OPINION 6

WORLD 8

UPHOLDING THE FOURTH | TRUMP CALLS JUDGE CROOKED

DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA Late City Vol.13 Issue 119

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STOCK MARKETS REBOUND AS GST REVENUES HIT RECORD IN APRIL

MONEY 10

KKR LOOK TO **IRON OUT FLAWS** AGAINST MI

12 SPORTS

to weaken Govt: Modi



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by BJP leaders during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Anand, Gujarat on Thursday

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE AHMEDABAD/NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday dubbed the Congress party a "disciple" of Pakistan, and targeted Rahul Gandhi saying the neighbouring country was eager to make the 'shehzada' of the grand old party India's next Prime Minister as the country's enemies want a weak Government

neighbourhood. Modi's comments in an election rally in Gujarat,

Maliwal cries

sacks 223 DCW

With its topmost leader

Minister Arvind Kejriwal still in Tihar, the AAP has

received yet another blow as

the Women and Child

Department of the Delhi

Government has terminated

the services of 52 "illegally"

Commission for Women

Governor Vinai Kumar

Saxena on April 29, issued an order to discontinue the

services of 223 contractual

employees from the DCW,

calling their appointment

The termination has been

carried out on the basis of a

report submitted by a

committee way back in June,

2017. Earlier, an order issued on April 29 said that

the WCD Department had

terminated the services of

223 contractual staff, but the

department on Thursday

issued a statement saying it had directed for the

termination of 52 such

(WCD)

contractual

Lieutenant

Delhi

'illegal' staff

SAUMYA SHUKLA

Development

appointed

employees

(DCW).

Earlier,

illegal.

employees.

NEW DELHI

foul as L-G

linking Congress former Minister in Imran Khan's Cabinet Pakistan, reportedly shared a video featuring Rahul on his social media handle and praised

"Pakistan is crying because Congress is dying here. You all must have learnt that Pakistani leaders are now praying for Congress. Pakistan is eager to make 'shehzada' (referring to

with Rahul) the next PM. This is Pakistan came a day after not surprising because we Chaudhry Fawad Hussain, a already know that Congress Pakistan's 'murid

(follower).

Pakistan

Congress has now exposed completely. It shows that the country's enemies want a weak Government in India, not strong one...A weak Government which was there at the time of 26/11 Mumbai terror attack. They want a corrupt Government on religious basis," he said.

partnership between

and

But Modi's strong Government neither bows down nor does it stop," Modi said in a rally in Anand in Gujarat.

The PM came down more and said unlike in the past when Congress was in power, the "tyres of Pakistan's terror have got punctured" now. "A country which used to export terror in the past, is now struggling to import 'atta' (flour). The hands which used to hold bombs are now holding 'bheekh ka katora' (begging bowl)," he said. People across the world are now saying that India is a global bright spot. India is seen as a 'vishwa bandhu' (global friend) who can resolve conflicts between countries, Modi said.

The PM also reiterated that Congress wants to change India's Constitution provide reservation Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and Other Backward Classes (OBC) communities to Muslims. "Congress wants to give reservation to Muslims, the party's favourite vote bank. For that, they want to change the Constitution. I challenge Congress to give in writing that they will not change the Constitution to give reservation to Muslims

Pak wants Rahul as PM Battle for Korba heats up as Saroj, **Jyotsna make all-out efforts**

SHRI RAM SHAW KORBA

BJP will bounce back: Saroj Cong will be the king: Jyotsna



Saroj Pandey, a prominent female leader of the BJP whose term as a Rajya Sabha member recently concluded, is contesting to the Lok Sabha from Korba in Chhattisgarh. She previously served as a Lok Sabha member from Durg and as an MLA. She has been pitted against Congress candidate Jyotsana Mahant. She reiterates that the active participation of Nari Shakti will undeniably accelerate journey towards achieving a developed and empowered India. Women connected with Self Help Groups are the strong link for Viksit Bharat.

In an exclusive interview with The Pioneer, she spoke about the development of rural women in Korba et al. EXCERPTS...

Q - Korba has been a citadel of the Congress. Do you think, it has done enough for all-round development of the place? There are problems

galore. For the all-round development of Korba, the Congress party did nothing all these years. The condition of the roads here is very pathetic. There's electricity and drinking water in rural areas. There's not even a good hospital or school. Even today, women face several challenges which is ripe for all of us to work harder not only for the party (BIP) but for our constituency and country as well to realise the pledge of a Viksit Bharat. I'm sure that BJP will bounce

back with a bang in Korba. Q - Doesn't it hurt when they say that you're an outsider?

The Congress people call me an outsider. 'Hey Mahantin, she can't even speak Chhattisgarhi'. Charan Das Mahant himself does not

live here and calls me an outsider. If I am from outside, is Sonia Gandhi from here? What matters most is work, because your work will speak volume for you.

Q - You have already experienced a successful stint as a Parliamentarian in Durg. What you've to bank upon in Korba to taste success?

See, we don't want to rest on laurels. We are a party which always looks ahead with renewed vigour. Our government has done a lot in last 10 years for the welfare of people of the country irrespective of their caste, creed, religion and region. We are also committed to empowering women through initiatives in education, entrepreneurship, technology and more. This is also reflected in the Modi g o v e r n m e n t accomplishments in the last few years. **Q - Your take on gender**

equality... Our government and

party recognise achievements of women and their efforts in raising awareness about gender equality and women's rights. The government is leveraging the power of drones to further women empowerment. Mere sloganeering will not serve the purpose of women empowerment. An awareness drive needs to be accelerated not only in Korba but in every part of the country to make them aware of various government welfare schemes.

Q - What will be your priority if you are elected from Korba?

People's well-being was, is and always remain our party's priority and our government's as well. Basic amenities like home, water, electricity, better road connectivity, ed healthcare must everyone. In today's digitalised world, women in rural areas must not be deprived of financial literacy. The Modi government has taken several initiatives for their capacity building. This is being done to boost female financial literacy level in India. This approach underscores the critical need for enhancing women's financial literacy for individual, household and broader societal well-being.



The Congress' lone female MP in Chhattisgarh, Jyotsna Mahant, has already been shouldering responsibilities in social work for close to four decades now. She abhors the term 'politician' and calls herself a social worker for life. Mahant got elected from Korba in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. This time she is contesting against BJP's Saroj Pandey from this very constituency. Jyotsna is married to senior Congress leader and former Union minister Charan Das Mahant, who is now the leader of the Opposition in the state Assembly.

In an exclusive interview with The Pioneer, she spoke on various issues including the prospects of her party in the Lok Sabha battle. EXCERPTS..

Q - Do you think a Modi wave is prevalent in Korba and the rest of the country? Will it affect the your party in the

We are fighting the election on several issues related to public interest inflation, unemployment, health, education, water etc. as mentioned in our manifesto. But the BJP have no issue except to fight the Congress. There was a Modi wave in 2019, but this time it has already dwindled. The so-called Modi magic will not work here in Korba.

Q – Don't you think Korba problems?

Where there's a problem, there's a solution too. We are working for the people 24X7. Korba is like a mini India. Thousands of migrated people live here. Most of them work as labourers. Problems like pollution, inadequate train services have always been there for a long time. We have been striving hard to mitigate them. I wrote many letters to the Rail Minister seeking more train services from Korba but all my pleas fell on deaf ears. **Q** - **Home Minister Amit** Shah yesterday referred to Chhattisgarh as an area of mostly backward, Dalit and tribal brothers and sisters. Your take on this.

If a senior leader and a minister of his stature talks like this, then it's totally uncalledfor. Korba is rapidly treading on the path of prosperity. There's a medical college with state-of-the-art facilities. We have come up with many English medium schools. We are focusing on people's health, education, water, sanitation and employment. Empowering rural women has also been our uppermost aim.

Q - Shah went on to say that the constituency is today known for the 'Missing MP'. How would you react to it?

This is a blatant lie. During the Corona pandemic, we were forced to remain indoors Hence, I lost valuable time to meet people in person. I got almost three years to serve my constituency. And during this period, a lot of work has been done. The National Highways Bharat Mala project and ESI facilities for labourers are testimony to that. Nitin Gadkariji and Harsh Vardhanji immensely helped me. I have visited several remote villages recently. During Parliament sessions I asked 106 questions

as a representative of Korba. Q - Tell us about the shift from being a social worker to now a politician?

I used to love my work as a social worker where I would spend my time with the people without the baggage of being an elected representative. I had the leverage to push for solutions for people's woes by sometimes forcing my husband to do some development work. But after becoming a politician, I understand that you cannot nieve everything 1 out for, especially when there are different governments in

the Center and the state. Q – Do you see a stiff fight with BJP's Saroj Pandey?

I don't think of it as a challenge. I am a common person who will fight in the elections based on the works that were done by our government. I'm confident that the Congress will be the king in Korba. I thank the party High Command for giving me this opportunity.

Clandestine 'dole surveys' make poll panel see red



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

 $A^{
m mid}$ controversy over freebies promised by the political parties in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission (EC) took "serious view of activities political parties and candidates seeking details of voters under the guise of various surveys for their proposed beneficiary

schemes" and termed such activities as "corrupt practice of bribery under Section 123(1) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951".

In an advisory issued to all national and State level parties, the commission has asked them to immediately cease any activities "that involve registering individuals for post-election beneficiary-oriented schemes through any advertisements/ survey/App.

The advisory came ahead of the third phase of the Lok Sabha Elections 2024, slated for May 7. The commission has directed all District Election Officers to take appropriate actions against any such advertisements within the statutory provisions.

The commission noted that during the ongoing elections has come across instances where some political parties and candidates been engaging in activities that blur the lines between legitimate surveys and partisan efforts to register individuals for

beneficiary-oriented schemes

the guise of conducting surveys or creating awareness about the existing schemes of the Government or creating awareness about the party manifesto regarding prospective individual Highlighting the possible 'quid-pro-quo arrangement", the commission said the act of inviting or calling upon voters to register for postelection benefits "may create an impression of the requirement of one-to-one transactional relationship between the elector and the proposed benefit'

This also has the potential to generate quid-pro-quo arrangements for voting in a particular way thereby leading to inducement, the poll body added. It added that the potential of quid pro for voting and inducements amounts to

bribery/corrupt practice. In this regard, the Election Commission directed all District Election Officers to take appropriate actions against any such advertisements within the statutory provisions namely 127A Section Representation of People's Act, 1951, 123 (1) of the Representation of People's Act, 1951, and Section 171 and individual benefits under (B) of the Indian Penal Code

BJP denies ticket to WFI ex-chief, names his son



RAJESH KUMAR | NEW DELHI

 $E_{\text{speculation, the BJP on}}^{\text{nding weeks}} \quad \text{of} \quad$ Thursday denied ticket to The former president of

sitting MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh who has been embroiled in a sexual harassment controversy and fielded his son Karan Bhushan Singh from Kaiserganj in Uttar Pradesh. For the first time since 2009, the BJP dropped its heavyweight leader and sitting MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh from Kaiserganj.

Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) is currently facing allegations of sexual harassment levelled against him by six wrestlers. women Karan is likely to file his nomination on May 3. The move retains the seat's contest the family within highlighting the influence of the Thakur leader and six-time MP in the region and the party.

The party also named Dinesh

Pratap Singh as its candidate from Raebareli, a Gandhi family bastion which has been won by former Congress president Sonia Gandhi for five consecutive times. Sonia, who won from the Gandhi family bastion five consecutive times, was elected to the Rajya Sabha unopposed from Kajasthan earlier this year. The deadline to file nominations for Amethi and Rae Bareli is on Friday. These seats are going to polls in the fifth phase, on May 20.

Tiny feet waltz back to school with innocent confidence

ABHI SINGHAL/ADITI SHARMA/ SAMAR PANDEY/RISHABH MALIK

t was just another start of the Lday for the school going toddlers and young children on Thursday who a day earlier had been evacuated from their classrooms following a bomb scare across over 100 schools of the Delhi NCR. In the schools which resumed, children appeared to be more confident than their parents when they exchanged the routine 'tata; byebye' greetings.

Several schools, however, decided to remain closed as part of security measures and a few of them observed a low attendance. The Pioneer reporters visited more than a dozen schools across the the schools of Delhi and Noida.

national Capital and observed that students were back to school in their school buses, private vans or parents' pick drop facility. Principal of Kendriya Vidyalaya in

Sadiq Nagar, Mamta Singh said, "Our attendance today has not dropped and students are also feeling safe and secure and it is our responsibility to ensure the security of the students". School management had assured parents on Wednesday itself that there is no need to worry. We didn't get anything on our official email ID, she added.

The parents came to drop students off at school just like on a normal day without any fears. On Wednesday, 131 schools received bomb threats via email, which led to mass evacuation and panic in

Photo: Samar Pandey/Pioneer

day, and he as a parent was not

scared at all." He further added Ajit Singh, who came to drop his children at Sarvodaya Vidyalaya in Keshav Puram in north Delhi area said, "It is just like any other

that this was only a way to create Sadina Khatoon, a mother of two

children, came to drop her

Hoax aimed at mass panic: FIR STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI 507 (criminal intimidation by an

 Γ he Delhi Police Special Cell in its FIR registered revealed that the perpetrators of the hoax bomb threat letters received by nearly 200 Delhi schools wanted to "create mass panic and disturb public order. FIR states that the movement of these units to the schools "resulted in massive inconvenience," according to the The FIR has been registered at

Special Cell Police Station under IPC sections 505 (2) (statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes)

anonymous communication), and 120 (B) (punishment of criminal conspiracy).

According to police sources, the investigation will be done by the Counter Intelligence Team Special Cell. The IFSO unit is also trying to find out the origin from where the mail was sent, till now the connection to Russia (IP address) has been revealed as the domain of the email is "mail.ru". The investigating agency is also probing the angle of joint conspiracy between China and ISI to ascertain if there is a larger conspiracy at work in the matter.

Primary School in Sukhdev Kunj and expressed that she was not scared and even other students have also turned up in the school. Several schools also sent messages early in the morning to parents not to send their children to school whereas a majority of parents were concerned after the bomb threats. While talking to some parents outside the school, they looked concerned, "My daughter's school did not receive any threat email and school has also convinced the parents about the security of the kids but still as a mother our concern is obvious," said Divya Singh, mother of a class 4 student in The Indian School, Sadiq Nagar, New Delhi.

