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All players set for penultimate battle

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Slogans ranging from sympathisers of Pakistan to changing the Constitution and appointing Amit Shah as a next Prime Minister to assault on Swati Maliwal to Adityanath vs Arvind Kejriwal dominated in the sixth phase of polling as campaigning ended on Thursday for May 25 polls for 58 Lok Sabha seats spread in six States and Union Territories. What makes this phase particularly interesting is that all seven seats in Delhi and all the 10 seats in Haryana will go to polls. Notably, States and UTs including Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha are likely to be voting under the hottest conditions ever for a Lok Sabha polls as temperatures may touch 46 degrees Celsius on that day which means heatwave to severe heatwave conditions are possible. A total of 889 candidates will be in the fray in the 58 Lok Sabha seats. Among the key contestants are Dharmendra Pradhan (BJP) from Sambalpur (Odisha), Manoj Tiwari (BJP) and Kanhaiya Kumar (Congress) from North East

Delhi, Bansuri Swaraj from New Delhi Maneka Gandhi (BJP) from Sultanpur (Uttar Pradesh), Mehbooba Mufti (PDP) from Anantnag-Rajouri (Jammu & Kashmir), Abhijit Gangopadhyay (BJP) from Tamruk (West Bengal), and BJP's Manohar Lal Khattar (Karnal, Haryana), Naveen Jindal (Kurukshehra) Raj Babbar (Gurugram) Dinesh Lal Yadav alias Nirahua (Azamgarh) and Rao Inderjit Singh (Gurugram). So far, polling has been completed in 428 constituencies across 25 States and Union Territories, with phase V witnessing a voter turnout of approximately 62.19 per cent. In the corresponding phase during the 2019 polls, a voter turnout of 64.16 per cent was recorded as 51 seats across seven states went to the polls. The Congress did not win even one of these 58 seats in the 2019 elections. In contrast, the BJP won 40, securing a vote share of more than 40 per cent on 47 seats in the last elections. This clearly shows, Congress doesn't have any strongholds in this phase. On the last day of campaigning, Prime Minister Narendra Modi

LOK SABHA ELECTION PHASE VI SEATS		
2024 LS voting concludes for States marked in red on May 25		
STATES	NO. OF SEATS	CONSTITUENCY
DELHI	7	Chandni Chowk, North East Delhi, East Delhi, New Delhi, North West Delhi, West Delhi, South Delhi
Uttar Pradesh	14	Sultanpur, Pratapgarh, Phulpur, Allahabad, Ambedkar Nagar, Shravasti, Domariyaganj, Basti, Sant Kabir Nagar, Lalganj, Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Machhlishahr, Bhadohi
JAMMU & KASHMIR	1	Anantnag-Rajouri
HARYANA	10	Ambala, Kurukshehra, Sirsa, Hisar, Karnal, Sonapat, Rohtak, Bhiwani-Mahendragarh, Gurgaon, Faridabad
Jharkhand	4	Dhanbad, Giridih, Jamshedpur, Ranchi
Bihar	8	Valmiki Nagar, Paschim Champaran, Purvi Champaran, Sheohar, Vaishali, Gopalganj (Sc), Siwan, Maharajganj
Odisha	6	Sambalpur, Keonjhar (ST), Dhenkanal, Cuttack, Puri, Bhubaneswar
West Bengal	8	Tamluk, Kanthi, Ghatil, Jhargram, Medinapore, Purulia, Bankura, Bishnupur

held a rally in Punjab and Haryana. He took a dig at the INDIA Bloc, saying the "cow hasn't given milk but the fight over ghee has started" as the

alliance is "talking about having five PMs in five years". Modi also asserted that till he is alive, no one can snatch the reservation for Dalits

and tribals. The day before, he referred to the Calcutta High Court's decision to strike down the OBC status granted to "77 classes" in West Bengal since 2010 to hit out at the INDIA Bloc, saying its "obsession with appeasement" has crossed every limit. The contest in the national Capital has become interesting as it is a direct fight between the BJP and INDIA Bloc parties — the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) after the release of Arvind Kejriwal on an interim bail for electoral campaigning. The Kejriwal-led AAP is contesting four seats, while the Congress has fielded candidates in three seats as per the seat-sharing agreement. The BJP, which won all seven seats of Delhi in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections, has dropped all except Manoj Tiwari. The BJP's poll campaign in Delhi saw Modi addressing two rallies besides canvassing by Union Ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadhari, Smriti Irani and Piyush Goyal and Chief Ministers of BJP-ruled States, including Yogi Adityanath (Uttar Pradesh), Pushkar Singh Dhama

(Uttarakhand) and Pramod Sawant (Goa). The INDIA Bloc is clearly counting on the sympathy wave following Kejriwal's arrest. The BJP's campaign, on the other hand, relies on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's development agenda while questioning the credentials of Kejriwal, the once anti-corruption crusader who is now named as accused in a money laundering case. At the peak of campaigning in Odisha, BJP's Puri candidate Sambit Patra kicked up a row with his comment that "Lord Jagannath is a devotee of Modi". Patra later clarified that his remark was inadvertently made and expressed regret. In Jammu and Kashmir, polling in four of the five parliamentary seats having ended peacefully, the focus has now shifted to the reshaped Anantnag-Rajouri constituency which witnessed four terror attacks in the last 30 days. The constituency spread on either side of the mighty Pir Panjal was originally scheduled to go to polls on May 7 but it was deferred to May 25 due to adverse weather conditions on the request of several parties, including the BJP, Apni party

and the DPAP. Mehbooba faces a tough challenge from National Conference candidate and influential Gujar leader Mian Altaf and the Apni Party's Zafar Iqbal Khan Manhas, who has the BJP's backing. Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) leader Mohamad Saleem Parry In UP, Sultanpur which is a seat to watch, next door to Amethi, another Gandhi, Maneka Gandhi of the BJP, is locked in a keen contest with her Samajwadi Party rival. Mayawati-led BSP's party nominee Udraj Verma, who hails from OBC Kurmi caste, is causing trouble to the BJP as well as the SP candidates but Akhilesh Yadav-headed SP candidate Ram Bhual Nishad is at a greater loss. Verma threatens to divide the OBC votes of the SP. Sultanpur bifurcated from Amethi in 2010. Varun Gandhi was its first MP while Maneka swapped seats with him in 2019 and is contesting for the second consecutive time. Varun joined the campaigning for her mother on Thursday. The Lok Sabha seat of Azamgarh, a stronghold of the SP with a sizeable Muslim-Yadav electorate, is witnessing Dinesh Lal Yadav 'Nirahua'

of the BJP taking on former Lok Sabha MP Dharmendra Yadav for the SP. In Haryana, the BJP is contesting all 10 seats on its own. While the Congress is fighting on nine seats, the AAP is fighting on the lone seat of Kurukshehra. The high-pitched campaigning, which saw the presence of top leaders including Modi, BJP chief J P Nadda, Union Ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadhari, Chief Ministers of BJP-ruled States, Congress leaders Rahul, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Kejriwal and BSP leader Mayawati. Haryana is witnessing a direct fight between the ruling BJP and opposition Congress on most seats. The key candidates are Manohar Lal Khattar from the Karnal seat whereas it has gone for industrialist Naveen Jindal to battle it out in Kurukshehra. The Congress, on the other hand, has hedged its bets on Raj Babbar against Union Minister and sitting MP Rao Inderjit Singh in Gurugram. From Hisar, Power Minister Ranjit Singh Chautala, an Independent MLA who joined the BJP ahead of polls, is contesting against two members of the Chautala clan — JJP's Naina Chautala and INLD's Sunaina Chautala.

Nehru's aura bubble burst in 1962: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday launched a scathing attack on Congress and said China thrashed India when the bubble of Pandit Nehru's aura burst in 1962. He also claimed that the INDIA Bloc is talking about having five PMs over the next five years and said the fight over 'ghee' has broken out in the alliance, even before the cow has given milk. Addressing an election rally in Bhiwani, Haryana, Modi said, "1962 mein, pandit Nehru ke aura ka gubbara jo phoot gaya, China ke haathon jo hamari pitayi hui", they (Congress) held our military responsible for that defeat. That family even today keeps looking for opportunities to demean our military. And in a sense of revenge, they have thrown Rs 500 and said OROP (One Rank One Pension) will be done. Modi has said what it means to implement OROP..." Modi also said the INDIA Bloc is talking about having five PMs over the next five years and said the fight over 'ghee' has broken out in the alliance, even before the cow has given milk. Hours before campaigning for the sixth round of the seven-phase Lok Sabha polls came to an end, Modi asserted that till he is alive, no one can snatch the reservation for Dalits and tribals. All ten Lok Sabha seats in Haryana will go to polls on May 25. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the BJP had secured all 10 seats. In this election, "you will not only choose the country's PM but also decide the country's future", the PM told the gathering. "On one hand is your tried and tested 'sevak' Modi. Who is on the other side, one does not know," he said, targeting the INDIA Bloc that has as its constituents Opposition parties, including the Congress, Aam Aadmi Party, Trinamool Congress and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.



The INDIA Bloc is "extremely communal, casteist and nepotist", he said while alleging that when the Congress was in power, it did not allow construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Recalling his days working for the BJP in the State in the mid-1990s, Modi said, "Haryana has showered a lot of love on me, I have deep relations with you." "It is my guarantee that we will not let Haryana's development stop," he said while canvassing for BJP's Bhiwani-Mahendragarh Lok Sabha seat candidate Dharambir Singh. Modi also said in the last 10 years, "we have worked hard to wash off the sins of the Congress". The Prime Minister also targeted the INDIA Bloc, saying it has already started making grounds for whom to blame for their defeat. Campaigning ended on Thursday in the State for Lok Sabha polls and Karnal Assembly bypoll, in which political prestige of Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, his predecessor M L Khattar, two Union Ministers and two Congress stalwarts including Kumari Selja is at stake. The high-pitched campaigning, which saw the presence of top leaders including Modi, BJP chief J P Nadda, Union Ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadhari, chief ministers of BJP-ruled States,

Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and BSP leader Mayawati, came to an end at 6 pm. As many as 223 candidates, including 16 women, are left in the contest for 10 parliamentary seats in the State. Two Union Ministers - Rao Inderjit Singh and Krishan Pal Gurjar -- and Congress heavyweight Deepender Singh Hooda are among the contestants. There are nine candidates in the fray for Karnal assembly bypoll necessitated after Khattar's resignation as MLA. There are a total 2,00,76,768 registered voters in the state, which include 94,23,956 women and 467 transgender voters, officials said. Meanwhile, Modi on Thursday launched a fierce attack on ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab, saying that drug trade is flourishing in the state and the government is in debt. Addressing his first election rally in the State for the seventh phase of Lok Sabha polls on June 1, Modi said Punjab has given leadership to the country in various sectors - from agriculture to industry. He then attacked the AAP, saying industries are now leaving Punjab while drug trade is growing. "The entire Government is running on debt." The Government writ does not run here while sand and drug mafia, and shooter gangs' rule, Modi said.

Cong, SP vote bank made up of intruders: Shah

PNS | Lucknow

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, during a poll meeting in Siddharthnagar, made bold predictions about the Bharatiya Janata Party's performance in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, claiming that the party has already won 310 seats. Speaking in support of Jagdambika Pal, the BJP candidate from Domariyaganj, Shah asserted that the BJP had secured over 310 seats in the first five rounds of polling, while the Congress would struggle to win even 40 seats. "The INDI Alliance has been wiped out in the first five phases. I am telling you, this time Congress is not even getting 40 seats, and Akhilesh Yadav will not even get four seats," Shah declared. Addressing the issue of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), Shah reaffirmed BJP's stance on the territory. "Leaders of Pakistan say that PoK is theirs. Congress leaders also say that they (Pakistan) have an atom bomb. The BJP people are not scared of atom bombs. PoK is and will remain part of India, and we will take it back," he said. Shah accused the opposition of trying to end reservations for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled

Tribes and Other Backward Classes. "Rahul Baba and Akhilesh Yadav, you have been blinded by vote bank politics. We will end reservation on the basis of religion and give it back to the SC, ST and OBCs," he asserted. He also criticised the INDIA bloc for lacking a clear prime ministerial candidate, claiming the alliance would have five potential prime ministers if they come to power. "Can the country run like this?" he questioned. Shah further alleged that Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav have planned vacations abroad after the election results. "On the one hand, there is Rahul Gandhi who leaves for Italy, Thailand and Bangkok, and on the other hand, there is Narendra Modi who has not taken any leave for 23 years and even spends his Diwali with soldiers on the border," he said. Highlighting the achievements of the BJP, Shah pointed out the implementation of the One Rank-One Pension (OROP) scheme for retired army personnel and expressed confidence that India would become the third-largest economy during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third term. Addressing a rally in Ambedkar Nagar, where he sought votes for party candi-



date Ritesh Pandey, Shah said, Akhilesh Yadav and Rahul Gandhi did not attend the consecration ceremony of Ram temple because they were scared of losing their vote bank. "You know who their vote bank is? I'll tell you. Their vote bank is made up of intruders. They did not go for the fear of losing them. They jeopardised the safety of the country," In another rally in Sant Kabir Nagar, Shah named several leaders from the opposition

parties and accused them of nepotism. "Lalu Prasad Yadav wants to make his son the chief minister, Uddhav Thackeray wants to make his son the chief minister, Sharad Pawar wants to make his daughter the chief minister, Stalin wants to make his son the chief minister, Mamata Banerjee wants to make her nephew the chief minister, and Sonia Gandhi wants to make her son Rahul Gandhi the prime minister," he

said, adding, someone who works for his family is not going to work for a constituency. In Khalilabad of Sant Kabir Nagar, where Shah addressed a gathering campaigning for the party's Praveen Kumar Nishad, who is contesting on a NISHAD Party ticket, a partner of NDA, Shah accused the opposition of stalling the construction of Ram temple for over 70 years and said the temple could only be built because of Modi. "This election is between the one who constructed Ram temple and those who opened fire on Ram bhakts," he said. On the abolition of Article 370 in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, he said, "Article 370 which was protected by the Congress and Samajwadi Party was removed by Narendra Modi in 2019 and Kashmir was made a part of India forever. No one dares to explode bombs there." Shah alleged that in the erstwhile SP government "goondaraj" was rampant in Uttar Pradesh, and it was Yogi Adityanath, the current chief minister, who set all goons right. Polling in Domariyaganj, Sant Kabir Nagar, and Ambedkar Nagar will be held in the sixth phase of ongoing Lok Sabha polls on Saturday.

