA ranking charts. The rankings of June 10 after the

conclusion of the French Open will be considered for qualifications. According to AITA sources, Bopanna had recommended names of Balaji and Bhambri to the national federation for inclusion in TOPS as his potential partners for Paris Olympics. "Usually, it's the player's choice (to pick his partner). The selection committee will ask him about his choice and discuss that. Whoever Rohan wants to play with, will be considered positively," AITA Secretary General Anil Dhupar told PTI when asked if the national federation will allow Bopanna to play with the partner of his choice or impose its own choice on him. Both Balaji and Bhambri have got some decent results on clay in lead up to the Roland Garros, where the action will unfold during the Summer Olympics from July 27. Balaji won the Cagliari Challenger



event with German partner Andre Begemann apart from reaching the semifinals at Francavilla al Mare in Italy. Bhambri won the ATP 250 event in Munich with French player Albano Olivetti in April and reached the semifinals of the Bordeaux Challenger — the only event he competed this month. The nominations for Olympics or other multi-sporting events have often created controversy in Indian tennis. In 2012, a huge controversy had erupted when both Mahesh Bhupathi and Bopanna had refused to pair with Leander Paes, who was forced to play with Vishnu Vardhan. Sania Mirza was then asked to pair with Paes in the mixed doubles event and the top woman player of the country had chastised the AITA for using her as bait to placate Paes. In the 2018 Asian Games, Paes had

pulled out of the continental event just two days before the start of tennis competition, saying he was not given a specialist player to pair with. AITA had nominated Bopanna and Divij Sharan as a team, leaving Paes with no option but to pair with one of the singles players in the squad. It will be Bopanna's last shot at winning an Olympic medal, having come close to a bronze medal with Sania Mirza in the mixed event of the 2016 Rio Games. In the singles, Sumit Nagal will need a good run at the French Open to boost his ranking. He is placed 94 as of Monday. In a draw of 64, the organisers will accept 56 direct entries and out of six ITF places, three men's quotas have been awarded to winners of continental events — Asian Games, African Games and Pan-American Games.



Nagal bows out of Geneva Open after loss to world number 19

PTI ■ GENEVA

India's top-ranked singles player Sumit Nagal made a first round exit from the Geneva Open after going down fighting against Argentina's Sebastian Baez. The world no.94 went down 6-7 (7) 3-6 to the Argentine, who is a clay court specialist, in a match that lasted one hour, 52-minutes here on Sunday. "Gutted with the loss today. But good preparation ahead of Roland Garros. Paris next," Nagal, who has qualified for the French Open, tweeted after the loss. Nagal started off brightly taking an early 4-1 lead over Baez. He also had a set point. But world no. 19 Baez, who has already won two titles on clay this season, showed his class to force a tiebreaker owing to his fantastic first serve performance. In the second set, Baez continued to bank on his superb first serve, and wrapped up the proceedings in 38 minutes.

Focus on Sindhu as she looks to end title drought at Malaysia Masters

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Back from a break, P V Sindhu will look to hit the right notes in her quest for some confidence-boosting wins ahead of Paris Olympics when she spearheads India's campaign in the Malaysia Masters badminton tournament starting here on Tuesday. Sindhu, a former world champion, returns to the international circuit after skipping the Uber Cup and Thailand Open, and she will aim to go deep in the women's singles draw of the BWF World Tour Super 500 event. The 28-year-old from Hyderabad hasn't been able to hit top form after recovering from a knee injury sustained in October last year. A silver and bronze-winner at the Olympics, Sindhu's return hasn't been smooth and she has endured a series of narrow losses. Sindhu has just two quarterfinal finishes to show in her six competitive appearances so far. The last title win for her came in the 2022 Singapore Open

though she did come close to claiming the Spain Masters last year when she reached the finals in Madrid. Sindhu, who had also suffered a stress fracture on her left ankle en route to the 2022 Commonwealth Games gold, will look to hit the ground running when she opens against Scotland's Kirsty Gilmour this week. Top stars such as An Se Young, Chen Yu Fei, Akane Yamaguchi or Carolina Marin are not participating this week and Sindhu will be desperate to test her preparation against the next generation players, who have troubled her recently. With a new set-up under mentor Prakash Padukone, Sindhu has shown glimpses of her menacing game but she hasn't been consistent with her shot-selection. Ashmita Chaliha, Aakarshi Kashyap and Malvika Bansod too will look to produce some good results after having been in the circuit for quite sometime now. Chaliha has played some quality matches against the likes of Han Yue and Aya



Ohori, both of whom she had pushed to three games recently. In men's singles, Kiran George is the lone Indian in fray and he will open against Japan's Takuma Obayashi. While Thailand Open champions Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty have opted out and it will be a chance for Krishna Prasad Garaga and Sai Pratheek K to show their prowess in men's doubles.

In mixed doubles, the husband-wife duo of B Sumeth Reddy and N Sikki Reddy, and Sathish Kumar Karunakaran and Aadya Variyath would be carrying India's hopes. Paralympics opens in 100 days; Paris organizers launching campaign to boost ticket sales Paris, (AP) With 100 days until the Paralympics begin, Paris organizers are delivering a message from the athletes in a

bid to boost ticket sales: I am not missing anything, except you. The countdown campaign for the August 28-September 8 Paralympic Games begins Monday. It features three Paralympic athletes, each of them alone in an empty stadium. The campaign slogan - "Il ne me manque rien, sauf vous" (I'm not missing anything, except you) - is a rallying call to get people to come along and

watch them compete. The French athletes featured in the campaign are Arnaud Assoumani, a long jump and triple jump specialist who won gold at the 2008 Games in Beijing; wheelchair tennis player Pauline Déroutède, and blind soccer player Gaël Rivière who was a European championship winner two years ago. He plays at club level for Bondy Cécifoot Club - in the same suburb where France star Kylian Mbappé grew up. National broadcaster France Télévisions will show the campaign in a bid to raise awareness and - ultimately - boost sales. So far, 900,000 of the 2.8 million tickets have been sold. A total of 4,400 athletes will take part in the Paralympics. Tickets are available from 15 euros (USD 16) for track and field sessions at Stade de France, wheelchair tennis at Roland Garros, or blind soccer at the foot of the Eiffel Tower. The finals cost from 25 (USD 27) euros and it costs 45 euros (USD 49) to watch the closing ceremony. Ticket sales could escalate once

posters start appearing around Paris, with organizers aiming to raise awareness and increase fan engagement and solidarity. There will be 651 posters dotted around the city, 972 on the subway and a further 2,520 on the sides of buses. On Tuesday, four Paralympic athletes will walk up the famed steps at the Cannes Film Festival along with Paris 2024 Olympic head Tony Estanguet. Of the tickets sold so far, organizers said 300,000 have been bought by the state and 150,000 by the International Olympic Committee and National Paralympic Committee. Organizers haven't released details for the amount of tickets sold for the opening ceremony, which takes place along a section of the famed Champs-Élysées. Paul McCartney has let the song "We All Stand Together" be used in a promotional film for the International Paralympic Committee. The Paralympics will have a record 164 broadcasters worldwide covering 549 events across 22 sports.

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