AGM, ECR visits NTPC coal mining project

General Manager Railway) Central Tarun Prakash. accompanied by distinguished guests from Hajipur Zone and Dhanbad Division, conducted a visit to the Banadag Railway Siding of the Pakri Barwadih Coal Mining project. The purpose of the visit was to assess the progress of vard augmentation work and the construction of the Rapid Loading System (RLS), Upon arrival at the Banadag Siding, received a warm welcome from Faiz Taiyab (Head of Project, PBCMP and PB-NW),



who welcomed them After that a brief meeting

place at the siding premises, during which senior officials from NTPC pro-

Ramashray Pandey, overview of the RLS con-(Construction), and senior NTPC officials Faiz Taiyab struction and yard augmentation work. Emphasizing the importance of meeting proj-(HOP PB-CMP), Sanjay Dubey ect deadlines, NTPC officials (GM. Infrastructure) Amudala Prathap (AGM, Dispatch), and Basant sought wholehearted support Dispatch), and Basant Behera (AGM, Electrical from the Railways for timely completion. Subsequently, the team toured the Banadag Engineering). Siding Area, RLS area, and

The visit concluded with lunch at the NTPC Transit Julu at Hazaribagh. Before depart-ing, AGM (ECR) and PCOM (ECR) commended the collaborative efforts of NTPC and Railways, affirming the Railway's commitment to fully support the timely completion of yard augmentation

Škoda Auto India comes up with MY24 undates

Skoda Auto India reinforces its commitment to safety with the introduction of six airbags as standard across all vari-ants of the Kushaq SUV and Slavia sedan as part of its MY24 updates. Following their previous milestones of achieving 5-star safety ratings, the move aims to enhance safety credentials even further. Petr Janeba. Brand Director of Škoda Auto emphasized the India, brand's dedication to safety, stating that customer feedback drives their continuous improvements. These updates align with the company's product action strategy, which includes recent introductions like electric seats and advanced infotainment systems. With Škoda's made-for-India, ready-forthe-world approach, the Kushaq and Slavia maintain their position as top choices in the market, offering both

Axis Nifty Bank Index Fund unveiled

Axis Mutual Fund launches 'Axis Nifty Bank Index Fund', an open-ended index fund tracking the Nifty Bank TRI. Managed by Mr. Karthik Kumar and Mr. Ashish Naik, the fund aims to mirror the total returns of the Nifty Bank TRI, offering direct participation in India's banking sector growth. B. Gopkumar, MD & CEO of Axis AMC, underscores the sector's resilience and potential within India's economic narrative. With an NFO opening on May 3, 2024. and closing on May 17, 2024, the fund provides investors with an opportunity to capitalize on the sector's growth.

President of the Congress safety and performance.

Party and Secretary of the City Center Traders Association, along with his supporters, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) The event took place on at the residential office of MLA Biranchi Narayan in Bokaro. Inspired by the policies and principles of the BJP and the transformative work of

along with prominent figures development, Jyoti Prakash like MP candidate Dhullu Mahato, BJP District President Jaydev Rai, welcomed the new members into

Modi, Jyoti Prakash Dwivedi,

Minister Narendra

the party fold, presenting them with party insignia, clothing, and flowers. Among those who joined the BJP were Anit Singh Dangi, Nikesh Upadhyay, Binod Pandey, Monu Kumar,

Prashant Dwivedi, Anish Kumar, Shankar Marandi,

Mahato, Souray Rastogi, Bipin Agrawal, Umesh Singh, Ritesh Singh, Amar Kumar, Anand Soren, Sanjay Kumar, and many others. The event witnessed a

large gathering, with notable personalities such as Mihir Singh, Shashi Bhushan Ojha, Mukul, Dilip Srivastava, Kamlesh Rai, Sanjay Tyagi, Birabhadra Prasad Singh, Anil Singh, Devendra Singh, Braj Dubey. Amar Swarnakar, Abhay Kumar Golu, among others, gracing

Adani Power announces Q4 FY24 results

Adani Power Ltd. ["APL"], a part of Adani portfolio companies, today announced the financial results for the fourth quarter ended 31st March 2024. Commenting on the quarterly results, Gautam Adani, Chairman, Group said, "As India transitions to a more sustainable energy future, the Adani Portfolio of companies will continue to provide innovative, reliable, and scalable solutions to support the nation's economic growth and help realise the aspirations of its billion plus citizens. Adani Power is a key component of our long-term strategy, supplying reliable base load power across a vast part of the country, executing benchmark-setting projects, creating assets of national impor-tance, and acting as the bal-

ancing supply to enable greater integration of renewables in the grid. We are committed to continuous innovation across businesses and creating sustainable value for

all stakeholders. S B Khyalia, CEO, Adani Power Limited, said, "Adani Power has posted yet another outstanding quarter demonstrating its core strengths, capping a year of exceptional operational and financial performance in a fitting testimony to its sound strategy and operational excellence. On our journey to achieve the Company's vision, we are focusing on tech-enabled reliability enhancement, reduction in cost of generation, and improvement in plant efficiency. Adani Power is committed to empowering lives and contributing to India's energy security by anticipat-ing the need for sustainable,

Congress leader JP Dwivedi

joins BJP with supporters

affordable, and reliable power supply and serving it by building capacities in a timely and cost-effective manner." The operating perform-ance for Q4 FY 2023-24 includes the 1600 MW Godda Ultra-supercritical Thermal Power Plant ("USCTPP") of APL's subsidiary Adani Power (Jharkhand) Limited (APJL), which was commissioned in O1 FY 2023-24. During the fourth quarter as well as the Financial Year 2023-24, higher volumes were contributed by almost all plants led by Mundra, the newly commissioned Godda plant, Udupi, and Mahan. Domestic power sales volumes continued to be driven by growing power demand across India, and offtake under Power Purchase Agreements ("PPAs") was further supported by falling prices of imported coal and alternate fuel.

Manoj Bajpayee ioins the Nand **Ghar Movement**

MUMBAI : Nand Ghar, a transformative initiative targeting 14 lakh anganwadis nationwide. launched the #KhaanaKhaayaKya movement with renowned actor Manoj Bajpayee. Aimed at nourishing India's future, the movement emphasizes holistic healthcare, quality nutrition, and preschool education for children. Chairman Anil Agarwal expressed gratitude for Bajpayee's support, citing his personal resonance with Ghar's mission. Bajpayee shared his own journey, underlining the pivotal role of proper nutrition in pursuing dreams.

Nand Ghar, spearheaded by Anil Agarwal Foundation, has made significant strides in combating child malnutrition, exemplified by the distribution of multi-millet nutri bars to 50,000 children daily. With the #KhaanaKhaayaKya

Adani Enterprises Ltd (AEL).

part of the Adani Group,

today announced its results

for the quarter and year

businesses comprising of

ANIL Ecosystem, Airports

and Roads are making signif-

icant strides in their opera-

tional performance. The con-

The emerging core infra

ended March 31, 2024

Adani Enterprises Ltd

announces Q4 and FY24 results

Bokaro Steel Plant bids farewell to retiring employees

In a heartfelt ceremony held at the Main Auditorium of the Resource Department, Bokaro Steel Plant, retiring employees who bid adjeu in April 2024 were honored. The event, graced by Chief Guest Harsh Nigam, Chief General Manager (Materials Management), commenced with a warm welcome by Assistant General Manager (Personnel) Dr. Nanda Priyadarshini. Dr. Priyadarshini provided insights into post-retirement benefits and presented each

retiring employee's biodata. Harsh Nigam, in his address, congratulated the retiring employees for their dedicated service and wished them a fulfilling retired life. He also presented them with service certificates and tokens of appreciation. A total of 61 employees, comprising 6

but also as a global leader in

infrastructure development,

Chairman of the Adani Group, "AEL's resilient

growth model of incubation

confirms the operational and

organizational excellence.

This is supported by high rat-

ings and fully funded growth.

Our commitment to excel-

lence in project management

and operations continues to

management.

Gautam

Adani.



executives and 55 non-executives, bid farewell in April 2024. The program was conducted under the guidance of Nanda Priyadarshini, Assistant General Manager (Personnel). Additionally, a separate farewell ceremony was organized for Prakash Upadhyay, Chief General Manager (Refractories), in the Director's Conference Hall. Executive

along with other dignitaries including Suresh Rangani (Executive Director - Finance & Accounts) and Rajan Prasad (Executive Director

the under-construction rail-

way yard, observing various

operations including rake

loading, boundary construc-

tion, RLS construction, earth

filling, construction of Bridge

Tarun Prakash, AGM (ECR),

included Manoj Singh, PCOM (ECR), Kamal Kishore Sinha,

Dignitaries accompanying

4, and track laying.

Personnel & Administration and Additional Charge), graced the occasion. C.R. Mahapatra presented him with a memento as a token of remembrance. All attendees extended their best wishes to Ved Prakash Upadhyay for his

Maoists put of posters for poll boycott in Palamu

PNS: DALTONGANJ

Haidernagar police in Palamu today retrieved 3 hand written leaflets purported to be from the Maoists parroting to the same old tune of boycott election which the Maoists had launched first in 1995 then in Balumath police station limits which was a part of Palamu district then.

SDPO Hussainabad Mukesh Kumar Mahto has

pen strokes have been used.

was found pinned in the stem of the banana, added Mukesh Kumar Mahto.

Two other hand written leaflets were found pasted on the government buildings.

The locations of the hand written leaflets have been found at two areas Imamganj and Barewa under the Haidernagar police station limits in Palamu.

The Maoists' poll boycott call hardly cuts any ice with the masses as the common voters have rejected it in the wholesale fashion for more

This tokenism to boycott is more to suggest that Maoists are down,lesser in numbers

PANKAJ: DHANBAD Detailed information is avail-Tuesday. able at www.axismf.com.

Substantial increase in assets of MLA Dhulu Mahato in 5 years

There has been a substantial increase in the wealth of MLA Dhulu Mahato and his wife Savitri Devi in the last five years. This has been shown in the affidavit filed by him as a Lok Sabha candidate on

R SHARMA: BOKARO

a significant political

joined

Dwivedi, the District Vice

According to the information given by the MLA in the affidavit, he has a total of movable and immovable assets worth Rs 3 crore 82 lakh 26 thousand 944, which includes land, vehicles, jewellery, bank deposits and fixed deposits, bonds and debentures, national savings certificates and others. This is approximately Rs 50 lakh more than the details given in the affidavit given in the 2019 MLA elections.

Whereas his wife Savitri Devi, as per the details given in the affidavit, is an employee of Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL), has assets worth approximately Rs 65 lakh, 24 thousand,867

Dhulu as karta of a Hindu undivided family has assets worth Rs 37 lakh, 24 thousand 305. He has also shown some assets in the name of his minor children. He has shown real estate in Dhanbad and Ranchi.

The MLA and his wife have a total of six weapons. Both of them also have one pistol, one rifle and one gun each. All together three licenses issued in the name of the MLA's wife have been issued by the Ranchi district administration whereas three in the name of

The MLA and his wife also have 13 LIC policies, the total value of which is around Rs 37 lakh

Total 20 cases against MLA:

According to the affidavit, a total of 20 cases are registered against the MLA in different police stations. He has said that he has been punished by the court in two cases and he has appealed against it in the High Court. Cases are registered under sections 307, 323, 378, 594, 120B, 507 and other sections of the IPC.

According to the affidavit, the MLA is also a shareholder of Munden Ore Management Services Private Limited. This company is currently working on four contracts in BCCL and one in Indian Oil Limited .

global benchmarks, tribution of these businesses to the overall EBIDTA has ensuring sustainable longconfirmed the retrieval of the consistently increased to 45% term value creation for our 3 hand written leaflets of the stakeholders. We remain for FY24 compared to 40% in Maoists to boycott polls. dedicated to corporate gover-He said the handwriting of "Adani Enterprises has nance, meticulous complithe three looks guite identical to each other while 2 different once again validated its posiance, robust performance tion not only as the premier and effective capital flow

One such poll boycott stuff

than 29 years or so.

but not out in Palamu.

Legal Awareness camp held in Garhwa

GARHWA

business incubator in India

instructions of On the Principal District Sessions Judge District Legal Chairman Services Authority Garhwa, the occasion of International Labor Day, a legal awareness camp was held in the auditorium of SBI's Rural Self Employment Training Institute in Chironjia village of Garhwa block on Wednesday

In which the Chief Guest Secretary District Legal Services Authority Garhwa Ravi Chaudhary explained in



detail about the rights of laborers and their protection and livelihood. PLV Murali

Shyam Tiwari provided information on all the schemes run by the government. And

while conducting the stage, he talked about all the free legal assistance available

case of accidents of laborers. LADC Advocate Sudhir Tiwari expressed his views on legal points. Institute Director Indu Bhushan talked in detail

Services Authority, and the

provision of compensation in

about the self-employment training of laborers. Secretary of Janak Vikas Ramashankar Dhara

Choubey made the laborers

aware through song. PLV Umashankar Dwivedi, Sangeeta Sinha were also present in this program. About 50 people attended the programme.

Tata Steel UISL promises water and electricity connections in underserved areas

the past.

PNS: JAMSHEDPUR:

Tata Steel Utilities and Infrastructure Services Limited (Tata Steel UISL), formerly known as Jusco, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Tata Steel, has unveiled plans for an extensive expansion of its services in Jamshedpur. Managing Director Ritu Raj Sinha revealed this information during a press conference held on Tuesday, outlining the company's commitment to providing water and electricity connections to areas currently lacking such essential amenities.

In a bid to address the ressing need for water infrastructure, Tata Steel UISL is set to extend water connections to various localities in both East and West Jamshedpur. Sinha specified

that areas such as Jemco Azad Basti, Jemco Basti, Laxmi Nagar, Namda Basti, Maha Nand Basti, Harijan Basti, and Cable Town in Jamshedpur East will receive water connections. Similarly, in Jamshedpur West, Shiva Nagar, Kapali Basti, Balram Basti, Kanhu Basti Jon, and Ramjanam Nagar are slated to benefit from this initiative.

Despite distributing a total of 3,266 forms for water connections in East Jamshedpur and 2.916 forms in West Jamshedpur, the response has been relatively low, with only 1,595 and 1,320 forms filled and submitted, respectively. However, Tata Steel UISL has managed to provide 1.301 water connections in East Jamshedpur and 965 in West Jamshedpur, with plans to fulfill the remaining

demand as it arises. Tata Steel UISL is also actively working towards providing electricity connections in various areas. While efforts are being made to collaborate with JBVNL for supplying electricity in government electricity areas, challenges remain in achieving this objective. Additionally, the company is focusing on enhancing cleanliness in sev eral parts of Jamshedpur, with a special emphasis on reaching underserved areas that have been neglected in

Tata Steel UISL's expansion of services reflects its commitment to improving the quality of life for residents of Jamshedpur. By addressing the critical need for water and electricity connections in underserved areas and prior-

itizing cleanliness initiatives, the company aims to contribute positively to the development and well-being of the community. Meanwhile the company also inaugurated the 500 KLD Sewage Pumping Stations in Bistupur today, marking a significant leap forward in urban infrastructure development. The ceremony, led by Capt. Dhananjay Mishra, Senior

General Manager of Town

Operations & Maintenance

and Real Estate, showcased

the commitment of Tata Steel

UISL to enhance community

well-being and environmental sustainability. The inauguration ceremony, graced by esteemed dignitaries, witnessed Capt. Dhananjay Mishra leading the ceremony in the presence of Mr. Chanakya

Chaudhary, Chairman, Tata Steel UISL, Mr. Ritu Raj Sinha, Managing Director, Tata Steel UISL and Mr Pranay Sinha, Chief, Corporate Services, Tata Steel. Their collective vision and dedication symbolize a collaborative effort towards addressing environmental challenges and enhancing community welfare.

The newly inaugurated 500 KLD Sewage Pumping Stations signify a substantial leap forward in sewage management capabilities, reflecting a blend of innovation and efficiency. Designed to accommodate 500,000 liters per day, these stations epitomize technological excellence and operational reliability, ensuring optimal performance in wastewater handling.