A typical repairman as renovation Ambassador

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

When N Rangaswamy, the 73-year-old Chief Minister of Puducherry was handed over a pearl white Ambassador car on Tuesday, he was left speechless. The soft-spoken Chief Minister could not believe that it was the same 1995 model Ambassador which he had entrusted to Thanjaneyan, a car mechanic at Thoothukkudi for restoration. This car had seen many summers and winters and was as good as scrap when Thanjaneyan asked him permission to restore the vehicle to its original form. Rangaswamy, who had a sentimental attachment to the car, did not think twice and asked Thanjaneyan to go ahead. The Chief Minister always preferred the battered and bruised old Amby for his personal use. Though Hindustan Motors, the

company that manufactured the car had stopped production in 2014 because of mounting losses and other factors, the passion for Ambassador remained intact. For two years, Thanjaneyan worked on the car in his small workshop and once it was completed, the restored Ambassador resembled a showroom model in all respects. It is living up to the catchword 'the Car with Plenty of Drive', coined by the manufacturer," said Dr Anjan Chatterjee, a lawyer-turned-car lover. Dr Chatterjee is an authority on the 'horoscope' of the Ambassador, which extends from the genesis till the car took the last bow. "It was exciting work because it is an Ambassador car. Restoring and maintaining the Amby is an intoxicating experience," said Thanjaneyan, an expert in restoring even the previous models of



Ambassador like the Morris, Vauxhall, Land Master and Baby Hindustan. The white Amby that was lying in the backyard of N Rangaswamy's residence has been brought to the portico of the house. One of the slogans used to promote the Ambassador and caught the national attention was "ideal at 200 potholes per hour". There were no national corridors or expressways in the country till former Prime

Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee launched the six-lane highway mission in 1998 and which was pursued by the Narendra Modi government since 2014. Dr Chatterjee lists many reasons for the shut down of the Ambassador plant in Hooghly district of West Bengal. "Militant trade unions and a management without any clue of what is happening around were the factors that led to the untimely demise of

the car manufacturer," he said. Doraiswamy Naveen, an avid car collector said he could not find any owners who made complaints about the Ambassadors. "There was a time when the choice of cars were restricted to Ambassador and Premier Padmini (owned by Walchand family). The liberalisation saw the gradual opening of the car sector to foreign investors and technology and this resulted in Ambassador making way for the newcomers," said Naveen who himself is busy restoring a Mark II Ambassador owned by his grandfather. Dr Chatterjee said it was nice to see car enthusiasts reviving their passion for older cars like Ambys. "Ambassador tops the list as the most desired classic for their garage. It is beautiful to see owners spending much more than the market value of an Ambassador just to restore the carto its glory," he said.

Campaigning ends for sixth phase polls in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Campaigning in 14 Lok Sabha constituencies of Uttar Pradesh that go to polls in the sixth phase ended on Thursday. The polling in these constituencies will be held on May 25. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has meticulously planned the polling schedule to ensure a smooth and efficient electoral process. This phase holds immense significance, as it not only marks another step in the democratic process but also shapes the political landscape of the most populous state of the country.

Voting on May 25 will take place in Sultanpur, Pratapgarh, Phulpur, Allahabad, Ambedkar Nagar, Shravasti, Domariyaganj, Basti, Sant Kabir Nagar, Lalgaon (SC), Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Machhlishahr (SC) and Bhadohi. These constituencies serve as battlegrounds where candidates from different political parties vie for victory, aiming to secure their foothold in the state's political landscape. Polling for the by-election to Gaisri assembly seat in Balrampur district will also be held on May 25 along with the Lok Sabha election. The Bharatiya Janata Party, in

the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, had won 10 out of these 14 constituencies. The Bahujan Samaj Party had won three while the Samajwadi Party had won the Azamgarh seat, from where the Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav was the candidate. He had resigned this seat after his election to state assembly in March 2022 and in the ensuing by-election to Azamgarh Lok Sabha seat, the BJP had wrested this seat from SP in June 2022. The ruling BJP-led National Democratic Alliance and the INDIA Bloc of the opposition have deployed their might in the sixth phase of elections where the prominent

leaders from both the alliances are in the fray. In Sultanpur, the electoral contest features eight-term MP Maneka Gandhi from the BJP, Bhim Nishad representing the SP, and Udraj Verma. Pratapgarh witnesses a clash between Sangam Lal Gupta of the BJP and SP Singh Patel of the SP. Allahabad witnesses a battle between Neeraj Tripathi of the BJP and Ujjwal Raman Singh of the Congress. Ambedkar Nagar presents a contest between Ritesh Pandey of the BJP and Lalji Verma from the SP. Domariyaganj sees a fierce contest between Jagdambika Pal representing

the BJP and Khwaja Shamsuddin of the BSP. Basti is the arena for Harish Dwivedi of the BJP and Ram Prasad Chaudhary of the SP. In Lalgaon, Neelam Sonkar from the BJP is pitted against Daroga Saroj of the SP. Azamgarh sets the stage for a fight between Dinesh Lal Yadav 'Nirahua' of the BJP and Dharmendra Yadav from the SP. In Jaunpur Lok Sabha constituency, Kripashankar Singh of the BJP is pitted against Babu Singh Kushwaha of SP and Shyam Singh Yadav of BSP. In the Bhadohi Lok Sabha constituency, Vinod Kumar Bind from the BJP is facing Lalitesh

Pati Tripathi of the All India Trinamool Congress, supported by the INDIA Bloc. These electoral matchups showcase the diverse political landscape and the fervour of democracy in Uttar Pradesh. According to Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa, a total 162 candidates including 146 men and 16 women are in fray in the Lok Sabha polls while seven candidates are contesting in the Gaisari assembly seat. After the end of campaign, all outside district workers of the political parties will not be allowed in the respective districts where polling is to be held, he said.



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath offers prayers at Maa Pateshwari temple in Balrampur. PTI

Cong pins hope on Allahabad, Bansgaon

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In the remaining sixth and seventh phases of Lok Sabha elections, Congress hopes are pinned on Allahabad and Bansgaon parliamentary constituencies. In both the phases, there is a direct contest between the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party in Allahabad, Bansgaon, Deoria and Maharajganj. In the fight between two political families in Allahabad, Congress is trying to make a comeback after 40 years. Film star Amitabh Bachchan won the last election for Congress in 1984 from this Lok Sabha seat. Since then Congress has not been able to win the Lok Sabha election from Allahabad. At the same time, Congress has high hopes from former minister Sadal Prasad who left the Bahujan Samaj Party and joined Congress to contest from Bansgaon Lok Sabha constituency. In Uttar Pradesh, Congress is contesting Lok Sabha elec-

tions on 17 seats in alliance with Samajwadi Party. Elections have been held in Saharanpur, Amroha, Mathura, Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr, Fatehpur Sikri, Sitapur, Kanpur, Rae Bareilly, Amethi, Barabanki and Jhansi in five phases. In the sixth phase, Congress is contesting only the Allahabad seat. In the seventh phase, elections will be held in Bansgaon, Deoria, Maharajganj and Varanasi. This time, there is a direct fight between two political families in Allahabad. Congress has fielded Ujjwal Raman Singh, son of former minister and MP and one of the founding members of SP, Reoti Raman Singh. BJP has fielded Neeraj Tripathi, son of former governor and veteran BJP leader Keshari Nath Tripathi. Congress has not been able to win the Allahabad seat since 1984. With the help of SP, Congress is hoping to wrest this seat after 40 years. All eyes are on the electoral battle to be held this time in

Allahabad, which has been the seat of veterans like former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, former Chief Minister Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna, Jamshwar Mishra, former Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh and Murli Manohar Joshi. In the seventh phase, Congress eyes are fixed on the direct fight with BJP in Bansgaon. However, BJP holds all the five assembly segments of this parliamentary constituency, Chauri-Chaura, Bansgaon, Chillupar, Rudrapur and Barhaj. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has a good influence on this seat connected to Gorakhpur and Deoria. This time, former minister Sadal Prasad, who left BSP, is contesting on the ticket of Congress, while Kamlesh Paswan, who won the Lok Sabha elections thrice from here, has once again become the BJP candidate. Along with Sadal Prasad, Kamlesh Paswan's vote percentage is also increasing in this seat. In 2014, Sadal Prasad,

who contested on BSP ticket, got 26.02 per cent votes while Kamlesh Paswan got 47.61 per cent votes. In 2019, Sadal polled 40.57 per cent votes and Kamlesh Paswan got 56.41 per cent votes. In this seat also, Congress is trying to sail its electoral boat with the help of SP. That is why Akhilesh Yadav's election campaigning programmes are being decided along with Rahul Gandhi. UP Congress president and former minister Ajay Rai is contesting against Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Varanasi, the most high-profile constituency of the state. BJP's vote percentage on this seat has been increasing continuously since the 2009 election. BJP got 30.52 per cent votes in 2009, 56.37 per cent in 2014 and 63.62 per cent in 2019, while Congress got 9.98 per cent votes in 2009, 7.34 per cent in 2014 and 14.38 per cent in 2019. There is a fight between Congress and BJP to increase the vote percentage on this seat. Former MLA Akhilesh Pratap Singh, who is

known as a big face of Congress in Deoria, is pitted against BJP's Shashank Mani Tripathi. Shashank Mani, who studied from IIT-Delhi and is famous as an social entrepreneur and writer as well as a politician. BJP's continuously increasing vote percentage in Deoria is a big challenge for Akhilesh. BJP got 51.07 per cent votes in 2014 and 57.19 per cent in 2019, while Congress got only 3.88 per cent votes in 2014 and 5.03 per cent in 2019. BSP got 23.77 per cent votes in 2014 and 32.57 per cent in 2019. In Maharajganj, Congress' Virendra Chaudhary is pitted against six-time MP and Union minister of state Pankaj Chaudhary from BJP. Pankaj Chaudhary got 44.65 per cent votes and 59.20 per cent votes in 2014 and 2019 respectively. Congress won this seat in 2009. Pankaj Chaudhary had won the election from this seat even during the Congress wave. Therefore, the contest here will not be easy for the Congress.

BJP will lose all 80 LS seats in UP: Akhilesh

PNS ■ PRATAPGARH

Samajwadi Party president and former chief minister of UP, Akhilesh Yadav, claimed on Thursday that the National Democratic Alliance would lose all the 80 Lok Sabha seats in the state, including Varanasi. "The BJP government has sold railways, stations, airplanes, platforms, ended all the jobs and started contractual recruitment. People were ruined by demonetisation. Now the public will give a befitting reply to the BJP," he said. The BJP government is ruining the future of the youth. Treatment is not being done in hospitals. There is no such district hospital in the state where the poor can get free treatment. Earlier the ambulance was bad, BJP has ruined the hospital itself," he said. He said the over 140 crore population of the country would see that the Bharatiya Janata

Party-led NDA loses 400 seats to the INDIA Bloc and would ensure that the remaining 143 seats also become difficult for them. The people's anger against the ruling party has been increasing and by the seventh phase of polling in UP, it will be at its peak (saatwen aasmaan par), Yadav said, while addressing a rally in Pratapgarh in favour of SP candidate SP Patel. "Earlier, I had said the BJP is heading to lose all seats except for the one of 'Kyoto wale' (Modi) Varanasi seat. But with time it seems that this seat is also slipping out of their hands and the saffron party will taste defeat in all the 80 seats in UP," Akhilesh Yadav said. His "Kyoto wale" remark was in reference to a memorandum of understanding signed between India and Japan in the presence of Prime Minister Modi and his then Japanese counterpart late Shinzo Abe at Osaka in 2014 to turn Varanasi into a 'smart city' with the help from Kyoto.

Yadav said the SP and the Congress had become 11 from one and one, causing tension for the "Delhi wale" (Modi government at the Centre). Apparently replying to Prime Minister Modi who referred to Akhilesh Yadav and Rahul Gandhi as 'shehzade' (princes), the SP president said, "We will give them 'sheh' and 'maat' (check and mate, vocabulary used in chess for defeat)." A huge crowd had gathered for the rally in the GIC grounds and many youths were seen hanging from the bamboo of the tent. Yadav jokingly said these youths had all the capability to clear the physical test and qualify for jobs in the armed forces. He reiterated the future INDIA Bloc government's commitment to scrap the four-year Agniveer job scheme and instead give a permanent job in the Army with the provision of pension.