Sameer Oraon inaugurates **BJP** election office



PNS: LOHARDAGA

Bharatiya Janata Party candidate Sameer Oraon reached Pesharar located in the remote jungle area Lohardaga district. The local villagers welcomed him in a traditional manner. Candidate Sameer Oraon inaugurated the block level BJP election office in Pesharar by formally cutting the ribbon. On the occasion, BJP District Minister Anil Oraon, Kailash Kumar, former OBC District President Shukul Ram, former Block President Basanti Devi, Tuimu chief Ashok Yadav, Mohan

Yaday, Sanjay Yaday, Kuldeep Yadav, Aneshwar Munda, Mahendra Singh, Umesh Jaggu Nandkishore Pandit, Siva Yadav etc. were mainly present. After the inauguration of the office, the workers expressed happiness by feeding each other sweets and under the leadership of Block President Bharat Kisan, BJP workers and villagers raised more than 400 slogans this time. While addressing the workers and villagers present on this occasion, Sameer Oraon said that PM Modi has given guarantees for the allround development of the country and making India a world leader. BJP will achieve historic victory in Lohardaga Lok Sabha constituency.

All workers should work at the grassroots level to get votes for the Bharatiya Janata Party. We will win the elections on the basis of the hard work of the workers, booth presidents and chiefs. Addressing the villagers, Shri Oraon said that this time I have got the opportunity to serve you all. I am very fortunate and with the blessings of all of you, I will complete all the work after winning the election.

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A 1994

batch

officer,

Singh filed

the

petition in

the High

Priyanka concerned over degradation in politics

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday expressed her concern over

degradation in politics.
She said two kinds of leaders being were promoted in today's politics The one who are corrupt and second are those who do not talk about people's issues in their speeches.

"In the Congress, we try to promote those leaders who understand the mindset of the people and are dedicated for their welfare of common people," she said.

Addressing a rally in Chirmiri town of Chhattisgarh's Manendragarh-Chirmiridistrict in



support of Congress candidate Ivotsana Mahant, Gandhi accused the Modi government of handing over

the country's assets to his corporate friends.

Gandhi mocked at the BJP by saying that it was

going to make people dependent by providing them 5 kg ration free of cost and said people should demand jobs from the ruling party instead.

She said the Congress

has named its manifesto 'Nyay Patra' as injustice has been done to people in the last 10 years of the Narendra Modi government.

Alleging that the BJP fans hatred and disharmony among different sections of the society, Gandhi said they had not done enough for the welfare of the common people.

Of the 11 Lok Sabha

seats in Chhattisgarh, polling has been completed in four in the first two phases. The remaining seven seats including Korba will vote in the third phase

HC stays FIR against GP Singh

STAFF REPORTER

The Chhattisgarh High Court has stayed a FIR lodged against compulsorily retired Indian Police Service (IPS) officer Gurjinder Pal related to the extortion of a Durg-based businessman.

Justices Ramesh Sinha and Rajani Dubey passed the order, the petitioner's counsel Himanshu Pandey told The Pioneer on Thursday.

The next hearing will be held on July 7, Pandey

A 1994 batch officer, Singh filed the petition in the High Court in November

A case under section

388, 506 read with section 34 of the Indian Penal Code was lodged against Singh following a complaint lodged by Kamal Sen. Besides an extortion

disproportionate assets case was lodged against Singh in A couple of days ago, the

case, a sedition and a

Tribunal (CAT) ordered the Chhattisgarh government to reinstate him within four

Central

He was forcefully retired by the Centre in July last year following recommendation of the service review committee of

Court in November 2023.

government to the Ministry of Home Affairs September 2022.

Radhika makes veiled attack at Bhupesh

On misbehaviour with her at Congress headquarters



STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

 $T_{\rm misbehaviour}^{\rm he\ row\ over\ the\ alleged}_{\rm with}$ Congress media coordinator Radhika Kheda in Chhattisgarh intensified Thursday as she expressed her dissatisfaction over the silence of former Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel.

Taking to 'X', Radhika,

without naming any person, said Baghel's affection for the 'Dushil' (deformed name) was more than that of a chastity of a girl.
"I will fight", she said in

her social media post, stating the slogan coined by Priyanka Gandhi "Ladki Hun Lad Sakti Hun"

The other day, she had a heated argument with a senior official of the

"I will fight". she said in her social media post, stating the slogan coined by **Priyanka** Gandhi "Ladki **Hun Lad Sakti** Hun"

communication department of the Chhattisgarh PCC and after which Radhika tweeted that daughters are not safe in

Chhattisgarh. A video clip of her crying at the Congress headquarters went viral on Wednesday.

BJP made false promise to turn Raipur into a Smart City: Vikas Upadhyay

Administrative

STAFF REPORTER ■

Taking a dig at the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) for allegedly making false promises, Congress candidate from Raipur Lok Sabha constituency Vikas Upadhyay said the BJP's promise to make the Chhattisgarh capital a Smart City turned out to be a blatant lie.

Upadhyay, a Brahmin, became a MLA in 2018. He faced defeat in 2023 from Raipur City West seat. The BJP has fielded Brijmohan Agrawal, an eight-time MLA and a prominent face in the party, against him. Agrawal is currently a minister in the Vishnu Deo Sai government. In an exclusive interview

with The Pioneer, Vikas Upadhyay said: "Being in power for more than a decade and half, the BIP failed to deliver on its Now promises.



acceptability of the BJP MP among the public has been rapidly reducing. People want a change as they have not done any major development work which can be termed as a milestone."

Going by Brijmohan Agrawal's winning streak in Assembly elections since ministerial roles, can you expect to defeat him?

Upadhyay said: "We are fighting on issues of public interest viz. unemployment, steep price hike of essential commodities, problems faced by the manufacturing sector etc. But the BJP has no issue to take us on. The dream of getting basic facilities that people had after the formation of Chhattisgarh could not be

fighters. We won't give up."

"For five years, the Bhupesh Baghel

realized. So, we are quite hopeful. We are relentless

government worked on issues of public interest. The BJP remained in power for 15 years. During this period, the Congress fought on all issues from streets to the House. Ever since the Congress government was formed, attention was given to solving all the problems and how to carry out development works. Works were done to benefit people from government schemes. The government did better work in all areas," he asserted.

But, you faced defeat in 2023 from Raipur City West. Still, you managed to get the ticket for the Lok Sabha polls?

Upadhyay answered: "I'm really thankful to the party High Command for reposing faith in me. I'm trying my level best and will not let them down." The BIP is detailing the

success of its central schemes. In such a situation what's the strategy of the Congress?

Ŭpadhyay "There's no such strategy. The BJP was missing from this state for four and a half years. When the public needed a public representative, BJP leaders were sitting in their homes. When there was Corona, someone needed ration, someone needed medical treatment, someone had to be admitted to the hospital; if a person died, his family needed the body. In such a situation, BJP leaders were sitting at home. They did not come out of the house for four and a half years. We are banking upon the works done by our government. Public understands everything, you cannot fool

Dhebar, two others sent to jail till May 16

STAFF REPORTER

The Chhattisgarh Anti Wing (ACB/EOW) on Thursday sent the elder brother of Raipur Mayor Aijaz Dhebar and two others to a two-week judicial remand in the alleged liquor scame linked money linked money

laundering case.
ACB/EOW Special Judge Nidhi Sharma Tiwari granted Anwar Dhebar, Arvind Singh and Arun Pati Tripathi 14 day judicial remand till May 16, ACB/EOW Deputy Director (Prosecution) Mithlesh Verma told The Pioneer.

The three were produced in the court after the expiry of their judicial remand.

Also, the judge extended the custodial remand of Trilok Singh Dhillon till May

Dhillon was also brought to the court after the expiry of his custody remand.



Meanwhile, the special court will hear Dhebar's bail plea on May 4. He moved his bail application on Thursday.

interim bail application of Sunil Gautam. He moved the

The court rejected the

bail plea a couple days ago. He was summoned by the ACB/EOW for questioning in the liquor scam.

The ACB/EOW have

named 70 persons, including several leaders of the

Also, the judge extended the custodial remand of Trilok Singh Dhillon till **May 8.**

Congress and companies, in a FIR registered in January 2024 in the alleged liquor

'Chhattisgarh to play key role in making India a developed nation'

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

 $\begin{array}{ccc} B^{JP} & {\tt General} & {\tt Secretary} \\ {\tt Vinod} & {\tt Tawde} & {\tt on} \\ {\tt Thursday} & {\tt said} & {\tt Chhattisgarh} \end{array}$ has to play a key role in making India a developed nation.

He was addressing an intellectual's convention 'Vision of Developed India -2047' in Raipur.

Citing various achievements of the Narendra Modi government over 10 years, Tawde briefed the vision document of the BJP for making India developed nation by 2047. Speaking before the

gathering. he said the vision document will have a perspective of 'Heritage with Development' in which ancient culture would be preserved with matching the footprints of contemporary



times.

He appealed intellectuals to contribute in the nation building and contribute in economic development of the country.

former Professionals from more

than 15 fields including businessmen, teachers, bureaucrats, economists and teachers participated in the event. The convention was

held at the Maharaja

tribes.

College Agrasen Auditorium in Minister Arun Sao and Chhattisgarh BJP chief Kiran Deo participated along with distinguished

In a remarkable feat, 100 percent Epic card distribution

was ensured and "Chunai Madai" festival celebrations in

Mahasamund district helped establish a connect with the

India has 8.6 percent tribal population which includes 75

sustainable elections.

'Collector Ki Paati' drive for 100 percent voting | Tribal voting blossoms as EC's outreach bears fruit



STAFF REPORTER

Tn a bid to make voters Lexercise their franchise, the Raipur Collector Gaurav Singh on Thursday started a campaign na 'Collector Ki Paati'. named

He handed over an

invitation card and appealed to a retired IFS officer and others to contribute their bit to ensure cent percent

Voting for the third phase will be held in the Raipur Lok Sabha seat on May 7.

Anganwadi workers and assistants would go door-to-door deliver the Paati with the cooperation of the Women and Child D e v e l o p m e n t D e p a r t m e n t

supervisors. The campaign will be held till May 5.

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission's efforts for inclusion of PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) communities and other tribal groups in the electoral process have borne fruit with tribal groups in various states and Union Territories participating enthusiastically in the first two phases of the Lok Sabha elections. In a historic development, the Shompen tribe of Great Nicobar voted for the first time in a general election.

the During summary revision for updating the electoral rolls, special outreach camps were held across the specific states where PVTGs reside so that they could be added to the electoral roll.

In November 2022, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar had emphasised the



Commission's focussed outreach and interventions to enrol and empower PVTGs as proud voters.

combined opulation of 1,86,918, five PVTGs are found Chhattisgarh -- Abujhmadia, Baiga, Birhor, Kamaar and Pahadi Korwa, spread across 18 districts. The number of 18+ voters stands at 1,20,632 and all have been registered in the electoral rolls.

Many steps have been taken to increase their electoral participation, including voter education campaigns in

Gariaband, the deployment of additional vehicles in Kanker and establishment of ecofriendly polling stations in Kabirdham district under the Baiga tribal theme and using plastic free natural material like bamboo, flowers, leaves for

decoration as a step towards

groups of tribals which are Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG). Location of new polling booths in previously inaccessible areas has led to the large-scale inclusion of PVTGs. In the elections to the last 11 state legislative assemblies, there were around 9 lakh eligible from 14 PVTG communities: Kamar, Bhunjia, Pahadi Baiga, Abujhmadia, Birhor, Sahariya, Bhariya, Chenchu, Kolam, Thoti, Kondareddy, Jenu Kuruba and Koraga. The Commission's special efforts ensured 100 percent enrolment

of PVTGs in those states.

India slams US body religious freedom report

India on Thursday slammed the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and said it continues to publish its propaganda on the country "masquerading" as part of an annual report.

In a sharp reaction to the USCIRF's latest report that has criticised India for alleged violations of religious freedom, of External Affairs(MEA)spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the organisation is known to be a "biased" entity with a political

The US Commission on International Religious Freedom is known as a biased organisation with a political agenda. They continue to publish their propaganda on India masquerading as part of an annual report," Jaiswal said. "We really have no expectation that the USCIRF will even



seek to understand India's diverse, pluralistic and democratic ethos," he added.

'Their efforts to interfere in the largest electoral exercise of the world will never succeed," Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing.In its latest annual report, the USCIRF has criticised India for alleged violations of religious freedom as well as on certain other issues. New Delhi's response came after the USCIRF released its 2024 annual report and recommended designating 17 countries, including India, as Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs), for "engaging in or tolerating particularly

freedom of religion or belief". The USCIRF report alleged that the government imposed "discriminatory nationalist policies", "perpetuated hateful rhetoric" and "failed to address communal violence" among minority communities.

The report also cited various instances, including Manipur violence, Haryana violence, and several Kashmiri leaders and separatists being detained when the Supreme Court, last year, upheld the government's 2019 decision to scrap Article 370 that granted special status to the then state of Jammu and

ing. "We further reserve the right to take necessary measures to safeguard our interests," he said.

India protests against

in Shaksgam Valley

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

India has lodged a strong protest with China for car-

rying out construction activities in the Shaksgam valley, in an "illegal" attempt to alter the

situation on the ground. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on Thursday the

Shaksgam valley is a strategi-

"We have consistently con-

(PoK).

China's illegal construction

The terse response came in the wake of China building roads in PoK near Siachen. The new road is part of the Chinese efforts to enhance infrastructure development in occupied Kashmir north of Siachen. The road lies in Shaksgam

Shaksgam valley is a part of India and New Delhi never Satellite pictures show the road in Shaksgam Valley, a part of accepted the so-called China-Pakistan boundary pact of Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK) ceded to China in 1963, 1963 through which Islamabad "unlawfully" attempted to cede branches out from an extenthe area to Beijing. The sion of Highway G219 in China's Xinjiang and disapcally key region that is part of pears into mountains at a place Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (coordinate: 36.114783° 76.671051°) approximately 50 km north of India's northernveyed our rejection of the most point, Indira Col in same. We have registered our Siachen Glacier. Last year, protest with the Chinese side India also lodged strong against illegal attempts to alter diplomatic protests with facts on the ground," Jaiswal said at his weekly media brief-Beijing for showing Aksai Chin plateau as its official territory.

No political clearance sought or issued: MEA on Prajwal trip

A mid an escalating political row over alleged sexual harassment of several women by JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna who is not in the country, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Thursday said Revanna travelled to Germany on a diplomatic passport and he did not seek political clearance for the trip.
On Karnataka Chief Minister

Siddaramaiah's demand for revocation of Revanna's diplomatic passport, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said such action can be taken only on the directions of a

Revanna, the grandson of former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, is said to have left India on April 27, a day after voting for the Lok Sabha elections took place in his Hassan con-

The Janata Dal (Secular) has already suspended the Hassan MP from the party. "No political clearance was either sought

from or issued by MEA in respect of the travel of the said MP to Germany," Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing while replying to a volley of questions on the MP's reported travel to Germany.

'Obviously, no visa note was issued either. No visa is required for diplomatic passport holders to travel to Germany. The Ministry has not issued visa note for any other country," the MEA spokesperson said. On Wednesday, Karnataka

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah urged the prime minister to take swift action to cancel the diplomatic passport of Revanna travel abroad.

Asked about whether the MEA may consider revocation of his passport in view of the allegations of sexual harassment against him, Jaiswal did not give a direct reply.

"As regards the possible revo

cation of the passport of any individual, I would refer you to the relevant provisions of the Passport Act 1967. A direction should come from a court for revocation of passport. We are not in receipt of any directions from any court in this regard," he said.