Varun seeks vote for Maneka Gandhi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Bharatiya Janata Party leader Varun Gandhi held an election rally on Thursday to support his mother, Maneka Gandhi, the BJP candidate from the Sultanpur constituency. The constituency is set to vote on May 25 during the sixth phase of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. In his speech, Varun Gandhi emphasised the special bond between Maneka Gandhi and the people of Sultanpur, stating, "There is only one constituency in the country where its people do not call their MP 'Sansad' but 'Maa'... I am here not just to gather support for my mother but the mother of Sultanpur." While highlighting Maneka Gandhi's achievements, Varun Gandhi notably avoided mentioning Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. He refrained from discussing the BJP's accomplishments or explicitly asking for votes for the party. Instead he urged, "Please vote for Maa". Varun Gandhi's speeches underscored the unparalleled power of a mother. "A mother holds the power equal to that



of the divine. Everyone may leave your side, but a mother never does. Today, I am here to seek support for my mother," he stated. He also highlighted the unique respect the people of Sultanpur have for Maneka Gandhi, noting, "In Sultanpur, people refer to my mother as 'Mataji'. Commenting on the high-profile nature of the election, he said, "In many places, charis-

matic figures are contesting the elections." Varun Gandhi's campaign aimed to garner local support by emphasising the personal bond between Maneka Gandhi and the constituents of Sultanpur. Maneka Gandhi expressed confidence in her son's efforts, stating that Varun's campaign would bolster her chances of increasing her winning margin.

The Sultanpur Lok Sabha seat holds significant importance, being situated next to Amethi, with the BJP's Gandhi candidate facing a tough battle against the Samajwadi Party's Ram Bhul Nishad and the Bahujan Samaj Party's Udraj Verma, who could split the Other Backward Classes vote traditionally aligned with the SP. Maneka Gandhi is contesting

from Sultanpur for the second consecutive time, having previously won with a margin of approximately 14,000 votes. This election, she aims for a more decisive victory. Despite limited campaign support from top BJP leaders, with only Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath campaigning for her, the BJP is hopeful of strong backing from the local fishermen community, which has around two lakh voters. This optimism is bolstered by their leader, Sanjay Nishad, head of the NISHAD Party, who is a minister in the Yogi Adityanath government. The electoral history of Sultanpur is varied, with no single party maintaining consistent dominance. Since independence, the Congress has won this Lok Sabha seat eight times, the BSP twice, and the BJP four times. Nearby constituencies also feature significant electoral battles. Rahul Gandhi is contesting from Rae Bareilly, while in Amethi, Nehru-Gandhi family loyalist KL Sharma is challenging Smriti Irani. As the campaign ended on Thursday, the results in Sultanpur would be closely watched, given the high stakes and the competitive nature of the race.

Brahmins harassed under BJP govt in UP: Mayawati

PTI ■ MIRZAPUR

Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Thursday claimed that the condition of poor people belonging to the upper castes was not good and Brahmins in particular were being harassed under the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh. Addressing an election rally in Mirzapur in support of BSP candidate Manish Tiwari, Mayawati said atrocities being committed against minorities under the guise of Hindutva have peaked in the state. Mayawati said the BJP was following wrong policies just like the Congress and expressed confidence that due to the casteist, capitalist, and communal policies of the BJP and its allies, the NDA won't be able to retain power at the Centre, provided the election is fair and the voting machines are not tampered with. "Atrocities against minorities under the guise of Hindutva have reached their peak. Along with this, the condition of poor people belonging to upper castes is also not very good. Especially, the Brahmin community is being harassed on a large scale in the entire state," Mayawati said. "Due to the wrong policies of the BJP government, the country's economy is being adversely affected. Poverty, unemployment and inflation are continuously increasing while corruption has not ended yet," she added. She urged the people to not let the BJP or the Congress win the Lok Sabha elections, asserting that if the BSP is voted to power, it would



ensure welfare for all. "If the BSP comes to power at the Centre, it will work on the policy of 'Sarvajam Hitaya, Sarvajam Sukhaya' (welfare for all). By doing this, the unfulfilled dream of BSP founder Kanshi Ram ji can be fulfilled," she said. Referring to the central government's free ration scheme, Mayawati said, "The little free ration being given to you will not benefit you permanently. I want to tell you that the ration given to you for free does not come from the pockets of the BJP and the RSS (Rashtriya Swamsevaksangh) people but from your tax money." Polling in Mirzapur will be held in phase seven on June 1.

Caste-based alliances clash in high-stake polls in Purvanchal

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

As the election momentum moves to eastern Uttar Pradesh, also known as Purvanchal, the strength of alliances is set to be tested. Both the INDI Alliance and the National Democratic Alliance are going all out to secure a win in this critical region. Key regional allies such as the Suheeldev Bharatiya Samaj Party, NISHAD Party and Apna Dal (Sonelal), crucial components of the NDA, are under pressure to deliver. These parties, representing various communities, assert their influence across the state. "The Bharatiya Janata Party has skillfully crafted a social engineering umbrella, giving representation to leaders of these caste groups in both Central and state governments. Its alliance with Rajbhar, Kurmi and Nishad communities, as well as their sub-castes, is stronger compared to 2019," says Nomita P Kumar of the Giri Institute of

Development Studies. NISHAD Party's president Sanjay Nishad claims to represent about 54 per cent of the marginalised population, spanning from Kanpur and Kannauj to Gorakhpur and Ghazipur. Communities such as Sachan, Verma, Katiyar and Kurmi hold significant sway within this demographic. To manage coalition dynamics, the BJP recently allocated a legislative council seat to Om Prakash Rajbhar and fielded him from the Ghosi Lok Sabha constituency, also nominating his son Arvind Rajbhar. Sanjay Nishad, a cabinet minister, has his son contesting from Sant Kabir Nagar constituency, with another son holding a legislative assembly position. Apna Dal (S) leader Anupriya Patel secured a Central ministry while her husband, Ashish Patel became a cabinet minister in UP. The BJP has allocated a larger share of seats to Apna Dal (S) compared to other allies, including Mirzapur and Robertsganj. Anupriya Patel's previous victories in these

constituencies have significantly bolstered the BJP's position in Purvanchal, Bundelkhand and Rohilkhand regions. The INDIA Bloc, comprising Samajwadi Party, Congress, and Trinamool Congress, faces significant challenges. The Mahan Dal, previously aligned with the INDIA Bloc, parted ways after SP gave a ticket to tainted Babu Ram Kushwaha from Jaunpur. NDA'S TARGETED CAMPAIGNS: The NDA has launched targeted campaigns across Purvanchal. The BJP has initiated efforts such as the women's conference in Varanasi and a new voter outreach model. The party has compiled block-wise lists of beneficiaries of government schemes like Jal Jeevan Mission, housing, and sanitation projects to engage with voters and highlight the benefits delivered by the NDA government. Each assembly constituency has been divided into three to four segments, with senior



Maneka Gandhi



Laliteshpati Tripathi



Dharmendra Yadav



Ujjwal Raman Singh

leaders conducting meetings in each segment. Specialised group meetings are also being held with professionals such as doctors, engineers, textile traders and pharmacists. Leaders in these sectors are tasked with engaging their peers to garner support. A significant focus has been placed on backward classes. BJP's Backward Class Kashi region general secretary Subhash Kushwaha stated that Yadav leaders from Etawah, Etah, Farrukhabad and Mainpur have been deployed in Varanasi and surrounding areas. Similarly, in regions dominated by the Nishad community, leaders from this community are spearheading the campaign. INDIA BLOC'S COUNTER STRATEGY: The INDIA Bloc is adopting a meticulous approach on the 27 seats. Congress and SP have strategically placed office-bearers of their frontal organisations in these constituencies. A dedicated team monitors BJP's public meetings and prepares

responses for their leaders. Congress has applied the Rae Bareilly-Amethi model, dividing assembly constituencies into sectors and assigning leaders of the predominant community to manage each booth. Both Congress and SP are emphasising leadership from castes beyond Yadav and Muslims to diversify their appeal. Congress state in-charge Avinash Pandey is overseeing the Brahmin-dominated areas, coordinating meetings between SP and Congress leaders during the day and hosting night chaupals. Dr Rajpal Kashyap, state president of SP Backward Class Cell, is engaged with the Nishad, Kashyap, and Bind communities, highlighting SP's strategic placement of five candidates from the Nishad community. HIGH-PROFILE CONTENDERS: This electoral phase sees many prominent figures contesting from 14 constituencies in the sixth phase and 13 in the seventh phase. Among them are Maneka Gandhi from

Sultanpur, Dharmendra Yadav from Azamgarh, Laliteshpati Tripathi of Trinamool Congress from Bhadohi, Ujjwal Raman Singh from Allahabad, and former Maharashtra home minister Kripashankar Singh from Jaunpur. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UP Congress president Arvind Rai are vying for Varanasi, while Apna Dal's Anupriya Patel is contesting from Mirzapur, and SBSP's Arvind Rajbhar from Ghosi. The NISHAD Party also holds significant influence in this region. "As Purvanchal heads into the crucial sixth phase of elections, the political stakes are higher than ever. With alliances being tested and every party deploying its top strategies and candidates, the outcome here will play a decisive role in the overall electoral results. Both the NDA and INDIA Bloc are leaving no stone unturned to secure a win in this politically vital region," said Ramesh Kumar Singh, a local journalist in Varanasi.

LS polls: Phase V turnout 62.2 per cent, says EC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

The voter turnout in the fifth phase of Lok Sabha polls held on May 20 has now climbed to 62.2 per cent, the Election Commission (EC) said on Thursday with women outnumbering men.

According to an EC statement, 61.48 per cent of the registered male voters turned up at the polling stations as compared to 63 per cent of female electors.

In phase 5, 49 seats across six states and two union territories went for polling where over 8.95 crore people, including 4.69 crore men, 4.26 crore women and 5409 third gender were eligible to vote.

The participation of women in voting was higher as compared to men in Bihar, Jharkhand, Ladakh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh. The male-female turnout gap was wide in Bihar and Jharkhand. While in Bihar, the male turnout was 52.42 per cent, the female turnout was 61.58 per cent.

Similarly, in Jharkhand, the male turnout was registered at 58.08 per cent, while the female turnout was 68.65 per cent.

A maximum of 38.22 per cent of voters registered in the third gender category turned out to



vote in West Bengal.

The poll body noted that repolls at two polling stations in the Kandhamal parliamentary constituency in Odisha will be concluded on Thursday and the figures "may" change accordingly, once the data is updated for post-repoll.

In the corresponding phase in the 2019 polls, the turnout was registered at 64.16 per cent when 51 seats across seven states went to polls.

According to the Election Commission, the voter turnout in the fourth phase stood at 69.16 per cent, 3.65 percentage points higher than the corresponding phase in the 2019 parliamentary elections.

The voter turnout figure for

the third phase of polling in the Lok Sabha elections was 65.68 per cent. In the third phase of the 2019 elections, the turnout was 68.4 per cent.

In the second phase of the 2024 elections, the turnout was recorded at 66.71 per cent as against 69.64 per cent in the second phase of the 2019 polls.

In the first phase of the ongoing general elections, a 66.14 per cent turnout was recorded. In the 2019 polls, the turnout in the first phase was 69.43 per cent. The poll panel has said the final turnout will only be available after the results, with the counting of postal ballots and its addition to the total voting percentage.

BJP again hits at INDIA Bloc over quota, appeasement politics

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

The BJP on Thursday here launched a fresh attack on the INDIA Bloc on the issue of reservation, accusing the Opposition grouping of indulging in appeasement politics, and said the people of the country will give them a fitting reply in the Lok Sabha polls.

The BJP's charge came a day after West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee said she will not accept a Calcutta High Court order that scrapped the OBC status of several classes granted in the state since 2010, and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi claimed the system is heavily aligned against lower castes and his party aims to fix this.

Latching on to their comments, senior BJP leader Shivraj Singh Chouhan said, "Appeasement is the dose and diet of parties like the Congress and the TMC. Without this, they cannot survive even a day."

The former Madhya Pradesh chief minister alleged after coming at the helm in West Bengal, Banerjee pursued vote bank politics and gave OBC certificates to a number of castes and the beneficiaries included Muslims, Bangladeshis and Rohingyas. "The Calcutta High Court's decision in the matter that came on Wednesday was a



tight slap on Banerjee's vote bank politics," he told a press conference at the party headquarters here.

The Calcutta High Court on Wednesday struck down as illegal the OBC status of several classes in West Bengal granted since 2010. The court observed that the inclusion of 77 classes of Muslims in the list was to "treat them as vote bank".

Reacting sharply, Banerjee asserted she "will not accept" the order and challenge it in a higher court. Chouhan slammed the West Bengal chief minister for her refusal to accept the High Court's order and termed her remarks an insult to the Constitution. "What does Mamata

Banerjee think of herself? Is she above the Constitution? This is the height of arrogance and anarchy," he charged and said the TMC chief has no right to continue holding the post of chief minister who provided reservation on the basis of religion in violation of the Constitution.

On Rahul Gandhi's statement, Chouhan asserted the BJP has been saying for several years that the Congress is anti-poor, anti-Dalit, anti-tribal and anti-backward classes. "Rahul Gandhi accepted this truth yesterday."

Addressing an event in Panchkula on Wednesday, Rahul Gandhi had said the system is heavily aligned

against lower castes and that he knows the system from inside as his grandmother and father were prime ministers and later he used to visit the PM's house when Manmohan Singh lived there. The Congress leader claimed that the country's 90 per cent population including the Dalits, OBCs, tribal communities and the minorities does not have representation in the country's narrative and power structure, and said his party aims to ensure their participation in the country's progress.