Jaiswal said Revanna travelled to Germany on a diplomatic passport and that he did not seek any political clearance for the trip. The MEA spokesperson noted

that parliamentarians are entitled to have diplomatic pass-

"The matter is being investi-gated and we will be doing whatever is needed to be done," he said in reply to another ques-

India, Indonesia to review bilateral Admiral Swaminathan takes defence ties during meet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

Tndia and Indonesia will **⊥**review the entire spectrum of their bilateral defence ties here on Friday during the sev-Defence enth Joint Cooperation Committee (JDCC) meeting, Defence Ministry said here on

Giving details, officials said the meeting will be co-chaired by Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane and Secretary General of Ministry of Defence, Indonesia Air Marshal (Retired) Donny Ermawan Taufanto. Both sides will exchange views on regional and global issues of shared interest.

The India-Indonesia friendship, which was elevated to



the level of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2018, has widened the scope of bilateral relations to allow for new collaboration in the realm of defence industry,

nificantly more men than

women, further emphasizing

the importance of under-standing and addressing these

The study revealed that men

lost 45 percent more life years from Covid-19 compared to

women. This disparity under-

scores the need for targeted

interventions to address the

specific health challenges faced

by each gender. One notable

finding was the wide gap in

health loss related to low back

pain, which disproportionate-

ly disadvantaged women, par-

ticularly in regions such as

South Asia and Central Europe.

The research highlighted that

these health differences mani-

fest from adolescence and per-

sist throughout life, with women experiencing higher

levels of illness and disability

due to their longer life

The authors emphasized the

importance of implementing

"concerted, sex- and gender-informed strategies" to pro-

mote equitable health out-

comes. They called for

enhanced reporting of sex and

gender data to inform policy

decisions and improve health

interventions.Senior author

Luisa Sorio Flor of the Institute

for Health Metrics and

Evaluation (IHME) at the

University of Washington

stressed the timeliness of the

study, particularly in light of the

Covid-19 pandemic's profound

impact on health outcomes.

expectancy.

disparities.

science and technology. The defence relations form a significant pillar to this growing partnership.

engagements Defence between the two nations have diversified to include wideranging contacts between the services, military-to-military exchanges, high-level visits, capacity building and training programmes, cooperation in UN Peace Keeping, ship visits and bilateral exercises.

The defence cooperation agreement signed in 2001 between India and Indonesia stipulated the establishment of the JDCC to explore and identify potential areas of cooperation, matters of common interest, initiate, coordinate, monitor and control the approved cooperative activities.

The Secretary General, who is on a visit to India from May 02-04, will also undertake discussions with Indian defence industries in New

charge as Navy Vice Chief Command (TC)on Monday. Air Marshal N Kapoor was

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan on Wednesday assumed charge as Vice Chief of Navy here. He was commissioned into the Indian Navy in July 1987 and specialist Communication Electronic Warfare, navy said here. He is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Khadakvasla; the Joint Services Command and Staff College, Shrivenham, United Kingdom; the College of Naval Warfare, Karanja; and the United States Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, USA.

Swaminathan's educational qualifications include a BSc degree from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; MSc in



Cochin University of Science and Technology, Kochi; MA in Defence Studies from King's College, London; MPhil in Strategic Studies from Mumbai University; and PhD in International Studies from Mumbai University. In another appointment, Air

Wednesday assumed charge as 36th Commandant of the prestigious National Defence College here. He took over from Lt General S S Dahiya. Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor assumed the appointment of Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief (AOC-in-C) Training commissioned into the Fighter stream of the Indian Air Force on 06 December 1986. He is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Defence Services Staff College and National Defence College. A Qualified Flying Instructor and a Fighter Combat Leader, he has more than 3400 hours of During his illustrious career, the Air Marshal has held

numerous field and staff appointments. His operational tenures include being the Commanding Officer of a fighter squadron in the Central Sector, Station Commander of a flying base in the Western Sector and Air Officer Commanding of a premier air

Men at risk of premature death while women grapple with poor health in life: Study



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

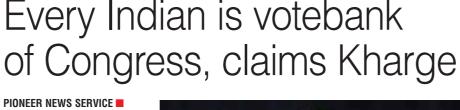
While men face a higher risk of premature death, women tend to spend more of their lifetime grappling with poor health, according to a recent global study published in Lancet Public Health. The findings, drawn from the

Global Burden of Disease Study 2021, highlight stark differences in the distribution of illness and premature mortality between genders over the past three decades, shedding light on the diverse and evolving health needs of men and women across the globe.

Researchers analyzed data spanning from 1990 to 2021, examining the prevalence of various health conditions and events leading to premature death.

Key findings reveal that mus-culoskeletal conditions, mental health issues, and headache disorders, though non-fatal, are more prevalent among women, leading to prolonged periods of ill health. This is compounded by women's longer life expectancy, resulting in higher levels of illness and disability throughout their

Furthermore, the study highlights specific conditions like ischaemic heart disease, lung cancer, and chronic kidney disease, where sex differences impact men at younger ages and exacerbate over time. Covid-19, the dominant health



In a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday said when the elections are over, people will only remember him as the PM who indulged in "divisive and communal speeches filled with lies" to avoid an inevitable

Noting that the PM in his letter to NDA candidates had claimed that reservation will be taken away from SC, ST and OBC and given to the Congress' "votebank", Kharge said, "Our votebank is every Indian — the poor, the marginalised, the women, the aspirational youth, the labour class, the Dalits and the Adivasis."

In a letter to the prime minister, Kharge urged Modi to seek votes on the performance of his government over the last ten years instead of indulging in "hate speeches". The Congress president's remarks comes days after Modi levelled various charges against his party in his letter to NDA candidates after the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls.

Prime Minister Modi asked the BJP-led NDA candidates in



the Lok Sabha polls to spread awareness among voters about the Congress's intention to snatch "reservation from SC, ST and OBC communities and give it away to their vote bank". In a personal letter written to them, Modi also accused the Congress and its allies of having divisive and discriminatory motives, even though reservation on the basis of religion is unconstitutional.

"I saw the letter written by you to all the NDA candidates about what they need to communicate to the voters. From the tone and content of the letter it seems that there is a lot of desperation and worry in you which is leading you to use language that does not suit the

office of the prime minister," Kharge said in the letter. Kharge claimed the prime minister was not interested in talking about the ever widening inequality, unemployment and unprecedented price rise. "You are not interested in talking about the increasing atrocities on women by your leaders," he said in his letter to Modi.

"It is better as the prime minister if you seek votes on the performance of your government over the last ten years instead of indulging in hate speeches. The Congress Party would like to challenge you or anyone you depute to debate with us on our manifesto and the points you have made," he

Fund (UNFPA) during the last

day of the 57th Session of the

Rahul accuses Modi Government of snatching quota from Dalits, tribals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

ongress leader Rahul CGandhi on Thursday accused the Government of "clandestinely snatching away" reservation from Dalits, tribals and backward classes by "blindly' implementing privatisation, and said his party guarantees strengthening the public sector enterprises and open the doors for employment.

In a post in Hindi on X, Rahul Gandhi said the mantra of Narendra Modi's campaign to remove reservation is -- 'na rahega baans, na bajegi bansuri', meaning neither there will be government jobs nor any reservation will be available.

"The BJP government is clandestinely snatching away reservation from Dalits, tribals and backward classes by eliminating government jobs through 'blind privatisation," the former Congress chief

In 2013, there were 14 lakh permanent posts in the public sector, which by 2023 stood at 8.4 lakh, he said. "By ruining top PSU's like BSNL, SAIL, BHEL etc., nearly 6 lakh permanent jobs



were eliminated from the public sector alone — these are the very posts which would have given the benefit of reservation," Rahul Gandhi said.

There is no count of the jobs that are being eliminated through the back door in institutions such as railways by giving government work on contract, he claimed. "The 'privatisation' of the Modi model is a plunder of the country's resources, through which the reservation of the deprived is being snatched away," he alleged. The Congress guarantees that it will strengthen the public sector enterprises and open the doors for employment for every section of the society by filling 30 lakh vacant government posts, Rahul

Gandhi said.

equality.

Women sarpanchs set to shine on global stage at UN

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Das Datta,

Supriya Das Datta, Sabhadhipati of Sepahijala Zilla Parishad in Tripura, utilises her Diploma in Pharmacy to champion women's participa-tion in decision-making and advocate for essential childcare facilities while Kunuku Hema Kumari, Sarpanch of Pekeru Gram Panchayat in West Godavari, Andhra Pradesh, leverages her Master's Degree in Technology to bridge access to vital healthcare services through organising medical camps. Likewise, Neeru Ŷadav,

Sarpanch of Lambi Aheer Gram

Panchayat in Jhunjhunu,

Rajasthan also known as 'Hockey wali Sarpanch' is armed with a Master's in Mathematics and Education and spearheads initiatives for girls' education and environmental conserva-These three extraordinary

women leaders, each blending their qualifications with unwavering dedication to community betterment, are set to shine on the global stage on May 3, 2024 at an event at the UN Headquarters in New York, showcasing their pivotal role in driving gender equality, poverty reduction, and inclusive development. The event titled "Localizing the

SDGs: Women in Local Commission on Population and

Development (CPD57) which Governance in India Lead the Way," is being organized by the started from April 29th April, Permanent Mission of India to 2024. the United Nations and the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj, in collaboration with the United Nations Population

It symbolises India's groundbreaking approach to empowering Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in local government to advance

Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs) given that India leads the world with 1.4 million women constituting 46 per cent of local elected officials.

Secretary Vivek Bharadwaj who will lead the delegation of these women from the grassroot level will discuss strategies derived from India's PRIs to foster gender equality and women's empowerment, focusing on poverty reduction and inclusive development.

Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, will inaugurate the event, emphasizing the crucial role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in advancing gender

The insights shared by Supriya, Kunuku Hema Kumari, and Neeru Yadav will highlight the transformative impact of women's leadership in enabling inclusive development and promoting women and girl-friendly governance. If Supriya will dwell on how she has been active in promoting child-care facilities to create a conducive work environment for women, Kunuku Hema Kumari will talk about her initiatives in establishing linkages between frontline health workers and women and girls in need of health services through her public out-

RJD stands for Rishwatkhor Jungleraj Dal: Nadda

PTI ARARIA (BIHAR)

Launching a frontal attack on the RJD, which is an alliance partner of the INDIA bloc in Bihar, BJP national president J P Nadda on Thursday said the party led by Lalu Prasad stands for 'Rishwatkhor Jungleraj Dal'.

Addressing a public rally in Araria Lok Sabha seat in support of BJP candidate Pradeep Kumar Singh, Nadda accused the opposition coalition of "protecting" corrupt people, whereas Prime Minister Narendra Modi was "striving hard" to end corruption in the country.

Araria will go to polls in the third phase on May 7.

"A majority of the leaders of the INDIA bloc, including those of the Congress and RJD, are either in jail or out end corruption but the INDIA bloc leaders call for protecting the corrupt. RJD, whose leaders are on bail, means corruption. R stands for 'Rishwatkhori' (bribery), J for 'Jungleraj' and D means 'Daldal' (slough of mud)," he

"On one side, we have a PM who is working for the country and on the other, you have the INDIA bloc, a 'parivar bachao, dynasty bachao' alliance," he alleged. Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, RJD's Lalu Prasad and Tejashwi Yadav, all are out on bail, Nadda claimed.

"Parties of the 'ghamandiya alliance' are all 'parivarvadi' (dynastic)... Look at Farooq and Abdullah Abdullah, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and Mehbooba Mufti, Mulayam Singh Yadav and



PTI ■ AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer (CEO)

Mukesh Kumar Meena on

Thursday published the final

crore, which rose by nearly six

voters, 2.1 crore female voters,

3,421 third gender voters and

"Voter list has been finalised

and frozen. On the day of freezing the list, April 25,

including all categories of

voters, service voters, male,

female and third gender voters, there are 4,14,01,887

said

addressing a press conference

The CEO noted that the

electoral rolls witnessed an increase by 5,94,631 voters

between January 1, 2024 and

April 1. The voter list was

updated until the last day of

receiving the nominations,

Meena called on the electorate to check their names and polling stations at

at the secretariat here.

Meena,

voters,"

April 25.

Bharti, Misa Rabri-Tejashwi-Tej Pratap-Banerjee and Abhishek, KCR-

KTR-Kavita, Karunanidhi-Stalin-Udayanidhi... Congress has Sonia-Rahul-Priyanka... All of them are dynasts," the national president

"Corrupt leaders of INDIA bloc who are in jail include Delhi Chief Minister Arvina Kejriwal, and other AAP leaders Manish Sisodia and

Satyendar Jain," he added.
Reiterating that the BJP-led
NDA will win 400-plus Lok
Sabha seats, including all 40
in Bihar, Nadda asserted that the eastern state has developed only under NDA rule, with a six-lane highway being built from Varanasi and Kolkata which will pass through the state.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi's only aim is welfare of every person from the Dalit, tribal and backward sections

Mamata

Final electoral roll has over 4.14

crore voters in Andhra Pradesh

brought a large section of the country's poor above the poverty line in the last 10 years. But INDIA bloc leaders want to give recommend. want to give reservation on religious lines. The Congress is giving tickets to those belonging to 'tukde-tukde' gang," Nadda added. "India was the 11th largest

economy when PM Modi came to power and now the country is the fifth largest economy, leaving behind United Kingdom and many other countries. We will be the third largest economy by 2027," he said.

Highlighting growth statistics of the country under NDA rule, Nadda, said, "Pharmaceutical and toy exports have surged... India

has become the third-largest automobile surpassing Japan."

Code of Conduct (MCC), Meena observed that two

deaths, 156 injuries and 13.4

lakh properties were involved

in cases of electoral violence.

Besides binding over 72,416

persons, the Election Commission has also

registered 9,337 seizure FIRs and 864 FIRs related to

enforcement such as

irregular meetings and others. Likewise, the poll body seized liquor, cash, drugs, precious

metals, freebies and other

inducements worth Rs 204 crore from March 16 to May

2. Further, Meena observed

that safety measures would be

put in place at polling stations

prone to heat waves, such as

setting up tents, canopies,

along

and shade

with

loudspeaker

umbrellas

violations,

PTI LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chiet Minister Yogi Adityanath Thursday accused president Mallikarjun Kharge hurting the religious sentiments of Hindus with his recent remarks on Lord Ram

and Shivam.
At a rally in Chhattisgarh on Tuesday in support of a party
Shivkumar

"His candidate Shivkumar Dahariya, Kharge said, "His name is Shivkumar. He can compete with Ram because he is Shīva."

"I am also Mallikarjun. Main bhi Shiv hoon," he said. Mallikarjun is another name for Lord Shiva.

The UP chief minister said that the party is facing significant setbacks in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and is resorting to disparaging the beliefs of the Hindu majority community to vent its frustration over impending defeat in the Lok Sabha elections.

Congress president's derogatory remarks are a "new beginning of the party's downfall," he said.