"The Congress has always snatched away the rights of the Dalits, OBCs and tribals. The Congress-ruled states including Andhra Pradesh

and Karnataka have committed the crime and sin of robbing the rights of OBC by providing reservation to minorities from their shares," Chouhan charged.

He alleged that while the Congress did not give Constitutional status to the OBC Commission for about 40 years, its government committed the "sin" of ending the reservation for Dalits, OBCs and tribals in the educational institutions like the Aligarh Muslim University in Uttar Pradesh and Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi.

"Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar once said at Rally in Punjab that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru did not do anything for Dalits and backwards. Such has been the mindset of the Congress since the beginning," Chouhan charged.

The BJP leader alleged that the Congress and other constituents of the INDIA bloc have been engaged in taking away the rights of Dalits, backwards and tribals while pursuing politics of appeasement. "The BJP will not allow this conspiracy to go on. People are seeing the truth as the INDI alliance's policy of appeasement stands exposed. Now people will reply to it. The BJP will form its government by winning 370 seats on its own and with the NDA (getting more than 400 seats in the Lok Sabha polls)," he added.

Return immediately or face my wrath, Deve Gowda issues warning to Revanna

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI/BENGALURU

Janata Dal Secular (JDS) supremo H D Deve Gowda on Thursday issued a stern warning to his grandson Prajwal Revanna, asking him to return to India, surrender to the police or face his wrath. He also said he should be given the harshest punishment if the accusations against him turn out to be true.

The former Prime Minister took to X (formerly Twitter) and posted a letter to Prajwal and captioned it saying "I have issued a warning to @iPrajwalRevanna to return immediately from wherever he is and subject himself to the legal process. He should not test my patience any further." In a related development, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is processing a request of the Karnataka government seeking cancellation of the diplomatic passport of suspended Janata Dal (Secular) MP Revanna, who is accused of sexually harassing several women. Official sources said the MEA

has received a letter from the Karnataka government seeking revocation of Revanna's diplomatic passport.

As regards, Deve Gowda's warning, in a two-page letter dated May 23 with the title "My Warning to Prajwal Revanna", he said "I spoke to the media about Prajwal Revanna on May 18, when I was headed to the temple to offer pooja (prayers). It took me some time to recover from the shock and pain he (Revanna) has inflicted on me, my entire family, my colleagues, friends and party workers."

Deve Gowda further went on to say he was of the view that Prajwal Revanna should be subject to the 'harshest of punishments', and that his son and former Karnataka Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy also advocated his stance on the matter. He said people (reacting to the Prajwal Revanna sex scandal) have used the 'harshest of words' against him and his family in the last few weeks. In the open letter, the 91-year-old politician said he asserted

that he is not aware of the alleged activities of his grandson, who is also the sitting MP of Hassan.

Deve Gowda further warned Prajwal to return if the latter has any respect towards his grandfather. He further wrote, "I can do only one thing. I can issue a stern warning to Prajwal and ask him to return from wherever he is and surrender before the police. He should subject himself to the legal process. This is not an appeal that I am making, it is a warning that I am issuing." Deve Gowda also told Prajwal that not listening to family members will lead to total isolation. "If he does not heed to this warning, he will have to face my anger and anger of all his family members. The law will take care of the accusations against him, but not listening to the family will ensure his total isolation. If he has any respect left for me, he has to return immediately," he added.

Revanna is at the centre of a sexual abuse case and the Hassan MP is said to have left India late last month, a day

after voting for the Lok Sabha elections took place in his constituency.

"The MEA has received a letter from the Karnataka government for cancellation of diplomatic passport in respect of MP Prajwal Revanna. This is being processed," a source said.

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said the Centre has not responded to the request for cancellation of Revanna's diplomatic passport on the basis of an arrest warrant issued against the JD(S) leader.

A Special Court for Elected Representatives issued an arrest warrant on Saturday against Prajwal following an application moved by the SIT. Earlier this month, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said Revanna travelled to Germany on a diplomatic passport and did not seek political clearance for the trip. "No political clearance was either sought from or issued by MEA in respect of the travel of the said MP to Germany," Jaiswal had said.

Madhya Pradesh sees record surge in spiritual tourism

ARCHANA JYOTI NEW DELHI

The inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya earlier this year is being hailed as a pivotal moment in religious tourism, yet Madhya Pradesh, the heart of India, is already experiencing a significant surge in the sector with five out of the top ten most visited tourist destinations being spiritual sites. These include Ujjain, Maihar, Chitrakoot, Omkareshwar, and Salkhanpur, reflecting the state's rising popularity of spiritual tourism.

This trend has contributed to a record-breaking tourist footfall of 11.21 crore, showcasing substantial growth compared to 2022's 3.41 crore visitors. Ujjain, renowned as one of India's holiest cities, emerged as the most popular tourist destination in the State, attracting over 5.28 crore spiritual seekers and tourists. It is revered as the abode of Lord Shiva and is home to the famous Mahakaleswar Jyotirlinga temple, a major pilgrimage site for Shaivites. Ujjain also hosts the Kumbh Mela, one of the largest



religious gatherings in the world, attracting millions of devotees and tourists every few years. The city's spiritual ambiance, ancient temples, and religious festivals make it a significant destination for spiritual tourism in Madhya Pradesh, contributing to the state's cultural heritage and tourism sector. "Number of footfalls not only surpassed pre-Covid levels but also positioned Madhya Pradesh as a leading tourist destination in India. Given that Ujjain among five religious sites have emerged as the top attraction, drawing over 5.28 crore pilgrims and tourists. "This showcases the state's growing prominence in religious

tourism," SheoShekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary of State Tourism and Culture on the occasion of Madhya Pradesh's Tourism Day said here. Ujjain was followed closely by Maihar, with 16,849,000 tourists, as per the State Government data. Likewise, Indore, known for its historical landmarks and culinary delights, welcomed over 10 million tourists, making it a prominent destination in the state. Chitrakoot attracted 9,001,126 tourists seeking solace and spiritual enlightenment. Omkareshwar witnessed a considerable footfall of 3,475,000 tourists whereas Jabalpur saw

2,669,869 tourists exploring its myriad attractions. Salkhanpur recorded 2,565,000 tourists, Narmadapuram, encompassing Pachmarhi, Madhai, Narmadapuram, and Adamgarh, witnessed 2,283,837 tourists and Raissen, boasting attractions like Bhimbetka, Sanchi, and Bhojpur, welcomed 2,137,058 tourists. Bhopal, the capital city known for its string of lakes, attracted 1,950,965 footfalls.

According to the State Government, while 2022 recorded 34,138,757 tourists, 2021 saw 25,595,668 tourists, and 2020 welcomed 21,400,693 tourists. According to reports, religious tourism in India is moving North, projecting a CAGR of over 16% between 2023 and 2030. Post COVID, religious inclination of Indians has become stronger. Industry reports also indicate a significant rise in overnight journeys for pilgrimage & 14% rise in donations in the year 2021-2022, according to Sachin Alug, CEO, NLB Services as per reports.

Kaamya becomes youngest Indian to scale Mount Everest



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

Sixteen-year-old Kaamya S Karthikeyan successfully climbed Mount Everest, becoming the youngest Indian mountaineer to scale the world's highest peak from the Nepal side, the Indian Navy said on Thursday. The daughter of a naval officer, Kaamya is a class 12 student at Navy Children School, Mumbai.

Kaamya and her father Commander S Karthikeyan successfully summited Mt. Everest (8,849 m) on May 20, according to a statement issued by a Navy spokesperson. "After this feat, she has become the second youngest girl in the world, and the youngest Indian mountaineer to summit the world's highest peak from the Nepal side," the

statement said. With this, Kaamya has completed six milestones in her mission to summit the highest peak of all seven continents and aims to climb Mount Vinson Massif in Antarctica this December to become the youngest girl to accomplish the '7summits challenge', the Navy said. The Indian Navy also shared her pictures in a post on X.

"IndianNavy congratulates Ms Kaamya Karthikeyan d/o Cdr S Karthikeyan on becoming the youngest #Indian & the second youngest girl in the world to summit Mt Everest from the Nepal side. "Kaamya has exhibited immense courage & fortitude in summitting the highest peaks in six of the seven continents," it said.

"IndianNavy wishes young Kaamya the very best in her

aspiration to summit the highest peaks of all seven continents, becoming the youngest girl to do so. #7SummitsChallenge," it added. Over the decades, Everest has drawn mountaineers, young and old, from across the world.

Lauding her feat, Tata Steel Adventure Foundation (TSAF) chairman Chanakya Chaudhary said in a statement "we are incredibly proud of Kaamya Karthikeyan's extraordinary achievement of summitting Mt. Everest at such a young age. Her journey is a testament to the spirit of perseverance, meticulous preparation, and unwavering determination." The TSAF supported her endeavour. Kaamya was a recipient of the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Shakti Puraskar.

Congress attacks BJP for not fulfilling farmers' promises



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday hit out at the BJP for not fulfilling the promises made to farmers' organisations and asserted that an INDIA bloc government will implement all its guarantees to the tillers, including the legal guarantee of MSP.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh noted that elections have been held in 428 constituencies and now polling on 115 seats, including those in Punjab and Haryana, are left. In a video statement on X, he said the farmers' movement has been going on in Haryana and Punjab since five years and though the government took back the "three black farm laws", it has "not fulfilled the promises" it made to farmer organisations.

"For the last five years, the Modi government has continuously ignored the farmers' movement of Haryana, Punjab

and Uttar Pradesh. Atrocities were committed against the farmers. Now they are talking about snatching the MSP from the farmers of Punjab and Haryana by burning stubble," Ramesh said and asserted that the Congress strongly opposes this policy.

"Farmer justice will be the top priority for the incoming INDIA Janbandhan government," he said in a post in Hindi along with the video statement. Ramesh said the Congress has given five concrete guarantees for the farmers in its Nyay Patra, including legal guarantee of MSP, based on the Swaminathan formula, and a permanent commission to effectively implement loan waiver plans.

The party has also given the guarantee for direct transfer of insurance payment within 30 days of crop loss, a proper import-export policy and removal of GST from everything necessary for farming, he said.

ICG organises pollution response seminar, mock drill



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) organised a 'Pollution Response Seminar and Mock Drill' at the Headquarters Coast Guard District No. 8 (West Bengal) in Haldia on May 22-23, defence ministry said here on Thursday.

Giving details, officials said the event gathered key stakeholders from various agencies, along with oil handling agencies, to address the critical challenges of combating oil spills at sea. Participants engaged in a table-top exercise, collaborating on simulated scenarios to enhance their response

capabilities and foster synergy among all involved parties. State-of-the-art pollution response equipment was demonstrated, providing participants with practical experience to further improve their readiness for environmental crises. The Commander of Headquarters Coast Guard District No. 8 (West Bengal) emphasised the importance of synergy and effective implementation of the National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan. He highlighted the collective responsibility to protect marine resources and reaffirmed the ICG's commitment to ensuring safer seas and cleaner coasts.

Indian Naval ships arrive in Manila for deployment in South China Sea

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

Indian naval ships Delhi, Shakti and Kiltan visited Manila, Philippines as part of operational deployment of the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet to South China Sea. The visit demonstrated India's strong ties with Philippines and its commitment to further deepen the partnership, navy said here on Thursday.

The port call included Subject Matter Expert Exchange (SMEE) between the Indian Navy and personnel of Philippines Navy, sports fixtures, cross deck visits, cultural exchanges and collaborative community outreach programmes.

Rear Admiral Rajesh Dhankhar, Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet, and Commanding Officers of ships had an interaction with Rear Admiral Renato David, Commander Philippine Fleet (CPF), and Vice Admiral Roldano Lizar Punzalan Jr, Deputy Commandant for Operations, Philippine Coast Guard.

Dhankhar also held wide-ranging discussions with the Flag Officer in Command (FOIC), Vice Admiral Toribio Dulinyan Adaci JT, on the avenues for collaboration, matters of mutual interest and the current security situation in the region and beyond.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

EC stirs a bit

The poll panel's latest directive to parties for a honest fight is a classic case of too little, too late

With the Lok Sabha elections approaching the final phases, the Election Commission (EC) has issued a stern directive to the Congress and the BJP against creating false narratives and making communal utterances. Interestingly, this directive comes after five of the seven poll phases are over. Also, the timing and impact of this intervention raise critical questions: Is the EC's directive aimed more at ensuring a free and fair election or at salvaging its image which has taken a dip? Though it is an independent, autonomous constitutional body, several events have raised doubts about its impartiality and functioning. There have been accusations of Government interference, from influencing the timing of elections to being lenient towards the BJP while being overly strict with the Opposition. Savour this: Since 2019, three Opposition parties registered 27 complaints against PM Modi but the EC took no action. A scrutiny of these complaints and the EC's response shows the poll body's 'reluctance' to act against the Prime Minister. The Congress has accused the panel of being "super, super cautious" regarding complaints against Modi, following the EC's request to the BJP to respond to the allegations of Modi's divisive speech in Rajasthan. The EC also asked the Congress to address the BJP's complaints against Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi. The EC's letters mark the first such action against a Prime Minister. But will any real action ever be taken?