"The Congress's history is replete with such actions. Yet, during elections, such behaviour becomes conspicuous. By bringing up such issues, the Congress is not only disrespecting the faith of India but also hurting the sentiments of the majority community," Adityanath said while addressing the media at his official residence before embarking on election rallies

in Mainpuri, Etah, and Firozabad. He condemned the attempt to pit Lord Ram against Lord Shiva in speeches of Congress

to be among the top three by

2027," said Singh, who also

organisations like the IMF

say we have brought out 25

crore people from the

Congress could not achieve

despite slogans of 'garibi

Referring to the advocacy of

inheritance tax by Sam

of poverty,
which the

pointed

clutches

hatao"

something

Yogi accuses Kharge

religious sentiments

of hurting Hindu

'Lord Ram and Lord Shiva hold significant reverence within its worship practices. In Ramcharitmanas, there are instances where Lord Ram worships Lord Shiva and vice illustrating their mutual respect complementarity", he said. "Our scriptures bear testimony to the fact that

betrayal of either Lord Shiva or Lord Ram inevitably leads to defeat and downfall," he said. "The Congress carries forward the British legacy of 'Divide and Rule'. It sows the seeds of discord in society based on caste, region, and language for petty political gains. The party will continue its divisive agenda in future as well to stay relevant in Indian

politics," he added. He claimed that Congress in its manifesto has pledged to include Muslims also among the beneficiaries of the reservation meant for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward

Classes. He also expressed his disapproval of Congress' disregard for India's Sanatan

traditions and accused the party and its president of disrespecting manipulating the country's Chief minister Adityanath

criticised the party leader for not only undermining the Hindu faith but also steering Congress towards oblivion through such divisive actions. He hoped that the divine wisdom of Lord Shri Ram and Devadhidev Mahadev Shiv would guide the Congress leadership to embrace the path of truth amid these challenges.

Rahul will be forced to take out Congress Dhundho Yatra after June 4: Shah



PTI ■ BAREILLY (UP)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday attacked Rahul Gandhi, saying he started his party's campaign with Bharat Jodo Yatra that will end with a 'Congress Dhoondho Yatra,' suggesting that the party will get a severe drubbing in the Lok Sabha elections.

Addressing an election rally here, Shah alleged that Rahul, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, and SP's Akhilesh Yadav did not attend the Ram Temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya fearing this may alienate their vote bank.

for ending terrorism and Naxalism and making India the third major economy

Šhah hit out at the INDIA bloc partner Samajwadi Party, saying it indulges in dynastic politics for its president Akhilesh Yadav has given tickets to five members of his family in the current election. He said that while Akhilesh is contesting from Kannauj and his wife Dimple Yadav is in fray from Mainpuri, Akshay Yadav, Aditya Yadav, and Dharmendra Yadav, all three his family members, are contenders from Firozabad, Budaun, and Azamgarh.

Shah said that this election is

https://electoralsearch.Eci.Go v.In/ and on the voter helpline

Though more than 7.2 lakh voters are eligible for home voting under the categories of voters above 85 years of age and specially-abled, Meena said only 28,591 such voters availed this facility.

Further, he said that the number of polling stations rose from 46,165 to 46,389, after factoring in the requirement of 224 auxiliary in the polling stations which were supplemented to regular polling stations where the upper limit of 1,500 electors has been breached.

The highest number of auxiliary polling stations (50) have been added Visakhapatnam district.

Meanwhile, the CEO noted that 12,438 polling stations out of the total have been identified as critical while webcasting has been proposed for 29,897 or 64 percent of the polling stations.

Until Thursday, as part of the enforcement of the Model

structures, providing chairs. Likewise, cooling devices

such as fans will be arranged at necessary polling stations for maintaining comfortable temperature for voters and polling personnel, including drinking water facilities at all the polling stations. Elections for the 175-member

Assembly and 25 Lok Sabha seats in Andhra Pradesh are scheduled on May 13 and the counting of votes will be held

Dharmendra Pradhan files nomination from Sambalpur

PTI ■ SAMBALPUR (ODISHA)

B^{JP} leader and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, who filed his nomination from Sambalpur Lok Sabha seat in Odisha on Thursday, expressed confidence that his party will win not only the general elections but also the assembly polls in the state.

Returning to the electoral fray after 15 years, 54-year-old Pradhan visited Samaleswari Temple here in the morning to seek blessings. He then participated in a two-hour-long road show from the temple to the DC office where he filed the nomination.

'There is a demand for change in Odisha and the BJP is determined to win not only the Lok Sabha polls but also the upcoming Assembly elections in the State," he told

BJP not against Muslims; Modi respected by several Islamic countries: Rajnath

PTI ■ SUPAUL/SARAN (BIHAR)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday debunked the opposition charge that the BJP was creating a Hindu-Muslim divide, highlighting the goodwill enjoyed by Prime divide, Minister Narendra Modi in several Islamic countries.

The former BJP president,

who addressed election rallies in Supaul and Saran Lok Sabha constituencies of Bihar, also urged the minority community to be wary of the Congress and its ally RJD, charging the opposition parties with "seeking votes by kicking sand in your face".

"In at least five Islamic countries of the Arab world, Modi has been conferred with the highest honour. And they (the opposition) have the temerity of charging us with (creating divisions) between Hindus and Muslims," Singh asserted.

"I would, however, urge my Muslim brethren not to be ensnared by these people, the parties like RJD and Congress, which are trying to get your votes by kicking sand in your face," he said.

Singh, in his address, also said reservations along religious lines is not possible under the constitution.
"Of course, there is a

provision for quotas for the backward classes and those Muslim sections of population that are lagging behind are covered under the same," he said.

"Muslims should also understand our motive behind illegalising triple talaq. How can one tolerate such a practice which had inflicted untold miseries upon so many Muslim sisters and daughters? We took action without worrying about electoral consequences. I am glad to see that our stand against triple talaq has also been appreciated by many defence Muslims," the minister said.

NDA was on course to achieve its target of 400-plus



Lok Sabha seats, and "a beginning" has been made in where the BJP te got elected candidate unopposed, and in Indore, where the Congress nominee withdrew his nomination papers and joined the saffron

the opposition is Now, Singh also claimed that the crying hoarse that this would imperil democracy. Let me you

Independence, at least 28 candidates have got elected unopposed. Twenty of them belonged to the Congress and two were from its ally Samajwadi Party," Singh said, without elaborating.

He also said the grand old party would soon become extinct "like dinosaurs" and "future generations would have to be told that something called the Congress existed".

party to be disbanded. It seems the party is being cursed by his soul," Singh said. The defence minister said he did "not wish to speak against anybody who has been the prime minister since it involved an institution and not just an individual", while drawing a contrast between the rule of Modi and Congress PMs since Congress Jawaharlal Nehru.

"Mahatma Gandhi wanted the

"I do not say that those in our ranks have been consecrated with milk. But, whenever somebody is found guilty of any wrongdoing, the BJP-led NDA has not shied away from

getting rid of tainted elements," asserted Singh. The senior BJP leader lauded his Bihar ally, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who heads the JD(U), saying, "You may have many grievances against him, but you cannot say that he is corrupt. In contrast, you have the RJD, which has been most notorious with regard to its track record on corruption, while in power".

"Beware of parties like the RJD, which want to take you back to the age of the lantern, and set up cow sheds doubling up as schools," said Singh, referring to the opposition party's poll symbol and a scheme launched by its president Lalu Prasad in the 1990s, when he was the chief minister of Bihar.

He also claimed that under Modi, the global standing of India has grown, citing the willingness of Russia and Ukraine to halt the war for a few hours to facilitate return of students. "Also, unlike in the past,

terrorists cannot strike at will as we have made known that India will hit back, even going across the border, if the need arises," the defence minister said.

He also alleged that the decade-long tenure Singh Manmohan marked by stagnation.

But, Modi worked a miracle. We have jumped to the fifth spot and experts around the world agree that we are poised

Pitroda "an advisor of the Congress' top leadership who also heads the party's overseas wing", the former BJP president asked, "Do you want such a system to be in place?". The Union minister also stressed on Modi's welfare initiatives, touching upon the

'Jan Dhan' scheme, and the proposal to bring "all people aged over 70 years, whether poor or not", under the Ayushman Bharat Yojana. We also intend to provide

300 units of electricity, free of charge, to every household through rooftop solar panels," Singh added.

This election is for Modi's mission, not ambition, says PM; dares Congress to restore Article 370

PTI ■ JUNAGADH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the ongoing Lok Sabha elections were not for satisfying his personal ambitions, but for fulfilling his "mission."

A strong and government was important not only for the country but also for the world, he said at a poll rally in Junagadh in Gujarat.

"These elections are not for my ambition, as people have fulfilled that ambition in 2014. The 2024 elections are for Modi's mission," the PM said. Accusing the opposition

Congress of having a "dangerous mentality", Modi said its manifesto is written in the language of Muslim League. For Congress, this election was all about saving its existence and the party was taking help of its "Mazhabi vote bank" to stay afloat, the prime minister claimed. In his address, he challenged

the Congress to restore Article 370 in Jammuabolish Kashmir, Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the law that bans triple talaq.

"I have buried Article 370. It is gone now. I want to challenge the Congress' royal family and its 'shehzada' (a jibe at the Gandhi family and Rahul Gandhi) that if it is your hidden agenda, then come out in the open and tell people you will restore Article 370," he said. "I want to see how much

courage they (Congress) have to insult the Constitution drafted by Babasaheb Ambedkar. You (Congress) will fail because this (standing in your way) is Modi," the PM asserted. Referring to the controversy surrounding the Katchatheevu island, he said during the Congress rule, the Union Government had no idea about the exact number of islands India had.

done and found that we have 1,300 islands. Some of them are as big as Singapore. We will develop some of them for tourism purposes," said Modi. A Congress leader had "I then got a satellite survey

spoken recently separating South India and forming a new nation, while those in the Opposition

said. "Congress leaders have inherited this mentality of partition. It was the Congress which accepted the country's partition for the sake of power," he said.

The Congress had gifted Katchatheevu island to Sri Lanka nearly 30 years ago as it was their personal property, he said. "If Sardar Patel was not present, Junagadh would have gone to Pakistan. The Congress will create a dangerous situation for the country if it comes to power. They may give away the Kutch desert claiming no one lives there," he said.

INDIA Bloc also make The Congress just does not statements on similar lines, he care and had given away

several uninhabited islands, the PM pointed out, adding "if given a free hand" that party will "sell off the Himalayan peaks". Attacking Congress president

Mallikarjun Kharge over a recent remark pertaining to Lord Ram and Lord Shiva, the PM said the opposition party had declared this election is a fight against Lord Ram.

The Congress president said his objective was to defeat Lord Ram and that Lord Shiva will defeat Lord Ram. What are they thinking? The Mughals destroyed Ram Temple in Ayodhya and Somnath Temple with this same mentality," the PM Speaking about reservation for Muslims, Modi said after Independence it was decided following deliberations that religionbased quotas would not be

Those deliberations went on

asserted.

for months. And no BJP or RSS leader was in the picture. Learned Congress leaders as well as Babasaheb Ambedkar took part in the discussion. After deliberations, they decided reservation will not be granted on the basis of religion," he said. The Congress now wants to snatch such quota and give it to others, Modi said.

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-PAPER WITH PASSION-

Voter inertia

Low turnout in early phases of Lok Sabha polls is a cause of concern for parties, EC and democracy

he lukewarm voter response in the first two phases of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections raises several questions about the underlying reasons for their apathy. Is the weather a deterrent, or is it disillusionment with governance, scepticism towards nominees/parties, or lack of faith in electoral procedures like Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)? Indeed, there is a pressing need to rekindle voter enthusiasm and participation in the electoral process. An initial speculation regarding low turnout often points to adverse weather conditions. The scorching heat can indeed discourage voters, especially in regions prone to extreme climates. However, while the weather may play a role, it is seldom the sole determinant of voter participation. A more substantial factor contributing to voter apathy lies in the prevailing disillusionment with governance. Citizens, disappointed by unfulfilled promises, rampant corruption and inefficient administration, often perceive their votes as inconsequential. This disenchantment can lead to voter iner-



tia, where individuals feel disengaged from the political process altogether. Also, scepticism towards parties and their nominees exacerbates voter apathy. In an era marked by populism, polarisation and political opportunism, many voters struggle to identify with candidates or parties that truly represent their interests. The prevalence of dynastic politics and candidate selection based on nepotism only deepens this distrust. The leaders' conduct leaves much to be desired. Many times, they switch sides making a mockery of the voters' decision. Sometimes even the party the voters voted for joins hands with its arch-rival. In such scenarios, voters have reasons to feel cheated.

As if all this were not enough, there are doubts about the efficacy of the electoral process itself. Many people are given to doubt the machinery employed, including the EVMs. The introduction of EVMs was hailed as a milestone in ensuring transparent and efficient elections. However, over time, scepticism and conspiracy theories surrounding EVMs have proliferated, eroding public trust in the process. Allegations of tampering, malfunctioning machines and lack of transparency in EVMs handling have sowed the seeds of doubt in the minds of voters. Their perceived vulnerability to hacking or manipulation, coupled with the absence of a paper trail for verification, has fuelled apprehensions about the sanctity of elections. In such an environment, restoring faith in electoral procedures becomes imperative to bolster voter confidence. The situation turned so grave that the matter was taken to the Supreme Court. On this front, introducing measures such as VVPATs alongside the EVMs can go a long way in rebuilding voters' trust. Indeed, it would take an effort by the Election Commission as well as the political class to instil a sense of confidence among people that their vote is sacrosanct. By demonstrating integrity and a genuine commitment to serving the public interest, political parties can rebuild the trust with for-now disillusioned voters.



People visit the seafront on a hot summer day, in Mumbai

Upholding the Fourth Estate in digital age



In an era marred by misinformation, censorship and threats to journalists, the celebration of press freedom assumes greater significance than ever before

should have a Government without newspapers, or newspapers without a Government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter - Thomas

Every year on May 3rd, the world comes together to celebrate World Press Freedom Day, a day dedicated to honouring the fundamental principles of press freedom, defending the independence of the media and paying tribute to journalists who risk their lives to report the truth. In an era marked by misinformation, censorship and threats to journalists worldwide, this day holds more significance than ever. Press freedom is the cornerstone of democracy. It empowers citizens by providing them with access to diverse viewpoints and information, enabling them to make informed decisions. A free press serves as a watchdog, holding Governments and powerful entities accountable for their actions. It acts as a voice for the voiceless, bringing attention to social injustices and human rights violations.

Despite the crucial role they play, journalists around the world face numerous challenges in their pursuit of truth. They encounter threats, harassment and violence, both online and offline. Many journalists risk imprisonment or even death for daring to report on sensitive issues. Censorship, propaganda and attacks on press freedom have become increasingly prevalent, hindering the ability of journalists to fulfil their vital role in society. World Press Freedom Day. Since 1993, it has been observed globally to honour a declaration made by African journalists in Windhoek, Namibia, in 1991. It commemorates press freedom principles and acknowledges journalists' courage. UNESCO awards the Guillermo Cano Prize to those preserving press freedom.

While technology has revolutionised the way information is disseminated, it has also present- with journalists being arrested new challenges for press free-dom. Social media platforms ed, newspapers censored and the Government exerting tight have become powerful tools for control over media outlets.



spreading information, but they have also been weaponised to spread misinformation and silence dissenting voices. Journalists must navigate through a digital landscape fraught with fake news and online harassment, often at great personal risk. India, home to one of the world's largest and most vibrant media landscapes, has faced scrutiny in recent years regarding its press freedom record. According to the World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), India's ranking has seen fluctuations. In the 2023 index, India was placed at 163 out of 180 countries, indicating significant challenges to press freedom within the country.