According to the poll panel, approximately 425 major complaints, excluding those related to canvassing or requiring clarification, have been filed by various parties and candidates. Action has been taken or the mat-

ter resolved in 400 of these cases. Interestingly, in most cases, the punishment was so mild that it did not matter much; like abstaining from campaigning for two days, and so on. Now, with only two phases of polling left, the directive is not likely to achieve much since the electoral narrative has already been set, with party rhetoric having saturated media channels and influenced public opinion. The late issuance of this warning suggests only an attempt to curb last-minute escalations in divisive rhetoric. By waiting until the tail end of the election cycle, the EC has allowed political parties ample time to embed their narratives into the electorate's psyche, with an extra long rope for the ruling party. Besides, for such a warning to be effective, it needs to be backed by the possibility of tangible consequences. While the directive emphasises the need for a respectful and fact-based campaign, it lacks clear punitive measures for violations. Political parties might calculate that the benefits of inflammatory and polarising rhetoric outweigh the potential repercussions. To ensure future elections are fairer and more respectful of democratic principles, the EC should adopt a more proactive stance involving faster interventions and stricter penalties for violations. It can draw inspiration from its own history when TN Seshan first empowered the institution.

PICTALK



Devotees at Har Ki Pauri on the occasion of Buddha Purnima, in Haridwar

Child development as a fundamental right

In the pursuit of a more equitable society, the universalisation of early childhood development should be recognised as a fundamental right, not a gratuitous freebie



APARAJITA SHARMA

That early childhood development (ECD) should be treated as a fundamental right rather than a gratuitous freebie is paramount for fostering an equitable society. The 2024 general elections offer a significant opportunity to advocate for the universalisation of ECD from birth to 18 years. Ensuring access to quality early education and care is crucial for the holistic development of children and the broader advancement of society.

ECD as a Fundamental Right India's commitment to social welfare is enshrined in its Constitution. The Directive Principles of State Policy mandate the Government to secure adequate means of livelihood, equitable distribution of resources and special protection for children and vulnerable sections. Early childhood is a critical period for cognitive, emotional and social development. The National ECCE Policy 2013 underscores the importance of providing quality health, nutrition, early learning and protection for children under six. Recognising ECCE as a justiciable entitlement under the RTE Act would ensure that all children receive the foundational support necessary for their development.

Challenges in Providing ECD After 13 years of implementation of the RTE Act 2009, only 25.5 per cent of schools across the country are RTE compliant. 8.4 lakh teacher positions are vacant and there is a constant shift towards contractual teachers. 19 per cent of schools in India are estimated to have teacher vacancies and one school in seven is run by a single teacher. While the quality of education cannot be ensured without professionally qualified and motivated teachers, 44 per cent of all teachers across the country work without job contracts, many fail to receive social security benefits and all are pressured with non-academic work which is estimated to account for 20-25 per cent of teachers' working hours. The average expenditure is 8,997 per annum for pre-primary, 9,913 for secondary and 13,845 for higher secondary. Costs are significantly higher in



urban areas and private unaided educational institutions.

Despite the recognised importance of ECD, significant challenges remain. As of recent surveys, only 38 per cent of children aged 3-6 years are enrolled in preschool education in Government Anganwadi centres. Additionally, the issues regarding 0-3-year-old children remain at the bottom of the pyramid of rights and entitlements in the country. Issues such as being underweight, stunting and anaemia among children highlight the need for comprehensive early childhood programs that address both educational and nutritional needs.

As of 2018-19, the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) had 30.1 per cent of Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) positions and 27.7 per cent of Supervisor positions vacant across the country. About 6.9 per cent of sanctioned positions for Anganwadi workers (AWWs) and 7.6 per cent of sanctioned positions for Anganwadi helpers (AWHs) were also vacant. This is a grave concern for achieving universalisation of childcare services in the country as well as improved governance at the project level. Despite the mention of establishing creches for promoting women workers and childcare services for their children vide several legislations,^[6] the



THE DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES OF STATE POLICY MANDATE THE GOVERNMENT TO SECURE ADEQUATE MEANS OF LIVELIHOOD, EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES AND SPECIAL PROTECTION FOR CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE SECTIONS

number of crèches came down to a drastic 3400 creches with only 84000 beneficiaries by 2023. The promise of crèche for promoting women workers is a welcome in political parties' agendas, however without universalisation and adequate public provisioning of childcare services they may again leave behind the most marginalised children and serve only a selected few.

A public manifesto collated by four national-level networks working for children's rights spotlights the need for reiterating the constitutional provision to ensure rights, entitlements and the overall well-being of children. The manifesto calls for extending the Right to Education (RTE) Act to cover children from birth to 18 years, aligning with the internationally recognised definition of childhood.

The manifesto further calls for drafting, implementing and enforcing a national regulatory framework for private schools and ECCE centres to combat the increasing commercialisation and privatisation of education. This framework should regulate fees, ensure compliance with quality norms and address social segregation. The Government must take immediate steps to ensure that all private schools adhere to the conditions under which recognition is granted and that no unrecognised schools are allowed to operate.

The State must be held accountable for its enforcement to guarantee that all children receive quality education. Strengthening School Management Committees (SMCs) and community participation in education is vital for the successful execution of educational policies. Additionally, it is critical to strengthen the Anganwadi system. Critical positions such as AWWs and AWHs must never be left vacant. The capacities of Anganwadi centres and workers should also be enhanced.

Way Ahead Investing in ECD has significant long-term benefits. Studies indicate that quality early childhood programs yield a high return on investment, contributing to better health, education and economic outcomes. Children who receive adequate early care and education are more likely to succeed in school, secure better jobs and contribute positively to society. Therefore, ECD should be recognised as a fundamental right, not a discretionary freebie. Its universalisation must be backed by adequate funding and robust policies, to ensure equitable access to marginalised children. There is a clear roadmap for achieving this goal.

(The writer is a member of Alliance for Right to ECD; views are personal)

Summer can be fun and learning for students

By engaging in innovative and educational activities, children can make the most of their summer break, ensuring both physical and intellectual growth

School students look forward to the arrival of summer vacations with a great deal of excitement. That period is also one of the happiest phases of a student's life. It also becomes imperative that parents recognise the worth of their children's time at this point. They start to worry about how they will ever let their child utilise his time wisely during those days. On the contrary, children are full of energy and anticipation in those months. However, it becomes troublesome for working parents if their kids are younger and highly energetic. Their daily scheduled activities go wild, making it harder for parents to engage their children in meaningful activities.

Though summer vacation means different to everyone, the significance of summer learning should not be ignored. It is a vital component of children's physical as well as academic health. With just 60 days of summer vacation, every day a child does not participate in summer training represents a setback. Nevertheless, parents can engage their children in a variety of new and entertain-



ing activities. Summer Vacation Courses The hot Indian summer can be the toughest time to endure for some people, especially kids. They can suffer severely if they stay unprepared to beat the heat. Parents should be cautious about the meals their children eat during these hot days so that no additional stress is placed on their digestive systems. In order to avoid digestive and dehydration issues, parents can add watermelon, curd, cucumber, coconut water and seasonal vegetables to their children's meal plans. Children must begin learning about the contemporary technological environment in which they live. Therefore, parents can engage their kids with engaging and innovative learning products. Trends are as follows: AI and ML course for kids: There are various courses online to introduce children

with futuristic skillset like Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning. Any career option kids would choose, this skillset will be must. Students should opt for courses which consist of Python Coding, Generative-AI prompt writing and Industry Projects like Website & App Building. Kids and parents should not get afraid of new technologies rather take these as an opportunity to outsmart in the future job market. Learning AI tools will upgrade the performance quality of culturally active students also. Learning AI-ML will prepare the students for upcoming innovation and robotics related competitions too. The best outcome will be grabbing an online internship. It will help the kids become more confident for the future. Summer specialised Innovation Based Online Experiments: Students and Parents should look for online innovation based experiments or projects which will not only provide a project kit but also consist of live sessions to understand the science and technology of the project. Students should be able to represent the projects in

schools too. Some attractive projects could be Laser Home Security System, Rain Water Detection and automatic cloth retrieval machine, Automatic Smart Roof, Parking Occupancy Indicator, Smart Blind Stick etc. Apart from the ones mentioned above, there are many other innovative activities which can be explored by the parents to increase their children's confidence and interest during summer holidays. Moreover, learning is an endless process. School kids need to gain knowledge about new things every day that are useful for their career and educational growth. Some of the most important knowledge for kids during the vacation will be sustainability, space technology, Electric Vehicle technology, Autonomous Car technology, Flying Taxi system and drone technology etc. Thus, during the next summer vacation, students may simply PLAY. LEARN. EAT. REPEAT by contemplating these mentioned methods of utilising perfect and productive holidays. (The writer is advisor innovates and director at YuviPep; views are personal)



AJITH KUMAR NS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BUDGET CLIMBDOWN CONCERN

Madam — Apropos the news story "Do not withdraw capital support for oil PSUs," published on 23 May, this is my response. As a regular newspaper reader, the Government's recent decision to halve the equity infusion for three major public sector oil companies—Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL)—is concerning. Initially, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a substantial Rs 30,000 crore for these companies to aid their transition to green energy and achieve net-zero emissions. However, this amount was slashed to Rs 15,000 crore, with no clear explanation provided.

Despite impressive profit margins, companies in the capital-intensive energy sector require substantial investments to transition to green energy. Past Government directives led to financial losses and predictable policy support is crucial to offset these losses and ensure their contribution to India's green energy transition and economic stability.

Khiraabdi Tanya | Noida

ELECTION BATTLE IN THE LAST LAP

Madam — Apropos the news story "Epic election battle enters decisive phase," published on 23 May, this is my response. With only ten days left in India's intense two-month election season, the focus sharpens on Uttar Pradesh, a critical battleground for the ruling BJP Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath have been tirelessly campaigning, emphasising law and order and cultural nationalism. Meanwhile, opposition leaders, notably Rahul Gandhi and Mallikarjun Kharge, strive to break the BJP's dominance. Despite Modi's polarising campaign, Yogi's steadfast leadership and achievements, including the Ram temple at Ayodhya, galvanise the BJP's base. The outcome in Uttar Pradesh, with its pivotal 80 seats, will significantly influence the national result. Both

Israel honours Indian caregivers



Apropos the news story "Israel honours Kerala caregivers," published on 22 May, this is my response. The celebration of Israel's National Day in India underscored the deep bonds between the two nations, especially in light of recent tragic events. Naor Gilon, Israel's Ambassador to India, expressed profound gratitude for India's unwavering support since the Hamas attacks on October 7. This solidarity reflects

the extraordinary relationship between Indians and Jews. Gilon honoured two brave Keralites, Meera and Sabitha, who risked their lives to save an elderly couple during the attack and paid tribute to Romi, a young Israeli child of Indian descent, for her bravery amidst the tragedy.

The event, graced by Indian Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra, highlighted the resilience and resolve of the Israeli people despite the pain inflicted by terrorism. Kwatra emphasised India's zero-tolerance stance on terrorism, aligning with Israel's fight against such threats. The national anthems of both countries played, symbolising unity, while a special message from President Isaac Herzog of Israel reinforced the call for the release of the 128 hostages. The Christian Alliance and Action for Social Action in Kerala also voiced strong support for Israel, praying for the hostages' safe return.

Jitu Majumdar | Kolkata

Modi and Yogi's efforts will be crucial in determining the BJP's success, potentially solidifying their path to victory on June 4.

Preeti Bajaj | Chandigarh

RAISI'S OPPRESSIVE REGIME

Madam — Apropos the editorial "Iran at Crossroads," published on May 22, this is my response. The late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, a hardliner, has long been regarded as a prospective successor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. He frequently criticised America and Israel and was on Washington's tight blacklist for serious human rights breaches. He was very vocal about growing Iran's nuclear power, despite US sanctions. Raisi held various key posts before becoming President of Iran in 2021 and many scandals have surrounded him. Specifically, he was accused of forcefully suppressing movements and opponents. Raisi was one of the Iranian politicians at whose behest two of the harshest acts of repression took place. Iran enacted regulations regulating women's dress and behaviour after Raisi

was elected president. Iran's hijab law has tightened. In September 2022, Iran witnessed significant protests after Mahsa Amini's death in custody for violating dress laws, marking the largest unrest since the 1979 Revolution. The demonstrations resulted in numerous casualties. Ebrahim Raisi, known for his harsh stance on exiled opposition and human rights groups, was linked to the mass killings of Marxists and leftists in 1988 while serving as Tehran's Revolutionary Court deputy prosecutor. Amnesty International reported the existence of 'Death Committees' in Iran, comprising religious judges, prosecutors and intelligence officers. These committees arbitrarily sentenced thousands of inmates to death. Amnesty reports that these committees have sentenced over 5,000 people to death. It was only after the mass hanging of 1988 that Raisi was called 'The Butcher of Tehran.'

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

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FIRST COLUMN

NEW CHALLENGES FOR INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

The global geopolitical landscape grows more complex with Russia-China ties



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The gruelling Indian elections, one of the largest democratic exercises in the world will be over in a week or so. A hectic flurry of pending policy decisions is likely to start immediately. If the current party comes back, a hundred days action-packed agenda would be rolled out by most major Government departments, going by PM Modi's Stated objective of not wasting a minute after polls are over. However, the geo-political space, which existed when the elections were declared, has become far more complex refusing to wind down any time soon.

To be fair some of the changes are driven by elections happening all across the globe during 2024, including in key European Union and US. This will ensure that almost all multilateral forums, where these key constituents and India are major contributors, would be subject to pressures of domestic politics and issues. Meanwhile, India's long-standing partner Russia, finished their election nearly a month back and upon reelection President Putin undertook his first State visit to China last week. Russia and China have emerged as the key UN Security Council permanent members, whose interests and policies are not likely to align with the US-led block any time soon.