'When asked to bend, the media crawled. And when asked to crawl, it cringed."This statement was made by Advani in the context of the Indian media's behaviour during the Emergency period (1975-1977), imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. During this time, press freedom faced severe restrictions,

PRESS FREEDOM IS

THE CORNERSTONE OF A DEMOCRACY. IT **EMPOWERS** CITIZENS BY PROVIDING THEM WITH ACCESS TO **DIVERSE** VIEWPOINTS AND INFORMATION, **ENABLING THEM TO** MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS Advani's quote reflects his criticism of how certain sections of the media capitulated to Government pressure and failed to uphold journalistic integrity and independence. It suggests that instead of resisting unjust demands or censorship, some media outlets complied with the Government's wishes, even to the point of degradation. This quote serves as a reminder of the importance of a free and independent press in holding those in power accountable and safeguarding democracy. It highlights the need for journalists to remain vigilant in upholding the principles of press freedom, especially in times of political turmoil or authoritarian rule. British politician Edmund Burke is often credited with coining the term in the late 18th century, referring to the gallery of the House of Commons as the fourth estate, symbolising the press's influence on political affairs. The term "fifth estate" underscores the transformative role of social media in democratising access to information, enabling public discourse and chal-lenging established institu-

empower users to share news opinions and perspectives instantaneously, bypassing traditional gatekeepers of infor-

On World Press Freedom Day, we must reaffirm our commitment to defending press freedom and protecting journalists worldwide. Governments must uphold the principles of free speech and ensure the safety of journalists within their borders. Civil society plays a crucial role in advocating for press freedom and holding those who seek to suppress it accountable. Media organisations must continue to strive for independence, transparency and ethical journalism, even in the face of adversity. World Press Freedom Day is also a day to celebrate the courage and resilience of journalists who risk their lives to report the truth. It is a day to honour those who have faced persecution, imprisonment and even death for their commitment to upholding the principles of press freedom. Their dedication serves as a reminder of the invaluable guarding democracy and pro-

(The writer is an associate professor, views are personal)

Time to curb fake videos in elections



A deepfake video of Union Home Minister Amit Shah sparks outrage during the Lok Sabha election campaign

◄he ongoing Lok Sabha election campaign has suddenly taken a very ugly turn after a fake video involving Union Home Minister Amit Shah has surfaced. Accusations and counter-accusations are common during campaigns and are not considered harmful. However, it is unacceptable for anyone or political party to resort to using 'deep fake' technology to release fake videos against their opponents to win elections.

In a recent case, the country's Home Minister, Amit Shah, has become a victim of 'deepfake' technology. Amit Shah delivered a speech at a BJP election rally in Siddipet, Medak district of Telangana on April 25. The video of this speech was allegedly tampered with and shared on social media. Fact checks have proven this video to be completely fake.

In this fake video, Amit Shah is allegedly seen announcing the abolishment of reservations for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Now, imagine if someone could abolish the

above-mentioned classes in

the country. It is an impossible thing. In reality, an old video of Amit

Shah has been edited, in which he was talking about ending Muslim reservations. In this original video, ST and ST have been added in place of Muslims. However, the question arises as to how the fake video may look exactly like the real one.

Fake videos are created with the help of software. As we know, the use of machine learning and artificial intelligence tools has increased in the market these days. In this technology, the tone and voice of a person are captured with the help of machine

learning. In fact, with the help of new technology, the face of a person who is not even a part of reservations provided to the that video is fitted into the Mumbai.

video. It is difficult to tell the difference between real and fake in a video manipulated through this technique.

Whoever leader or political party created and released fake videos showing Amit Shah announcing the abolishment of reservations, how serious an act they have committed to spreading hatred in A complaint has been lodged

by Prateek Karpe, an office bearer of BJP's Mumbai unit, at Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) Cyber Police Station. The complaint states that a deepfake video of Amit Shah was created, posted and shared on the internet, to defame BJP leader Amit Shah. The complainant also requested the police to immediately remove the fake video and register a case against those accused who allegedly shared it to create enmity and hatred among various castes. Based on the complaint, a case has been registered against the social media han-

dle of Maharashtra Youth

Congress and 16 others under

various sections of the IPC

and IT Act at Bandra-Kurla

Cyber Police Station in

Of course, technological development has taken place rapidly in the world in the last few decades. The increasing use of digital platforms has made life easier and faster, but along with this benefit, some serious risks related to cyber security are also coming to the fore. With the boundless nature of cyberspace, the threats associated with it and the deceitful methods and tools of cyber criminals, the trend of cyber-attacks is constantly changing.

Apart from this, terrorism and fundamentalism are also finding shelter in cyberspace. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Cybersecurity is no longer limited to the digital world.

It has become a matter of national security." Cyberspace has become the new battleground. The Government must take strict action against these elements. Meanwhile, one only hopes that the authorities concerned would curb the menace of deep fake videos sooner rather than later with an iron hand.

(The writer is a senior journalist and author of two books; views are personal)

EMPOWERING VISUAL NARRATIVES

Madam — Apropos the news article, "A picture is worth a thousand words," published on May 1, this is my response. The depiction of sexual violence against women in the media often portrays them as helpless victims, reinforcing stigma and shame. Ankita Anand, a survivor herself, challenged this narrative by spearheading a campaign urging media outlets to rethink their imagery. Instead of portraying women as passive victims, she advocated for images that reflect their resilience and agency. Anand's efforts, along with initiatives like the image bank by the Hri Institute, mark a significant step in reshaping visual narratives around gender-based violence.

Through campaigns like "I Never Ask For It," survivors are reclaiming their stories, using mediums like textiles to challenge societal attitudes towards gender-based violence. These initiatives underscore the transformative power of imagery in shaping public perception and fostering empathy. Ultimately, the portrayal of sexual violence in the media should prioritise dignity and empowerment, amplifying the voices of survivors and challenging ingrained biases. It's a collective responsibility to ensure that visual narratives reflect the strength and resilience of those affected, rather than perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

Rian Mehta | Chandigarh

CHINA'S SHADOW POLITICS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Why is the BJP avoiding China in campaigning?" published on May 1, this is my response. The discourse surrounding China in Indian politics is a delicate dance where words and actions are carefully measured. While the former Army Chief's blunt assessment of China as India's primary threat is refreshing, it also underscores the gravity of the situation. The recent revelations about the India-China confrontation shed light on systemic failures and diplomatic intricacies shaping bilateral relations.

India's semiconductor mission

tions and power structures.

Social media platforms

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

propos the news article, "Semicon ecosystem: A revolution in India," published on May 1, this is my response. The surge of semiconductor development in India marks a pivotal juncture in our technological evolution. As our reliance on technology deepens, so does the significance of these minuscule chips, which power everything from smartphones to space missions. India's strategic vision to foster a robust semiconductor ecosystem is commendable, as evi-

The Government's cautious approach, aiming for diplomatic disengagement while hinting at alternative alliances reflects the complexity of the issue. However, the opacity surrounding critical events like the Kailash Heights incident raises questions about political oversight and decision-making during times of crisis. As the election rhetoric tiptoes around recent confrontations, focusing instead on historical grievances, individuals like Naravane risk overshadowing the valorous efforts. Amidst the political manoeuvring, one thing remains clear: addressing the China challenge requires strategic foresight and resolute

Zara Khan | Mumbai

DANCE UNITES PEOPLE

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Celebrating the Universal Language of Dance," published on April 30, this is my response. Dance is a lot more than just body movements. It is a universal language that speaks to the soul. By using dance as a tool for change, you can turn your passion into a powerful force for social good.

denced by ambitious projects and partnerships aimed at reducing import dependency and fostering innovation. Initiatives like the India Semiconductor Mission and skill development programmes underscore a concerted effort to nurture indigenous talent and infrastructure. Geopolitical shifts, especially amidst the China-US trade tensions, offer a timely opportunity for India to emerge as a preferred destination for semiconductor manufacturing.

However, challenges persist, particularly in bridging the skill gap and accessing advanced technology. Collaborations with global leaders and initiatives to attract talent back to India are steps in the right direction. The road ahead is promising, with India poised to not only meet its self-sufficiency goals but also emerge as a global leader in semiconductor innovation, contributing significantly to economic growth.

Advait Rao | Bengaluru

The wonderful aspect of dance is its ability to speak volumes without uttering a sin-

It is a great way to share one's passion for dance, impart new skills and foster a sense of unity. One of the greatest strengths of dance is its finesse and ability to touch people emotionally. Remember, every little step counts when it comes to making a difference through dance. Dance comes in many forms, from ballet to hip-hop and from contemporary to folk. A talented dancer will naturally embrace all these styles and weave them into choreography. This not only enriches the dancer's performance but also acknowledges the global tapestry of dance. A dance community is a great space for everyone, regardless of their age, race and gender. After all, diversity is the lifeblood of creativity. Said John Dryden, the literary critic and an accomplished poet from England: "Dancing is the poetry of

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

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FIRST COLUMN

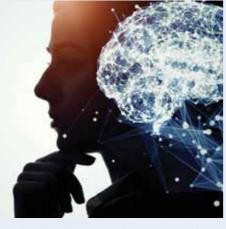
THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL **INTELLIGENCE**

The mastery of emotions is a pivotal factor in shaping success and fulfilment



n a busy world, as individuals navigate through various personal and professional challenges, their ability to understand and manage emotions plays a critical role in determining success, well-being and overall fulfilment. It is the emotions that shape how individuals interact, communicate, lead and innovate, thereby ultimately driving organisational success and fostering a positive work culture. Often it is found that much of an individual's behaviour is the result of emotions. However, these emotions are not a great guide to how one should behave in challenging situations. That is why identifying and working through them helps make better decisions. Feelings and needs are intertwined and knowing one helps an individual understand the other. it is the feelings that are the gateway into what health needs are thereby, promoting the individual to take appropriate action and enabling the self to grow and heal. If one is not in touch with their feelings, one may end up not knowing what they need which may further lead to indecision or emotional outbursts and the same is being faced in today's scenario be it the corporate world or the world of education.

The importance of emotional intelligence cannot be overstated in this fast-paced and interconnected world. At the workplace, what forms the utmost need is the combination of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, effective communication and a supportive work environment. By implementing such strategies, organisations can foster a culture where employees feel empowered to manage their emotions positively, leading to increased productivity, job satisfaction and overall well-being. Emotional intelligence positively correlates with job satisfaction. Employees with higher emotional intelligence are more satisfied with their jobs, as it fosters purpose, belonging and commitment.



Employees with high emotional intelligence excel in interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution and adaptability, while emotionally intelligent leaders inspire trust, motivate teams and cultivate a positive work environment. By promoting emotional well-being, organisations optimise employee performance and achieve better business outcomes. Recognising the importance of emotional well-being, organisations implement initiatives to support employees' mental health be it wellness programmes, counselling services or flexible work arrangements. Stressreducing activities, workload management, work-life balance and emotional validation can reduce absenteeism, turnover and healthcare costs, promoting a healthier and more resilient workforce.

Organisations should look for silver linings or alternative perspectives that can help reframe the situation in a more positive light, for emotionally intelligent employees can bounce back from failures, learn from setbacks and thrive in the face of uncertainty. By practicing self-compassion, focusing on strengths and investing in ongoing learning and skill development to enhance competence and confidence, can an individual effectively manage challenging emotions in the workplace and foster a more positive and productive work environment.

Remember, a workplace that acknowledges and supports the emotional needs of employees can promote mental health, reduce stress and prevent burnout. Emotions are not only inevitable but the most essential ingredient in the workplace. Recognising them and then cultivating them can lead to a more engaged, collaborative and resilient workforce which will ultimately contribute to the organisation's success and sus-

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

AFSPA repeal: A step towards 'Naya Kashmir'



Amit Shah's proposal to repeal AFSPA in J&K could restore normalcy, but it must consider the broader implications and evolving security of the region



ecently, the Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that the Centre will consider the removal of AFPSA in J&K. This statement assumes significance as it reflects the Government's vision towards J&K and most importantly Prime Minister's promise of Naya Kashmir. Soon, after the Lok Sabha elections, the focus will be panned towards J&K as the Union Territory is scheduled to go for polls in September this year. After abrogating article 370, the Government seems to turning towards solving another long-standing conundrum in J&K- AFSPA. At the security and strategic level, this attempt will accelerate the cleaning of Pakistan's propaganda by cleaning up their psychological warfare designs in J&K and will provide full throttle for holistic development. Before the Government sets its approach, it must see the bigger picture

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act gives sweeping powers to armed forces (which also extends to CAPF under Section 2) and most significantly provides them legal immunity for their actions under Section / of the act. However, the Supreme Court in 2016 struck down this blanket protection from prosecution. The Supreme Court said "It does not matter whether the victim was a common person or a militant or a terrorist, nor does it matter whether the aggressor was a common person or the state. The law is the same for both and is equally applicable to both". The sweeping powers under Section 4 of the act include , Arrest without warrant,

·2. Fire (After due warning) upon or use other kinds of force even if it causes death, against the person who is acting against law or order in the disturbed area for the maintenance of public order.

·3. To enter and search any premises in order to make such arrests, or to recover any person wrongfully restrained or any arms, ammunition or explosive substances and

·4. Stop and search any vehicle or vessel reasonably suspected to be carrying such person or weapons. The AFSPA debate stems from two perspectives first is security necessity and second is cases of extrajudi-



THE IMPOSITION

OF AFSPA IN THE STATE OR UT ITSELF EXPLAINS THAT THE STATE HAS ALMOST LOST ITS CAPACITY TO **DEAL WITH THE** SITUATION AND WHEN THE STATE LOSES ITS CAPACITY, IT MEANS THAT THE ADVERSARY OR ANY ADVERSE SITUATION WILL SOON GRIP THE STATE, LEADING TO MAYHEM AND A BREAKDOWN OF

cial killings in the Northeast. The most debatable part is the second one which has made this act controversial. In 2004, a thorough review of the act of was done by the Justice Jeevan Reddy Commission which concluded that the act should be repealed and observed that "agitations such as in Manipur and elsewhere are merely the symptoms of a malaise, which goes much deeper" and called on the Government to address the "core issues.". However, the importance of National security somehow gets shadowed by a few cases of misuse of the act.

Call for AFSPA comes under extraordinary situations which if not controlled or mitigated can result in serious consequences from the genocide of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990, 1986 Kashmir riots killing 2000 2000 people primarily Hindus, Sopor firings in January 1993 killing 40 people to Bij Behara firings in October 1993 killing 60 people. Such horrifying incidents need stringent measures in place and a certain amount of free pass to operate efficiently. "We feel that by revoking special legal provisions, which are in place here, definitely our operational capabilities will be compromised," General Officer Command (GOC) of Army's Srinagar-based 15 Corps Lieutenant General Syed Ata Hasnain said in 2011. To deal with a situation that is spiralling out day by day in a state requires effective operational dominance over the adversary which can only be possible if armed forces can freely operate.

The imposition of AFSPA in the state or UT itself explains that the state has almost lost its capacity to deal with the situation and when the state loses its capacity then it means that the adversary or any adverse situation will soon grip the state leading to mayhem and breakdown of

breakdowns are not ordinary and demand extreme measures and interventions to normalise and any constraints in intervention will affect the normalisation process therefore to let "normalisation" progress an effective emergency response mechanism is required which AFSPA provides. A call for the removal of AFPSA should only come when the security environment is significantly improved or secured as hurried removal might bring back the old situation. The case of a fresh wave of radicalisation in 2018 in J&K after the killing of terror poster boy Burhan Wani is one incidence where a cautious decision must be made to decide the removal of AFSPA.