The joint Statement released after President Putin's visit to China highlighted the importance of his visit to China. It was a message to the wider Western block of countries opposed to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, coming at a time when the Chinese president had just come back after meeting every senior leader from the European Union, the French President and reaffirmed firm support from a couple of East European countries. The European Union and recently the US have expressed grave concerns



and taken some tariff measures regarding China's non-competitive trade practices, especially regarding State-subsidised cheap Electric vehicles flooding their markets. Apprehensions have been raised by Indian trade associations that the loss of the lucrative US market for Chinese Electric vehicles could lead to, these automotive products being dumped in India leading to a situation similar to Europe and the US. In this context Russia seems to have come out in full support of the Chinese automotive sector, perhaps also sending a strong message to Europe and the US. In the media Statement released during Mr Putin's State visit to China, he mentioned "Regarding bilateral industrial cooperation, we are pleased to witness the proactive expansion of Chinese automakers and household appliance manufacturers in the Russian market. As discussed during our talks and as the President said, we acknowledge the detrimental effect of any unlawful actions, sanctions, or restrictions. We wholeheartedly embrace collaboration with our Chinese counterparts."

China has refrained from overtly criticising Russia over its war in Ukraine and has in the past been accused of supplying military equipment stealthily. Even though Ukraine found mention in both Statements by President Putin and President Xi Jinping, it was velvet-gloved, under larger international foreign policy issues and overall commentary on geo-political matters. On foreign policy matters Russian president's Statement read "We are working together to create a fairer and more democratic multipolar world order based on the central role of the UN and its Security Council, international law, cultural and civilizational diversity, as well as a calibrated balance of interests of all members of the international community. We believe that the creation of such alliances is extremely harmful and counterproductive." Reforming multilateral institutions, especially the UN and a permanent membership has been a long-term foreign policy goal for PM Modi. In the wake of geopolitics, the new Government will have its task cut out on foreign policy.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Elder abuse is far more rampant than assumed



GURDEEP KAOUR

Despite respect for the elderly, many seniors face abuse from family members. This hidden crisis demands urgent action to protect their dignity and wellbeing



The culture in India over the past few decades has significantly transformed. As the 21st century unfolded with developments and advancements in science, technology, communication etc. the values upon which cohesion and amicable environment at family to global level can be built have been hit hard. The world has never been wealthier or possessed greater knowledge and technological prowess than it does today but sadly, inequality, poverty, food insecurity, violence, exploitation and discrimination continue to escalate unchecked. Among the victims of exploitation are the elderly population across the globe. And this issue becomes more worrisome for India where the culture of respect and care for the elderly has always existed and was deeply rooted. Given the cultural norms, the value system of filial piety and residence with the children, more often than not the elders in the family seem protected but on closer and deeper investigation, it is not so. The prevalence of elder abuse and neglect is evolving as a pressing and distressing hidden reality. As the person ages, his or her ability to engage in productive/ remunerative work gradually decreases, further their physical ailments, diseases etc demand care and specific needs to be looked after, this worsens and complicates the problem. As dependency grows and contribution declines, the elders in the family become subject to abuse, isolation, neglect, humiliation and harassment. The increased rate of urbanisation, transborder migration, inflation, technological advancement and the scale and extent of dependency add to the vulnerability of the elderly being exploited and neglected. In most cases, the perpetrators of abuse- physical, psychological, financial and verbal are their children whom they have raised by sacrificing their comforts and basic needs. According to the United Nations policy brief titled 'The Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Older-Persons (2020)', the cases of elder abuse have grown worldwide during and after the pandemic, making it a worrisome issue.

Life expectancy and life longevity have enormously improved, given the advancements in diagnostic, medical and therapeutic science but for the ageing population support



THE PREVALENCE OF ELDER ABUSE AND NEGLECT IS EVOLVING AS A PRESSING AND DISTRESSING HIDDEN REALITY IN INDIA, DESPITE THE COUNTRY'S CULTURAL NORMS OF RESPECT AND CARE FOR THE ELDERLY

services from family, community and the Government are also crucially needed for dignified life and death. In the present-day neo-liberal world order, access to State-of-the-art health and care facilities burns a big hole in the pocket of those wanting to access them. In addition, inflation, job crunch, financial crisis and the burgeoning household budget for education, basic needs, recreational, health care services etc are largely responsible for the elders and their needs being pushed to the periphery. Lack of timely care and preventive measures compounds their problem and vulnerability to the extent of extreme dependency. The State of complete/ partial dependency makes them subject to neglect, harassment and humiliation, abrogating their human rights. With intra and transborder migration of young and productive age groups, the threat to survival, safety and well-being of the ageing population is rising across the globe including India. In the past few decades, the migration from rural to urban areas and from urban to distant lands has been considerably growing, the dearth of resources, harsh living conditions and tough competition faced by the young population a reason although indirect, for elder abuse and in absence of dear ones (son/grandchildren), adjustment to new settings also drains the elder population mentally, financially and emotionally and risks their wellbeing and safety.

Further, as senior citizens are seen as a liability, apart from the conflict over their care and responsibility, the conflict over inheritance and property share also traumatises them. It is estimated that more than 90 per cent of elder abuse cases emerge from property-related matters. Thus physical, verbal, sexual, mental and emotional abuse can occur within these dynamics, causing immense suffering to the elderly. The sudden-

part about elder abuse is that the perpetrators of violence and hardship against them are their family members, it could be their son/ daughter-in-law/ daughter/ son-in-law/niece/nephew/ grandchildren among other close relatives as a result of the instances of violence either don't come in the public domain or if at all it comes, it isn't given attention stating that it is a personal/family matter. Due to a lack of intervention, the concerns of the elderly being abused and harassed most often go unattended and cared for.

In most cases the abuse is subtle and persistent, so is perceived as normalised by victims and is difficult to label as abuse, however, badly harms the victims and their wellbeing. In some cases, senior citizens suffering from dementia or other cognitive impairments are unable to understand that they are being ill-treated and abused or at times may find it difficult to effectively communicate the reality and seek intervention. The absence of timely and appropriate intervention discourages the victims from reporting their abuse. It is also out of fear of offending the family members/ agonising them that the victims are reluctant to report or discuss the instances of violence and humiliation meted out by them. There is also a stigma around abuse and the concern that society may perceive them to be weak/ incapable and also that it might bring the family in a bad light is a reason that discourages senior citizens from speaking about their vulnerability and abuse. Moreover, the elderly either don't have awareness about the legal mechanism that they can take recourse to or do not have trust in the system and the law designed to protect them.

As most cases remain unreported, the exact figures associated with violence against elder persons cannot be provided. This however can-

not be taken as a reason to escape and deny the grim reality. The issue indeed is important and the laws enacted in the recent past to save the elders from abuse and violence, the growing number of old age homes and the increase in property-related disputes where the elders in the family are either as plaintiff or the defendant are a testimony. Globally, a very good proportion of the population is growing older, India mirrors this trend too. According to the United Nations Population Fund's India Ageing Report 2023, the population above 60 years will double from 10.5 per cent or 14.9 crore (as of July 2022) to 20.8 per cent or 34.7 crore by 2050. There is a dire need to understand that this population is neither small nor are their issues insignificant that can be ignored. It is important to understand that the elderly population which isn't engaged in productive work were once the ones who shouldered responsibilities and looked after the needs of the children. They had been once a very potential workforce in nation-building. They are a reservoir of knowledge and experience and should be valued for their sacrifices, pains and contributions made during their lifetime. As reasons are multiple behind elder abuse so are the ramifications, it is therefore important to have solutions at different levels ranging from sensitising the society at large to spreading awareness among elders, formulating policies, emboldening social security measures to robust monitoring and judicial mechanism to deal with the perpetrators of violence. Concrete measures need to be taken so that elder abuse, albeit hidden, is not perceived as normalised.

(The writer is Assistant Professor, Political Science, Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi; views are personal)

Political turncoats being turned down by voters

There is a concerning pattern of political leaders forsaking their party affiliations in pursuit of personal gain, but voters are giving them a run for their money

India, once a beacon of guidance in global affairs encompassing Statecraft, religion and politics, now confronts a disheartening reality. Presently, its political landscape appears adrift and devoid of purpose. Those in positions of authority seem driven solely by personal gratification. The completion of the fifth phase of the 2024 general elections has stirred heightened activity among political factions. Both ruling and opposition parties fervently urge the public to cast their votes in their favour. As the electoral process unfolds, leaders assess their prospects of triumph or defeat, often shifting allegiances between parties. Moreover, other political entities not only welcome



VINOD TAKIAWALA

defectors into their ranks but also offer them electoral tickets, even at the expense of their loyalists. The phenomenon of leaders defecting from one party to another is not new. Reflecting on historical trends, in the 1960s, approximately 30 per cent of parties witnessed leadership changes. However, public sentiment, termed 'Janata Janardan,' proved decisive,

thwarting 31 per cent of defectors in 1977 and 85 per cent in 2019. Examining the success rates of party-switching leaders, in the 1960s, around 30 per cent of parties with new leadership secured victories. Contrastingly, in the 2019 elections, the success rate plummeted to less than 15 per cent. A recent example is Seema Soren from Jharkhand, a three-time MLA and sister-in-law of former Chief Minister Hemant Soren, who departed from the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on March 19. Similarly, Congress MP Geeta Koda from Jharkhand also crossed over to the BJP and secured a ticket for the

Singbhum constituency. The trend continues with leaders like Brijendra Singh and Rahul Kaswa, former BJP MPs now contesting under the Congress banner and Ritesh Pandey, previously a BSP MP, a BJP candidate. Afzal Ansari, once aligned with the BSP, is now a candidate for the Samajwadi Party, while Bibi Patil and Sangita Azad, both former BSP MPs, are now BJP candidates. Analysts attribute these defections to various factors such as the denial of tickets or perceived better prospects in another party. However, the prognosis for such defectors appears bleak as data analysis from the Trivedi Center for Political Data at Ashoka University indicates a dwindling success rate, dropping below 15 per cent in the 2019 elections from around 30 per cent in the 1960s. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, out of over 8,000 candi-



dates, 195 were party-switchers, constituting 2.4 per cent of the total candidates. However, only 29 emerged victorious, marking a success rate of 14.9 per

cent, significantly lower than previous years. The peak year for party-switching was 1977, post-Emergency, when disparate political forces united against Indira Gandhi, resulting in a success rate of 68.9 per cent for defectors. Conversely, the subsequent election saw this rate decline sharply. The question of which party, BJP or Congress, better accommodates defectors remains a subject of debate.

In 1984, following Indira Gandhi's assassination, sympathy propelled the Congress, leading to a remarkable success rate of 81.3 per cent for defectors. Conversely, the BJP, contesting its inaugural Lok Sabha elections in 1984, saw no success among its 62

defector candidates. However, subsequent years witnessed shifts in these figures. In 2019, 5.3 per cent of BJP candidates were defectors, with a success rate of 56.5 per cent, whereas the Congress, with 9.5 per cent defectors, saw only 5 per cent success. The future of defector leaders in the ongoing 2024 Lok Sabha elections remains uncertain until June 4th, when the Indian electorate bestows its verdict, symbolised by the "Vijayshree" crown. Until then, further speculation would be premature, necessitating patience from all stakeholders.

(The writer is a columnist and a freelance journalist; views are personal)



Choose INDIA MPs in Delhi, says Cong

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Just days before the Lok Sabha elections in Delhi, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi rode the Delhi Metro on Thursday to connect with voters. Congress candidate from North East Delhi, Kanhaiya Kumar, shared photos of Rahul interacting and posing with passengers. En route to a rally in Mangolpuri with Kumar on the last day of campaigning, Rahul engaged with commuters. Delhi will vote on May 25 under Phase VI. Speaking at an election meeting at the DDA ground, GTB Nagar, Dilshad Garden in northeast Delhi, Rahul said the BJP always wanted to "tear and throw away" the Constitution, and asserted that the Lok Sabha elections this time is a

fight to safeguard it. Thursday was the last day of campaigning for the seven Lok Sabha seats in Delhi. This is Rahul's second rally in Delhi where he notably avoided mentioning Arvind Kejriwal's AAP, despite their alliance with Congress in the region. The Congress has fielded former JNU Student Union president Kanhaiya Kumar, who is locked in a fierce contest against BJP's Manoj Tiwari for the Northeast Delhi Lok Sabha seat. Earlier in the day, former Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Thursday said these elections are very important to save democracy and the Constitution, as she urged the people in the national Capital to help INDIA Bloc candidates

win on all seven seats. In a video statement shared by the Congress on X, Sonia asserted, "This is a very important election. This election is an election to save the democracy and Constitution of the country. This election is being fought on issues like unemployment, inflation and attack on constitutional institutions. You have to play your part in this fight." Speaking at the election meeting, Rahul said these people have always wanted to tear and throw it (Constitution) away. "They never accepted neither the Indian Constitution nor the Indian flag. In this election finally they have accepted that they want to change it," he

charged. "In this election, the fight is for safeguarding the Indian Constitution. It is not simply a book, our Constitution carries thousands of years of ideological heritage of Gandhi, Ambedkar and Nehru," the Congress leader said. The former Congress president said the BJP has finally "accepted" in this election that it wanted to change the Constitution. However, the BJP will have to face the Opposition and crores of people of the country if it tries to change the Constitution, he said. "I want to tell them (BJP) you don't have the dare to do it (change Constitution). You will have to face us and the crores of people of India if you attempt it," Rahul added.