AFSPA is not immune; it has its limitations and misuses. For example, the Nagaland case in 2021 of killing innocent 14 civilians or the 1995 Kohima Massacre where 16th Rasthtriya Rifiles fired upon civilians mistaking the sound of the tyre dursting for a domb attack killing 7 and injuring 36. The free pass or the freeness in the name of operational efficiency or capabilities has also led to some serious consequences which are eroding the primary objective of the act. The AFSPA Act is in place to mitigate the extreme situation in the state and to aggravate it. Such incidents aggravate the situation and further complicate the situation in a state. Therefore, these immunities either required a removal or needed a proper check to put caution in the exercise of powers by the armed forces which later was done by the Supreme Court in 2016.

AFSPA cannot stay for long as extraordinary or exceptional situations are temporary and once under control, AFSPA could be withdrawn. If it goes beyond necessity, then AFSPA's presence would hinder the normalisation process. The national security. Such situations of normalisation process does not

only include fighting with the adversary it also includes the restoration of a peaceful and harmonious environment. A state of being normal is only when the state begins to function without any constraints, fear and anxiety. AFSPA being in place distorts the state of being "normal" and rather heightens the anxiety and fear which in the long run affects the democratic ecosystem and governance in a state that might further lead to sociopolitical instability if overlooked. The case of J&K ever since the removal of Article 370 has significantly improved there was a 66 per cent drop in terror cases in J&K. The union territory has also seen a significant drop in terror recruitment under Army's Operation Sahi Raasta. According to reports only seven youth joined terror groups last

As the security environment in J&K is significantly improved, a call for the removal of AFSPA is well reasoned. Now, the CAPF presence would easily tackle any security situation if arises as the substantial threat of terror now seems to be subsiding. Like the Government withdrew AFSPA from Punjab in 1997 it should soon take a call on J&K as well, though few CAPF presence can be there considering bordering areas the operation of the act must

The removal of AFSPA will facilitate and exhort confidence and peace among people. Most importantly, eliminates the sense of fear and accelerates the pace of normalisation and developmental processes at socio-political levels. The Prime Minister's promise in Naya Kashmir lies beyond the security to society and politics which will only strengthen after the removal of AFPSA.

(The author is an Advocate based out of New Delhi, views

Engaging in the theatrics of India's electoral carnival

In the realm of political theatre, candidates await their turn in the merry-go-round of power, setting the stage with tension and anticipation

n anticipation of the 18th Lok Sabha elections in ■ India, political parties have fervently engaged in pre-electoral activities, including candidate selection, issue advocacy and public discourse-all these, much before the official announcement by the Election Commission (scheduled from April 19 to June 1, 2024). Of particular significance is the burgeoning cohort of 18 million first-time voters, who observe the electoral spectacle with keen interest as parties vie for their support by proffering ambitious pledges. Within this theatrical milieu, the composition of the Lok Sabha, comprising 543 parliamentary constituencies nationwide, assumes paramount importance. Each constituency plays a pivotal role in



electing a singular representative, who assumes the mantle of voicing their constituents' concerns within the Lower House of Parliament. Thus, amidst the cacophony of democratic fervour, the formation of the (18th) Lok Sabha emerges as a focal point, embodying the democratic ethos and the intricacies of electoral representation within India's diverse polity - as we witness this chaotic carnival

(read dance) of democracy. Now picture this: Rallies echoing with rehearsed oratory; meetings buzzing with the monotonous drone of 'scripted' discourse; and the landscape littered with towering hoardings and captivating advertisements—all vying for attention like desperate contestants in a reality TV show. Each candidate, eagerly awaits their fate in this grandiose spectacle, hoping to shine bright enough to avoid being relegated to the shadows of political obscurity. But, as they say, once a politician, always a politician.

This grand orchestra of democracy will see nearly a billion people herded like cattle into over a million polling booths, expected to cast their votes in a choreographed charade to determine the future Government.

In the realm of electoral politics, politicians assume the role of adept illusionists, skillfully concocting promises tailored to captivate the electorate. Through artful rhetoric, they conjure visions of development and inclusivity, appealing to voters' emotions despite the potential disparity with reality. Parties engage in a theatrical spectacle, donning elaborate garb and competing for attention with promises of infrastructure, welfare and prosperity. However, voters' decisions ultimately reflect both their susceptibility and the manipulative prowess of politicians. This electoral charade underscores the complex interplay between rhetoric, perception

and voter agency in contemporary democratic processes. Here past performances mat-

NATIONAL

SECURITY

Enter the Narendra Modi Government, riding high on the waves of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, with a later addition of 'Sabka Prayas'. Since 2014, the Modi administration has been pulling rabbits out of hats faster than a magician from electrifying villages to construction of toilets across the country in a bid to make India defecation-free, to digitising governance (Digital India), Startup India and standing up for the people and the world during emergencies like Covid19. Of course, like any good magic show, there's always a healthy dose of criticism to keep things interesting - after all, what's a politi-

cal spectacle without a little touch of drama? India's diplomatic endeavours have bol-stered its global stature, marked by strategic alliances with major powers and initiatives like the International Solar Alliance, etc., fostering collaboration in trade, technology and sustainable development. Concurrently, domestic developments such as Ayushman Bharat for healthcare, Saubhagya for rural electrification, Jan-Dhan Yojana for financial inclusion and so on, underscore efforts toward inclusive progress. Nonetheless, socio-economic disparities persist, emblematic of the ongoing challenges amidst India's democratic evolution on the world stage. The Indian electoral process is

One cannot forget that in this grand symphony, the Election Commission stands as the characterised by extravagant linchpin, ensuring the sancti-

rallies, serving as vibrant

showcases of democracy

where ordinary citizens are

swept into the extraordinary

theatre of politics. Whether

attendees arrive voluntarily

or are transported en masse,

these gatherings epitomise

the essence of democratic

engagement. Amidst a back-

drop of waving flags and res-

onant slogans, the democrat-

ic spirit radiates, offering a

glimpse of both the triumphs

and tribulations of competing

political factions. Central to

this spectacle, is the tireless

efforts of party workers,

orchestrating the mobilisa-

tion of supporters for these

ty of free and fair elections despite recurrent criticisms. Imagine the stalwart veterans anxiously clinging to their phones, praying for one more display of their experience in the political limelight, while the current faces (read chosen MPs) pace like restless lions in the corridors of authority, fearing either the sweet embrace of reselection or the bitter sting of rejection. But there's nothing to fear. For

in the unpredictable world of politics, one never knows when the pendulum of fortune will favourably swing back. So, let us Vote so that the elected parties work to fulfil their manifesto.

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

Police dismantle pro-Palestinian Trump calls judge 'crooked' after demonstrators' encampment facing warning of jail time demonstrators' encampment

Police removed barricades and began dismantling a pro-Palestinian demonstrators' fortified encampment early Thursday at the University of California, Los Angeles, after hundreds of protesters defied orders to leave. Some people were detained, their hands bound with zip ties.

The action came after officers spent hours threatening arrests over loudspeakers if people did not disperse. A crowd of more than 1,000 had gathered on campus, both inside a barricaded tent encampment and outside it, in support. Protesters and police shoved and scuffled as officers encountered resistance. With police helicopters hovering, the sound of flashbangs, which produce a bright light and a loud noise to disorient and stun people, pierced the air. Protesters chanted, "Where were you last night?" at the officers, in reference to Tuesday night, when counter-protesters attacked the encampment and the UCLA administration and campus police took hours to respond.

Tent encampments of protesters calling on universities to stop doing business with Israel or companies they say support the war in Gaza have spread across campuses nationwide in a student movement unlike any other this century. The ensuing police crackdowns echoed actions decades ago against a much larger protest movement protesting the Vietnam War. In the Mideast Iranian state television carried live images of the police action as did Qatar's pan-Arab Al Jazeera satellite network. Live images of Los Angeles also played across Israeli television networks, as well. California Highway Patrol offi-

cers poured into the campus by the hundreds early Thursday. Wearing face shields and protective vests, they stood with their batons protruding out to separate them from demonstrators, who wore helmets and gas masks and chanted, "You want peace. We want justice." Police methodically ripped apart the encampment's barricade of plywood, pallets, metal fences and trash dumpsters.

Will Israel end war without group's destruction?



Demonstrators gather on the UCLA campus, after nighttime clashes between Pro-Israel and Pro-Palestinian

Beirut (AP): Hamas on Thursday was considering the latest proposal for a cease-fire with Israel that the United States and other mediators hope will avert an Israeli attack on the Gaza town of Rafah. But chances for the deal are entangled with the question of whether Israel can accept an end to the war without reaching its stated goal of destroying

The stakes in the cease-fire negotiations were made clear in a new UN report that said if the war in Gaza stops today, it will still take until 2040 to rebuild all the homes that have been destroyed by nearly seven months of Israeli bombardment and ground offensives in the territory.

It warned that the impact of the damage to the economy will set back development for generations and will only get worse with every month fighting continues. Hamas has insisted it won't sign onto the deal without assurances that, if it eventually releases all its hostages, Israel will end its onslaught in Gaza and pull its troops out of the territory.

The proposal that US and Egyptian mediators have put to Hamas -- apparently with Israel's acceptance — sets out a three-stage process that will bring an immediate six-week cease-fire and partial hostage release but also negotiations over a "permanent calm" that includes some sort of Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, according to an Egyptian official.

If Israel does agree to end the war in return for a full hostage release, it would be a major turnaround. Since Hamas' bloody Oct. 7 attack stunned Israel, its leaders have vowed not to stop their bombardment and ground offensives until the militant group is destroyed. They also say Israel must keep a military presence in Gaza and security control after the war to ensure Hamas doesn't rebuild.

Publicly at least, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to insist that is the only acceptable

He has vowed that even if a cease-fire is reached, Israel will eventually attack Rafah which he says is Hamas' last stronghold in Gaza. He repeated his determination to do so in talks on Wednesday with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was in Israel on a regional tour to push the deal

The deal's immediate fate hinges on whether Hamas will accept uncertainty over the final phases to bring the initial six-week pause in fighting and at least postpone what it is feared would be a devastating assault on Rafah, Gaza's south ernmost town where some 1.4 million Palestinians have taken

Egypt has been privately assuring Hamas that the deal will mean a total end to the war. But the Egyptian official said Hamas says the text's language is too vague and wants it to specify a complete Israeli pullout from all of Gaza. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to talk about the internal deliberations.

Donald Trump returned briefly to the campaign trail Wednesday and called the judge presiding over his hush money trial "crooked" a day after he was held in contempt of court and threatened with jail time for violating a gag order. Trump's remarks at events in the battleground states of Wisconsin and Michigan were being closely watched after he received a USD 9,000 fine for making public statements about people connected to the criminal case. In imposing the fine for posts on Trump's Truth Social account and campaign website, Judge Juan M. Merchan said that if Trump continued to violate his orders, he would "impose an incarceratory punishment." There is no crime. I have a crooked judge. He's a totally conflicted judge," Trump said speaking to supporters at an event in



again that this and other cases against him are led by the White House to undermine his campaign. The gag order bars him from making public statements about witnesses, jurors and some others connected to his hush money case. Trump is still free to criticise Merchan.

The former president is trying to achieve a balancing act unprecedented in American history by running for a second term as the while also fighting felony charges in New York. Trump frequently goes after Merchan, prosecutors and potential witnesses at his ral-lies and on social media, attack lines that play well with his sup-porters but that have potentially put him in further legal jeopardy. Trump insists he is merely exercising his free speech rights, but the offending posts from his Truth Social account and campaign website were taken down. Merchan is weighing other alleged gag-order violations and will hear arguments on Thursday. Trump has often called this case and other criminal cases against him "election interference," saying they keep him from campaigning for the presidential election in November. Attendees agreed he is being unfairly prosecuted, contending the trial and gag order were designed to distract him . "It's a trial looking for

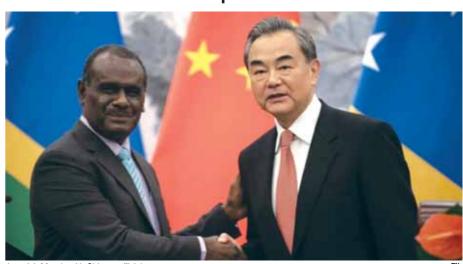
a crime," said Ray Hanson, of

Hartford. Hanson said he expected Trump's lawyers would "keep him in line" so he doesn't violate the gag order, as much as he likely wants to talk about the trial. Manhattan prosecutors have argued Trump and his associates took part in an illegal scheme to influence the 2016 presidential campaign by purchasing and then burying negative stories. He has pleaded not guilty. Trump's visits to Wisconsin and

Michigan mark his second trip to the swing states in just a month. For the previous rallies, the for-mer president largely focused on immigration, referring to people who are in the US illegally and who are suspected of crimes as "animals." Meanwhile, Democrats are hoping to remind voters ahead of these visits about Trump's position on abortion, which Trump has been openly concerned about being a political liability for him and

Solomon Islands lawmakers elect former Foreign Minister as new prime minister

Colomon Islands lawmakers On Thursday chose former Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manale as the new prime minister of the South Pacific island nation that has grown closer to China in recent years. The withdrawal of pro-Beijing former Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare from the contest to remain head of the government to make way for Manale as their party's candidate is an indication the country could follow a similar direction. The prime minister was chosen in a secret ballot of 49 lawmakers who won general elections on April Governor General David Vunagi said Manale received 31 votes. Sogavare had hoped to become the first Solomons prime minister to maintain power in consecutive four-year terms following the election. During his previous term, China's influence increased more in the Solomons than anywhere else in the South



Jeremiah Manale with Chinese official

Sogavare switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to Beijing and struck a secret security pact that has raised fears of the Chinese navy gaining a foothold in the region. Meg Keen, the director of the Pacific Islands program for

Lowy Institute, a Sydney-based international policy think tank, said Manale will be a "less fiery and combative leader for the West to manage but he will continue to pursue close relations with China.

"As the former foreign min-

ister he helped broker the security deal with China that panicked the West. But he is also a seasoned diplomat with experience at the UN and in western countries — he's no stranger to western engagement," Keen said in an email.

Over 40% of Americans see China as enemy: Report

AP WASHINGTON

More than 40 per cent of Americans now label China as an enemy, up from a quarter two years ago and reaching the highest level in five years, according to an annual Pew Research Center survey released Wednesday.

Half of Americans think of China as a competitor, and only 6 per cent consider the country a partner, according to the report. The findings come as the Biden administration is seeking to stabilise US-China relations to avoid miscalculations that could result in clashes, while still trying to counter the world's second-largest economy on issues from Russia's war in Ukraine to Taiwan and human rights.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen have both recently visited China in the administration's latest effort to "responsibly" manage the competition with Beijing. Despite those overtures, President Joe Biden has been

competing with former American attitudes toward presumptive Republican nominee in November's election, on being tough on China. The Pew report, which is drawn from an April 1-7 survey of a sample of 3,600 US adults, found that roughly half of Americans think limiting China's power and influence should be a top US foreign policy priority. Only 8 per cent don't think it should be a priority at all. For the fifth year in a row, about eight in 10 Americans report an unfavourable view of China, the Pew report said.

"Today, 81 pe cent of US adults see the country unfavourably, including 43 per cent who hold a very unfavourable opinion. Chinese President Xi Jinping receives similarly negative ratings," the report said.