Later addressing an all-women poll meeting in Mangolpuri in support of the Congress' North West Delhi Lok Sabha seat candidate Udit Raj, Rahul said though the BJP passed the women's reservation bill in Parliament with much pomp and show, later it said that it will be implemented after 10 years. "Met fellow passengers and enquired about their well-being -- I am happy to see that our initiative of building metro in Delhi has proved so convenient for public transportation," the former Congress president said in a post on X in Hindi. He also shared pictures of him interacting and clicking pictures with passengers in the metro.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with party leader and INDIA Bloc Lok Sabha candidate from North East Delhi constituency Kanhaiya Kumar during a public meeting at Dilshad Garden in New Delhi on Thursday. Photo by: Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

Speaking at the poll meeting, Rahul said there is an ideology behind this. Do you know... The RSS does not enroll women? Women cannot enter

there (shakhas). This belief is deeply ingrained in their minds that women should be treated as second-class citizens," he alleged.

The Congress leader also promised to increase the reservation of women in all government jobs if his party is voted to power.

Odisha MLAs, MPs cannot meet CM, Government is outsourced: Nadda

PTI ■ KARANJIA/ DHAMNAGAR (ODISHA)

Alleging that the Odisha government has been "outsourced", BJP president JP Nadda on Thursday claimed the people's representatives like MLAs and MPs are unable to meet Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. The government in the state needs to be changed to get rid of this practice, Nadda said while addressing election rallies at Karanjia and Dhamra.



"The Odisha administration has been outsourced. There is no son or daughter of Odisha left who can run the administration here. Who is stopping the MLAs and MPs of Odisha from reaching the seat of Chief Minister?" he said at a public meeting in Karanjia. Though Nadda did not name anyone, he was apparently referring to bureaucrat-turned-BJP leader VK Pandian, a close associate of the chief minister. The BJP has been calling him an "outsider" in Odisha's politics. Pandian was born in Tamil Nadu, studied in Delhi and started his career as a Punjab cadre IAS officer, but shifted to Odisha cadre after marrying an Odiya. Urging the people to vote for the BJP, Nadda said he assures the gathering that only a son or daughter of Odisha will rule the state. Nadda also claimed that all government contracts are given to outsiders. "Even the contract for the supply of school dress, cycle

for children and food in school are given to outside contractors," he said in another rally at Dhamnagar. The BJP president also came down heavily on the BJD government over the missing keys of Lord Jagannath's Ratna Bhandar (treasure chest) in Puri and said the new administration formed by the saffron party after the elections will find them out. "We will inquire into irregularities over the Ratna Bhandar and properly manage the Lord's treasury... People have decided to give rest to Naveen Babu and engage BJP to work for them," he said. The Ratna Bhandar, located in the basement of the 12th-century shrine, has two parts. The outer chamber of the Ratna Bhandar stores ornaments used by the deities daily, while many pieces of jewellery are kept in the inner chamber of the treasury. While the keys to the outer chamber are available, the

keys to the inner chamber are missing. While addressing the people in the tribal hinterland of the eastern region, Nadda said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has enhanced the status of the "adivasis" by making a daughter of Odisha's soil and a tribal woman the President of India. He also mentioned several schemes of the central government for the welfare of tribals. Nadda said how the Modi government brought about 25 crore of people out of the below poverty line (BPL). Attacking the Congress and the INDIA bloc, the BJP president termed them as a group of parties which have come together to promote their ideas of dynastic politics and appeasement. "Modi ji will protect your reservation rights. INDI Alliance wants to snatch your reservation and give it to their vote bank. BJP will save you from this," he said.

Arunachal human rights body takes cognisance of complaint over fake voter ID

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

The Arunachal Pradesh State Human Rights Commission (APSHRC) has taken cognisance of a complaint filed by a woman against election officers in Changlang district for their alleged inaction over "forged" voter ID of a person. The woman had lodged the complaint to the Election Commission in June last year, alleging that the Changlang district electoral officer

(DEO) and the electoral registration officer (ERO) did not take action against the person who was accused of "fraudulently obtaining a fake voter identity card". The accused had filed his nomination for the Bordumsa-Diyun constituency in the assembly elections in March this year but his bid was rejected. "The Arunachal Pradesh State Human Rights Commission deems it very serious that the ERO of

Bordumsa-Diyun of Changlang district did not make a decision on the complaint despite the hearing on August 23, 2023, and the DEO, Changlang district, did not take any decision in the appeal case heard on February 15, 2024. "This allowed a person against whom complaints of cheating and forgery regarding his voter ID are pending to continue as a voter and submit a nomination," said an order

issued by APSHRC member Bamang Tago on Wednesday. The APSHRC has directed the ERO of Bordumsa-Diyun and the DEO to submit a "detailed reply to the complaint and the entire proceedings of the hearings held on August 23, 2023, by the ERO and the appeal heard by the DEO on February 15 this year". They must also explain why the commission should not recommend an appropriate inquiry against them within

15 days, it said. The complainant claimed that the accused was residing in Arunachal Pradesh without obtaining the required Inner Line Permit (ILP), violating the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873. According to her, the person fraudulently obtained the voter ID in 2022 after moving to the Diyun — Bordumsa constituency, without providing proof of residence.

Will industrialise Jaunpur so that youth do not have to migrate: BJP candidate

PTI ■ JAUNPUR (UP)

BJP candidate Kripashankar Singh says this priority on winning the election would be to set up industries in this parliamentary constituency so that people don't have to leave home to find jobs like he once did. For this, I will use my "Mumbai contacts", said Singh, who moved to the city in 1971 and was once considered a strong leader of the Maharashtra Congress and also served as a former Minister of State for Home in the state. "Jaunpur, with a population of about 46 lakh, is a district where most of the youth migrate to Mumbai and other cities every year in search of employment," Singh told PTI. "Every sixth North Indian in Mumbai is from Jaunpur district who has gone there for employment," Singh said. Singh started his political career with the Maharashtra Congress in the 1970s. About four years ago, he resigned from the Congress party and joined the BJP. He said Jaunpur produces potatoes in huge quantities and its people are hardworking, yet there are no sugar and potato processing units here.

Will industrialise Jaunpur so that youth do not have to migrate: BJP candidate

PTI ■ JAUNPUR (UP)



It is also very important to have a sugar mill in Jaunpur. About 900 acres of government land are available on the highway in the Shahganj assembly segment of the district where industries can be set up, yet so far it hasn't happened. But now it will be used, Singh asserted. Singh said he would use his "five-decade-old contacts" in Maharashtra, which has a thriving sugar industry, to set up potato and sugar processing units along with a sugar mill in Jaunpur. "On December 1, 1971, at the age of 21, I

had to leave my home and go to Mumbai to earn a livelihood... Who would know better than me the pain of leaving home for a job or business? My wish is that in the coming three to four years, no youth of Jaunpur should have to go outside for work," Singh said. Within a month of winning the election, work will start on the issue of generating employment for the youth of Jaunpur, he said, adding "An action plan for this is being prepared by a team of experts." Asked about his chances of victory in the elections, Singh said, "I was born in Jaunpur and I grew up here. This is my home and my family members live here. The debt I owe to the people and my family members here will be repaid with the help of Prime Minister Narendra Modi." He also said that the people of Jaunpur are very happy with the work done by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and the Narendra Modi government at the Centre. This is why the people of Jaunpur have made up their minds to make Narendra Modi the prime minister for the third time and ensure that the BJP-led NDA gets more than 400 seats in the Lok Sabha.

INDIA Bloc talking about having 5 PMs in 5 years: Modi

PTI ■ MAHENDRAGARH (HARYANA)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday claimed that the INDIA bloc is talking about having five PMs over the next five years and said the fight over 'ghee' has broken out in the alliance, even before the cow has given milk. Hours before campaigning for the sixth round of the seven-phase Lok Sabha polls came to an end, Modi at a rally in Haryana's Mahendragarh asserted that till he is alive, no one can snatch the reservation for Dalits and tribals.

In this election, "you will not only choose the country's PM but also decide the country's future", the prime minister told the gathering. "On one hand is your tried and tested 'sewak' Modi. Who is on the other side, one does not know," he said, targeting the INDIA bloc that has as its constituents opposition parties, including the Congress, Aam Aadmi Party, Trinamool Congress and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. The INDIA bloc is "extremely communal, casteist and nepotist", he said while alleging that when the Congress was in power, it did not allow construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Claiming that the INDIA bloc is talking about having five PMs in five years, Modi said.

Saran violence: Lalu's daughter Rohini Acharya named in FIR

PTI ■ SARAN/PATNA

RJD president Lalu Prasad's daughter Rohini Acharya has been named in one of the FIRs registered in connection with "irregularities" during polling in Bihar's Saran Lok Sabha constituency and post-poll clashes leading to the death of one person there earlier this week, officials said on Thursday. Acharya was the Mahagathbandhan candidate in Saran against BJP MP Rajiv

Pratap Rudy. The state government extended the suspension on internet services in the district by two more days till May 25, while the process to attach properties of the absconding accused was initiated, officials said. One person was killed and two others were injured in post-poll violence at Bada Telpa area in Saran on Tuesday morning. The police registered a total of four FIRs to probe into the alleged irregularities on May

20, the day of polling, and also the violence on Tuesday. Two persons have been so far arrested in this connection. The police registered an FIR naming Acharya under various sections of the Representation of People Act, 1951, based on a complaint filed by Manoj Kumar, a representative of the BJP's Lok Sabha nominee from Saran. In his complaint, Kumar alleged "Rohini Acharya, along with her seven supporters and 50 unidentified people



indulged in illegal/irregular practices in polling booth number 318 and 319 in Chapra assembly seat on May 20," said the statement.

The complaint has been converted into an FIR, an official said. The police also constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to nab the absconding accused. "The process to attach properties of absconding persons, who have failed to appear before the police, has also been initiated by the authorities concerned," the Saran Police said in a statement on Thursday. Saran District Magistrate

Aman Samir said, "The situation in Saran is completely under control. Security personnel are keeping a strict vigil in the Bada Telpa area near Bhikhari Thakur Chowk following Tuesday's incident." As a precautionary measure, the government has extended the ban on internet services in the district by two more days till May 25, he said. "The process to attach properties of absconding persons, who have failed to appear before the police, has

been initiated," Saran district SP Gaurav Mangla told PTI. He, however, refused to reveal the exact number of persons whose properties are being attached. Meanwhile, senior RJD leaders on Wednesday met family members of Chandan Rai, who was shot dead in the post-poll violence, and handed them over a cheque of Rs 10 lakh. The RJD leaders also gave a cheque of Rs 2 lakh each to the family members of the two injured persons.

Big guns missing in Maneka Gandhi's low decibel campaign

PTI ■ SULTANPUR (UP)

In Sultanpur, near high-profile Amethi, BJP's Maneka Gandhi appears to be fighting a lone battle to retain her parliamentary seat with few top leaders of her party canvassing for her and no opposition biggies campaigning against her either. Sultanpur goes to polls on May 25 and Thursday is the last day of campaigning. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addressed a public meeting in support of Maneka Gandhi in Qazipur on Wednesday. Her son Varun Gandhi, who has been benched by the BJP in this Lok Sabha election, is expected to join her for campaigning on Thursday. Her nephew Rahul Gandhi and niece Priyanka Gandhi Vadera have visited Uttar Pradesh multiple times to canvass for INDIA bloc candidates but have not campaigned against her.



Maneka Gandhi was represented by Varun Gandhi before 2019. In an interview with PTI, the sitting Sultanpur MP asserted that her victory margin this time will be bigger than last time. In the 2019 general elections, Maneka Gandhi had won the Sultanpur seat by a margin of 14,000 seats. The BJP is confident of gaining around 2 lakh votes of the fishermen community in Sultanpur with their leader and Nishad Party chief Sanjay Nishad holding a ministerial berth in the Uttar Pradesh cabinet. Maneka Gandhi said neither the Ram temple nor the denial of a ticket to her son

is an election issue in her constituency as people are more concerned about their problems and their MP's response to their concerns. She said the people of her constituency are happy about the opening of the Ram temple in Ayodhya but "it is not an issue in the polls here." "I don't look at the people coming to me with their needs on the lines of caste or religion. Everybody in the constituency belongs to me and I hold the responsibility of their better future," the eight-time Lok Sabha MP said. Asked about the BJP's call to wipe out the Nehru-Gandhi family from Rae Bareilly, the 67-year-old Sultanpur MP said, "I have no comments to make... I am concerned about the problems of my constituency and the people here." Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is in the fray from Rae Bareilly. BJP district president R K Verma said the people here have a positive response to the "Modi-Yogi" combination. Toilets have been built for people and they have received houses and free foodgrains under different government schemes, he said. "Maneka ji helps whosoever comes to her for assistance irrespective of one's caste or religion," he said.

Bengal: Pangs of deprivation among tribals of Bankura as political parties vie for their favour

PTI ■ RANIBANDH (WB)

An indomitable spirit of struggle seems to be the source of sustenance for residents of the Santhal villages of Ranibandh in Bankura, where pangs of deprivation of access to government welfare schemes like Awas, Lakshmi Bhandar or MGNREGA keep their lives on the edge. Although infrastructure developments in the form of blacktop roads cutting across the lush green forests, solar street lights in some pockets and tap water connections to households were apparent, people claim that unequal distribution of government benefits affects their big time. The story remains uniform across the Santhal villages of Ghagra, Rautera, Sonardi, Haludkanali and several other forest-covered areas, forming parts of West Bengal's Jangalmahal, which were affected by Maoist activities a little over a decade ago.



"Some are getting these benefits twice over, while others are fully deprived," said Sukhlal Mandi, who works as an occasional bus driver on a local route, while sitting outside his modest but tastefully decorated mud house in Ghagra village. Mandi said that he never received a house under the government's 'Awas yojana'. Lamenting that the political leaders and candidates come only before the elections,

Shyامل Hembram of Sonardi village said, "All parties take advantage of us." Sudhir Tudu, a septuagenarian, of Rautera village, said that his old age pension has stopped getting deposited in the bank. "I made visits to the officials concerned, but nothing fruitful has happened yet to restart the pension," he said. Ghagra village youth Bijoy Murmu said although he works as an agricultural labour

in the farming season, but mostly sits idle during other parts of the year. "All the parties are the same, no one is there for people like us," he said. Murmu said that there are problems of lack of jobs, water not flowing out of taps, housing and distant schools. "What is the use of studying anyway, there are no jobs," he said. Mandi lamented that while the well-to-do get richer, the conditions of the poor hardly see much change. Two middle-aged women of Sonardi, unwilling to share their names, said they work as daily labourers and are yet to get funds under the Lakshmi Bhandar scheme of the state government. Shyامل Hembram of Sonardi claimed that water flows from taps in their village only on the days officials visit the area. He said that only one person has a government job in his village which houses a hundred-odd people.

Sensex, Nifty hit all-time peaks

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices rallied on Thursday, with the Sensex and Nifty hitting their lifetime peaks...



The RBI board, at its 608th meeting on Wednesday, approved the transfer of surplus, the central bank said in a statement.

government taking office. The RBI board, at its 608th meeting on Wednesday, approved the transfer of surplus, the central bank said in a statement.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.15 per cent to USD 81.79 a barrel. The negative for equity markets is the US Fed meeting minutes, which indicate concern over the stubbornness of inflation, he noted.

India to get rating support if it uses RBI dividend to reduce fiscal deficit: S&P analyst

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India can get 'rating support' over time if it utilises the highest-ever dividend of over Rs 2 lakh crore received from the Reserve Bank to reduce fiscal deficit, said an S&P Global Rating analyst on Thursday.



The RBI board has decided to pay a record Rs 2.1 lakh crore dividend to the government for the fiscal ended March 2024, more than double of what was budgeted expectation of Rs 1.02 lakh crore.

revenue shortfalls in areas like investment receipts or additional allocation to expenditures in the final budget, Phua said in an email interview from Singapore.

revenue — would be brought down to 4.5 per cent by 2025-26. In May last year, S&P Global Ratings affirmed India's sovereign rating at 'BBB' with a stable outlook on growth but flagged weak fiscal performance and low GDP per capita as risks.

Godrej Properties sells about 650 flats for over ₹2,000 crore



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Godrej Properties has sold around 650 flats in Noida for more than Rs 2,000 crore, amid strong consumer demand for residential properties.

Emcure, Genovra settle litigation with HDT, ink pact to develop mRNA vaccines

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Emcure Pharmaceuticals Ltd and its arm Genovra Biopharmaceuticals have settled all legal disputes with HDT Bio Corp and have signed a long-term agreement to develop mRNA vaccines, the company said on Thursday.

Under the settlement, the litigation between them, including before US courts and the arbitral tribunal in London, has been settled and dismissed, Emcure said in a statement.

The parties have also entered into a long-term agreement to develop mRNA vaccines against a broad range of infectious diseases, in India and several other countries. As part of their agreement, HDT has granted a licence to Emcure to use its patented mRNA vaccine technology in multiple fields, it added.

commercialisation of mRNA vaccines," the statement said. HDT had filed lawsuit against Emcure alleging stealing of Covid-19 vaccine technology trade secrets. Emcure CEO & Managing Director Satish Mehta said, "...The misunderstanding between us and HDT not only stands resolved but we have widened the scope of our technical collaboration on a long-term basis."

Leather exporters seek national policy to attract investments, create jobs, boost shipments

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



A apex body for leather and footwear exporters CLE has asked the government to formulate a national policy for the sector with a view to attract investments, boost India's shipments and create jobs.

Explaining the importance of the policy, CLE Executive Director R Selvam said that the sector needs a national policy as it is a labour-intensive sector, which employs about 4.4 million, with over 85 per cent women.

lowering the tax burden for the sale of goods in the domestic market. Further, the CLE suggested that the policy should include a blueprint for infrastructure development in all leather and footwear clusters to make them smart clusters; measures for logistics management; and monetary policy; credit facilities; and insurance coverage.

Government plans big scale radiation processing of onions to prevent shortages

PIT ■ NEW DELHI



The government is planning to significantly ramp up the radiation processing of onions to create a buffer stock of 1,00,000 tonnes this year, as it aims to prevent shortages and price rises of the politically sensitive bulb, according to a top government official.

this year," Khare told PTI. The ministry has asked the state agencies NAFED and NCCF, who are procuring 500,000 tonnes of onions to create a buffer stock this year, to explore irradiation facilities around key consumption centres such as Sonapat, Thane, Nasik and Mumbai. Radiation processing was tried on a small scale of 1,200 tonnes near the growing region of Maharashtra last year.

Working on Gen AI tool to make video learning content more accessible, affordable: Upsurge

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Upsurge, an e-learning platform that focuses on stock market trading and investing, aspires to become the leading platform in the domain of finance and is working on a generative AI tool to churn out video-based content to make its offerings more accessible and affordable, say its co-founders.

founded Valuationary, which was acquired by Raise Financial Services in 2022 and rechristened Upsurge. With more people keen to dabble in stock market investment, the demand for learning stock market trading and investing is on a constant rise, said Gupta.



traders and investors looking to enhance their skills, Shah added. The name Upsurge resonates better with the younger trading and investing audience, he said.

affordable," Shah told PTI. "The idea behind creating Upsurge is to ensure that stock market participants trade and invest right, especially in the Futures and Options (F&O) segment, where 90 per cent of traders do not make money. Upsurge imparts education through well-produced courses, live

sessions, mentorship programmes, and social media initiatives," he explained. With over 60 courses and more than five mentorship programmes (revolving around options trading, technical analysis, investing strategy and personal finance among others) in its arsenal, the platform has garnered more than 100,000 users who are constantly learning on their platform and becoming better traders and investors, Shah noted.

builds up and scales. Over 50 traders, investors and fund managers teach on Upsurge's platform. The overall community size is over half a million learners across Upsurge platforms. "Life has changed quite drastically for the founders and the entire team post the acquisition," said Shah. The speed of lining up courses and product offerings is lightning fast.

India," he said. The vision for Upsurge is to become the number one learning platform in the domain of finance. "Going forward, we will be gamifying the entire learning process to make it more interactive and engaging. This shall help Upsurge to increase its completion rates (people enrolling & completing the course), which are currently at about 25 per cent," he says. Upsurge has leveraged AWS services — Amazon's cloud computing unit — extensively in scaling its business.

servers to ensure we manage our traffic well. Along with that, we have been using Cloud Front, Elemental MediaConvert, and S3 to ensure that our content storage, video processing, and content streaming work seamlessly," Gupta said. Amazon's SES (Simple Email Service) has helped Upsurge to automate high-volume emails, leading to 10 percent of free users getting converted into paid users.

JSW Group's paint business turns profitable

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



JSW Paints crossed Rs 2,000 crore in revenue from operation in FY24 and logged its first operating profit in five years of inception, a top company official said on Thursday.

growing Indian paints industry, is aiming "to grow much faster than the market". "We aim to keep growing anywhere from 5 to 10 times the market growth. In the current year (FY24), We have grown 10 times the rest of the industry," he said adding that JSW Paints is bringing new products into the market,

expanding its reach and network and continuing to invest in building the brands. Asked about JSW Paints' target to have Rs 5,000 crore revenue within the next two years, Sundaresan said: "We believe it is possible." "Of course, it has to be aided by a buoyant market and if you keep doing the right things which we have been doing. We have always believed in taking the aspirational goals and working towards them systematically. So we believe it is possible," he added.

continue to do," he said. JSW Paints has so far invested Rs 900 crore for its decorative and industrial coating business. Regarding the paints market, Sundaresan said, the industry has been growing at double-digit in the last few decades and is expected to do so going forward. It is a growing market and has a place for newcomers in the segment.

terms of its offerings and has achieved this milestone in a short span of time despite two years being lost in COVID, he added. "We have already faced the existing competition actively over the last five years. We believe JSW Paints will be able to face both the existing as well as new competition which is coming into the industry well with our approach and difference we can make in industry," he said. Launched in May 2019, JSW Paints is a part of the USD 24 billion JSW Group, whose business interests span sectors such as steel, energy, maritime infrastructure, defence, B2B e-commerce, realty, cement, sports and venture capital.

MG Motor India signs pact with Vertelo to deliver 3,000 EVs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

MG Motor India on Thursday said it has signed an initial pact to deliver 3,000 EVs to integrated fleet electrification platform Vertelo in a phased manner.

demonstrates a shared vision for a green and sustainable future with decarbonisation in India. We also believe that this collaboration will augment our endeavours to offer advanced e-mobility solutions for passengers and boost faster adoption of EVs in the country," MG Motor India Chief Growth Officer, Gaurav Gupta said. Vertelo is a fleet electrification platform that aims at providing end-to-end solutions to operators and corporates. It has been established by Macquarie Asset Management and has received anchor investment from the Green Climate Fund which has committed to

invest up to USD 200 million. "This partnership with MG Motor India to purchase around 3,000 electric cars, marks the beginning of an exciting journey for both organisations with a common goal of accelerating fleet electrification and achieving Net-zero emissions," Vertelo CEO, Sandeep Gambhir said. The range of electric vehicles that MG Motor plans to bring in India over the next few years coupled with Vertelo's integrated electrification solutions for fleet operators and corporates will go a long way in accelerating the shift towards a more sustainable transportation ecosystem, he added.



SRH big-hitters up against RR's spin stars in battle of nerves for place in IPL final

PTI ■ CHENNAI
IPL's best power-hitters Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma will face a very different challenge in wily spinners...

national highway or at the Kotla or Wankhede is completely from playing at the Chepauk where the strip will be sticky in nature.

and playing on his home turf here, he would love to exploit the conditions. Also, the experienced duo of Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Cummins have a lot to deal with...



month. However, skipper Sanju Samson will have to do better, given that he hasn't crossed the 20-run mark in the last three contests.

Ahmed, Pat Cummins (c), Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jaydev Unadkat, T Natarajan, Mayank Markande, Umran Malik, Anmolpreet Singh, Glenn Phillips (wk), Rahul Tripathi, Washington Sundar, Uppendra Yadav (wk), Jhathavedh Subramanyan, Sanvir Singh, Vijayakanth, Viyakanth, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Marco Jansen, Akash Maharaj Singh and Mayank Agarwal.



PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Dinesh Karthik's international career was a classic case of what could have been after the arrival of Mahendra Singh Dhoni but on Wednesday, when he said goodbye to the game...

Dinesh Karthik: Man of comebacks and Dhoni's understudy calls time on IPL and international career

teams in the IPL since the tournament's inception in 2008, Karthik can be proud of his record in the world's premier T20 league. He finished as an IPL winner with close to 5000 runs over 17 seasons...



He announced his arrival on the big stage with a spectacular stumping of opposition skipper Michael Vaughan. Three months later, he made his Test debut against Australia but his international career could never really take off...

admission, he was shocked to know about his exclusion from the home series against Australia, ahead of the ICC event in England. The selectors surprisingly brought him back for the World Cup where he only got three games, including the ill-fated semifinal against New Zealand.

We need bowlers with specific skill set of bowling at Chinnaswamy: RCB head coach Flower

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD
Raw pace alone will never be enough to win T20 games consistently at Chinnaswamy where bowlers with different skill-sets, executing a specific plan will be required in RCB set-up...

NEEDED: On batting front, Flower wants players with better power game, who can keep up the tempo. "We have all seen how the power game has affected T20 cricket recently. On the batting front, you certainly need to recruit batsmen with that sort of power that can keep up that sort of tempo," he added.

COACH SUPPORTS 'IMPACT PLAYER' RULE: Flower backed for the 'Impact Player' rule saying that it allows two Indian players to participate in a game. "It has got a few positives about it absolutely. Now there's an extra Indian playing and that's a good thing for Indian cricket. It has catalysed the batsmen," Flower said.

Avesh Khan Way: Sleep well, eat well and bowl well

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD
Eat, sleep, Bowl and repeat. Avesh Khan has simplified the mantra of success and it is paying dividends as one saw his performances during key games for Rajasthan Royals in this year's IPL.

Royals reach Qualifier 2 in IPL here on Wednesday. "The more you would think... cricket is like a circle, the smaller you keep it, the better it will be. You expand this circle more and you will find (more and more) gaps," he added.

LSG, I had played 10 matches of Ranji Trophy wherein I bowled about 320 overs. The body was not responding to the efforts I was putting in," he said.



you will be able to execute better. I was not fresh last year so I did not have a successful IPL. I (also) realised later that there is no good in taking so much tension," he added.

drawing board and working with his coach in order to work on his bowling action and setting up right routines for training and recovery have helped him immensely.

back then, but after the IPL last year, I analysed that there were some technical changes in my bowling. I worked with my coach Anand Rajan and I did well with him," he said.

and Rajasthan's (home) ground is also quite big, the team is also good... as a bowler you need such margins," he said. While acknowledging that various methods help player develop mental toughness, Avesh said there is no better teacher than going through the grind regularly.

all that, but when (as a batter) you need 10-12 runs in an over, you forget everything and focus on execution," he added. The pacer acknowledged RR's dugout was tense during a close finish against RCB in the Eliminator here but he said the team perhaps remembered head coach Kumar Sangakkara's message before the game.