About eight in 10 Americans say they have little or no confidence in Xi to do the right thing regarding world affairs. About 10 per cent said they have never heard of him.

ical after the US launched a trade war against China in 2018 and since the emergence of COVID-19, which was first reported in China

Beijing's human rights record, its closeness to Russia and its policies toward Taiwan and Ĥong Kong also have left Americans with negative views of the country, according to Pew's previous analyses.

At the same time, the US government has been overt about competing with China on economic and diplomatic issues. Following that, 42 per cent of Americans say China is an enemy of the US, the highest level since 2021, when Pew began asking the question. The share is much larger among Republicans and Republicanleaning independents, Pew said, with 59 per cent of them describing China as an enemy, compared with 28 per cent of Democrats and those leaning Democratic.

Norway to increase defence spending

AP ■ COPEHNAGEN

The Norwegian centre-left government said on Thursday that it wants to add 7 billion kroner (USD 630 million) to the Scandinavian country's armed forces over the next 12 years amid increased tensions in the region. The announcement came on top of plans announced last month of a "historic increase" of 600 billion kroner (USD 54 billion) in the oil-rich country's defence budget over the same period.

'We must increase the operational capability of the Armed Forces," Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store, citing heightened tensions in the region as the reason for the boost.

Gahr Store said on Thursday that the combined budget increase meant that Norway would be able to reach NATO's goal of military spending of 2 per cent of each member country's GDP this year.

In 2024, the Scandinavian country's defence budget is expected to increase to 104 billion kroner (USD 9.4 billion).

Finance Minister Trygve Slagsvold Vedum called it "a strong growth" and said it was "a necessary investment to strengthen our freedom".

Gahr Store heads a coalition that includes his own social democratic Labour party and the left-leaning Centre Party. He is expected to win support for the proposal in the 169-seat Storting assembly. No date for a vote was set.

On Tuesday, party leaders in the Norwegian parliament announced that the Scandinavian country was donating 7 billion kroner to Ukraine as part of a five-year support package. That comes on top of the 75 billion kroner (USD 6.8 billion) which Norway already has said it will donate, making it one of the world's biggest donors to wartorn Ukraine.

Georgia parliament cancels session after huge protests

AP ■ TBLISI (GEORGIA)

The parliament of Georgia ■ cancelled its Thursday plenary session following massive protests against a proposed law that critics fear will stifle media freedom and endanger the country's bid for membership in the European Union. The parliament's announcement said the cancellation was connected to damage the building suffered during Wednesday protests in which police used water cannon, tear gas and pepper spray against the tens of thousands of demonstrators. The legislature on Wednesday approved a second reading of the bill that would require media and non-commercial

organizations to register as "pursuing the interests of a foreign power" if they receive more than 20% of funding from abroad. The third and final reading was expected in mid-May and it was not clear if the cancellation

of Thursday's session would

affect the bill's progress. The

ruling Georgian Dream party withdrew a similar proposal last year after large crowds protested. Protesters denounce the bill as "the Russian law" because

neighboring Russia uses similar legislation to stigmatize independent news media and organizations critical of the Kremlin. Eighty-three of Georgia's 150

lawmakers approved the bill in its second reading, while 23 voted against it.

Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, increasingly at odds with the governing party, has criticized the bill and vowed to veto it if it is passed by Parliament.

But the governing party can overrule the veto and ask the parliamentary speaker to sign the bill into law.

The EU's foreign policy arm earlier this month also criticized Georgian Dream's decision to reintroduce the law. which it said "raises serious concerns" around media freedom in the country — something it called "crucial for the EU accession process."

New form of mpox that spreads easily found in Congo's biggest outbreak

AP ■ CONGO

ongo is struggling to con-Ctain its biggest mpox outbreak, and scientists say a new form of the disease detected in a mining town might more easily spread among people.

Since January, Congo has reported more than 4,500 suspected mpox cases and nearly 300 deaths, numbers that have roughly tripled from the same period last year, according to the World Health Organisation. Congo recently declared the outbreak across the country a health emergency. An analysis of patients hospitalised between October and January in Kamituga, eastern Congo, suggests recent genetic mutations in mpox are the result of its continued transmission in

humans; it's happening in a town where people have little contact with the wild animals thought to naturally carry the

"We're in a new phase of mpox," said Dr. Placide Mbala-Kingebeni, the lead researcher of the study, who said it will soon be submitted to a journal for publication. Mbala-Kingebeni heads a lab at Congo's National Institute of Biomedical Research, which studies the genetics of dis-

The lesions reported by most patients are milder and on the genitals, Mbala-Kingebeni said, making the disease trickier to diagnose. In previous outbreaks in Africa, lesions were mostly seen on the chest, hands and feet. He also said that the

new form seems to have a lower death rate.

In a report on the global mpox situation this week, WHO said the new version of the disease might require a new testing strategy to pick up the muta-

With experts pointing out that fewer than half of people in Congo with mpox are tested, Mbala-Kingebeni said: "The risk is that unless patients themselves come forward, we will have a silent transmission of the disease and nobody will know.

Mbala-Kingebeni said most people were infected via sex, with about a third of mpox cases found in sex workers. It was not until the 2022 global emergency of mpox that scientists established the disease was spread via sex, with most cases in gay or bisexual men. In November, WHO confirmed sexual transmission of mpox in Congo for the first time.

There are two kinds, or clades, of mpox, which is related to smallpox and endemic to central and west Africa. Clade 1 is more severe and can kill up to 10 per cent of people infected. Clade 2 triggered the 2022 outbreak; more than 99 per cent of people infected sur-

Mbala-Kingebeni and colleagues said they have identified a new form of clade 1 that may be responsible for more than 240 cases and at least three deaths in Kamituga, a region with a significant transient population travelling elsewhere in Africa and beyond.

2 years after SC draft leak, abortion consuming US politics and courts

AP WASHINGTON

wo years after a leaked draft of a US Two years after a leaked didn of a Co Supreme Court opinion signalled that the nation's abortion landscape was about to shift dramatically, the issue is still consuming the nation's courts, legislatures and political campaigns — and changing the course of lives.

On Wednesday, a ban on abortion after the first six weeks of pregnancy, often before women realise they're pregnant, took effect in Florida, echoing laws in two other states.

In Arizona, meanwhile, lawmakers voted to repeal a total ban on abortion dating back to 1864, decades before Arizona became a state. Also this week, the Kansas Legislature increased funding for antiabortion centres, while advocates in South Dakota submitted the required number of signatures for a ballot measure to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution. The status of abortion in states across the

country has changed constantly, with lawmakers passing measures and courts ruling on challenges to them. Currently, 14 states are enforcing bans on abortion at all stages of pregnancy, with limited exceptions. Most Democratic-led states, meanwhile, have taken steps to preserve or expand access. Some of it's exactly what we knew would

happen," said David Cohen, a professor at the Thomas R. Kline School of Law at Drexel University who studies abortion policy, "and others have been big surprises that have put, frankly, the anti-abortion movement on their heels".

Although more than 20 states have begun enforcing abortion bans of varying degrees since the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in June 2022, studies have found that the number of monthly abortions nationally is about the same — or higher

 than it was before the ruling. Asked to weigh in on the emotional debate, voters have supported the position favoured by abortion rights advocates on

all seven statewide ballot measures since

The Supreme Court's decision in the Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization case was released officially on June 24, 2022, upending nearly 50 years of abortion being legal nationwide. But the world caught a glimpse of it about six weeks earlier, on May 2, after a news out-

let published a leaked draft. "With the Dobbs decision, the will of the people is now able to be adhered to," said Stephen Billy, vice president of state affairs for Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America. He said abortion rights supporters have amplified uncertainty in laws — especially over whether abortion is allowed in medical emergencies: "They've tried to sow political division just to advance their policy agenda," he said.

At the time Politico published the leaked draft, Amanda Zurawski was undergoing fertility treatment and was about two weeks away from learning she was finally preg-

Senior PML-N leader signals possibility of early elections

Bid to pave way for Nawaz Sharif's fourth stint as PM

PTI ■ LAHORE

senior leader of the ruling APML-N party has hinted at the possibility of fresh elections in Pakistan within the next two years to pave the way for Nawaz Sharif to secure a record fourth term as prime minister, according to a media report on Thursday

Senior Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Javed Latif's comments came during an interview with a private TV channel.

Nawaz Sharif, 74, was all set to become prime minister for the fourth time but his party failed to get a clear majority in the National Assembly on its own in the February 8 general elec-

In a surprise move, he allowed his 72-year-old younger brother and the incumbent party president Shehbaz Sharif who is considered the favourite of the military establishment to lead a six-party coalition government at the Centre.

Latif said whether the elections take place in two or five years, Nawaz Sharif, the PML-N supremo will take the reins of power for the fourth time. He hinted that early elections

could be in the cards within the next two years to pave the way for Nawaz Sharif's fourth stint as the country's prime minister, The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

Pressed to explain how Nawaz Sharif could reclaim the top spot within two years, especially with his brother currently occupying it, Latif said it would be possible through elections. "The elections can happen

tomorrow," he said. Nawaz Sharif returned to Pakistan from London in October 2023 after ending his nearly four-year-long selfimposed exile, hoping to be the prime minister again.

He predicted that even those who once obstructed Nawaz Sharif's path to a fourth term as premier would now rally



He pointed out that a party a two-thirds majority often struggles to complete its term. The senior PML-N politician warned that the withdrawal of support from even one coalition party could jeopardise the current government's survival. Latif is the only remaining active party member who continues to take swipes at his own party's central government. Given the track record of his colleague Rana Sanaullah who, after throwing jabs at his own party's central government, promptly joined the same Cabinet he accused of being chosen by the establishment—many in the party view his criticism of the party as Latif's desperate attempt to bargain for a position in the government, the paper said. source within the Prime Minister's Office revealed that Sanaullah was brought into the cabinet to exert control over him. The source said he was a senior party leader and president of Punjab, adding that any action against him—even if approved by Nawaz Sharif—could have been harmful to the party's interests. When questioned about

whether Rana Sanaullah and Ishaq Dar's appointments were decisions made by Shehbaz Sharif, he said he was not at liberty to divulge any specifics, noting that in the PML-N party, Nawaz Sharif remains the founder and his decisions reign

He said that Latif, inspired by Rana Sanaullah, might have chosen to go all out. He added that it was up to Nawaz Sharif to assess his party leaders who deviated from the party line.

Pak Military aware of its constitutional limits: Army chief

 $P^{\text{akistan Army chief General}}_{\text{Asim Munir on Thursday}}$ said the military was "well aware" of its constitutional limits and expected others to uphold the Constitution, amid allegations of the powerful army's involvement in politics and interference by the intelligence agencies in the working of the judiciary

The general, who was the chief guest at a passing out parade, said that those who flout the clear restrictions imposed on freedom of expression in the Constitution cannot point fingers at others.

We are well aware of our constitutional limits and expect others to uphold the Constitution," Gen Munir said while addressing the Pakistan Air Force's passing out parade at the Asghar Khan Academy Risalpur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

"Article 19 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan clearly defines the limits of freedom of speech and expression of opinion," he said. His remarks came two days after Pakistan's Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa said that pushing the judiciary towards taking a certain action was akin to interference in the judicial process. The top judge was referring to a letter written by six Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges on March 25, alleging interference of agencies in their matters. The apex court took suo motu notice of the letter and later several bar councils also filed petitions

the case. The powerful army, which has ruled Pakistan for more than half of its 75-plus years of existence, has hitherto wielded considerable power in matters of security and foreign policy. However, the military has denied meddling in the coun-

and they were made parties to



try's politics

Gen Munir lauded the PAF for patrolling the airspace in all kinds of difficulties, terming the shooting down of an Indian fighter jet in February 2019 as a great example of the same. 'You are the centre of our hopes, the guardian of the skies and the guarantors of regional unity," the army chief told the cadets. Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman shot down the Pakistani F-16 jet during an aerial combat before his MiG 21 Bison aircraft was hit on February 27, 2019. He was captured by the Pakistani Army and later released on the night of March 1.

Without naming any country, Gen Munir highlighted that the arms race posed a risk of disturbing the region's balance of

"Specific technologies, including artificial intelligence, roboting, and quantum computing, and quantum computing, and provide the provide are changing the use of air power as well as expanding its scope," he noted. Gen Munir also pledged Pakistan's "moral, political and diplomatic support" to the Kashmiri people.

Verdict reserved on petition seeking transfer of Imran Khan's wife

Islamabad (PTI): A top court in Pakistan on Thursday reserved its verdict on the peti-tion filed by former prime min ister Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi requesting her transfer to the high-security Adiala Jail, where her husband is incarcerated. The 71-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Khan has been lodged at Adiala Jail at Rawalpindi after conviction in multiple cases while Bushra Bibi, 49, is currently jailed at Bani Gala — Khan's home in Islamabad – which was turned into a sub-jail since the couple was sentenced in the 'un-Islamic nikah' case in February. After hearing the arguments from both sides, Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) reserved the verdict in the peti-tion requesting Bushra Bibi's transfer from the Bani Gala sub-jail to the Adiala jail, The News International said

Former first lady's lawyer Usman Gul said the process of declaring the residence as a sub-jail was completed within a few hours. The court said that the Adiala Jail Superintendent had informed that they could not accommodate Bushra Bibi as the jail was already over-crowded. "Apparently, it was already decided that she had to be transferred to Bani Gala," it added. Justice Aurangzeb posed an array of questions on declaring Bani Gala a sub-jail, asking the state counsel if its notification was prepared in a minute, The News International said further quoting the proceedings. "Don't you feel it was already decided that Bushra Bibi had to be transferred (home)? How many women have been brought to Adiala jail, after sending Bushra Bibi home?" he inquired.

The IHC judge questioned if the 141 women brought to the jail after that had lesser rights. "Why don't you send the other women home as well?" he asked. Responding to the judge, the government's lawyer said Bushra was transferred to Bani Gala due to a threat to her in jail. Justice Aurangzeb said he would be overjoyed if he was "willingly" confined to his house and questioned how a prisoner's property could be made a sub-jail without their

Pak witnessed 77 militant attacks in April: Report

 $F_{\text{March, militant attacks in}}^{\text{ollowing a brief lull in}}$ Pakistan surged once again in April, as the country experienced 77 verifiable attacks last month, a security assessment report by an Islamabad-based think-tank said.

Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) in a report said the attacks, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa particularly bearing the brunt, resulted in 70 fatalities, including 35 civilians and 31 members of security forces, Dawn News reported on Thursday.

It said four militants were killed, and 67 individuals — 32 civilians and 35 security personnel — were injured in the attacks. In comparison, March saw 56 militant attacks, resulting in 77 fatalities and 67 injuries. This indicates a 38 per cent increase in the number of militant attacks, although there was a nine per cent decline in deaths, with no change in the number of injuries. The security report also underscored

security forces in thwarting numerous potential attacks during the month. At least 55 suspected militants were killed and 12 others arrested, including individuals involved in the Basham suicide attack, marking a 55 per cent increase in militant deaths compared to

The report further said that 73 per cent of the total number of militant attacks reported in April took place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including the tribal districts of the province. Fifty-six attacks were reported in the province during the previous month. The attacks killed 43 people — 26 members of security forces and 17 civilians, the report said.

The number of the injured stood at 32, with 19 members of security forces and 13 civilians with injuries. Within KPK, mainland districts saw more attacks and fatalities than tribal districts (formerly Fata). Mainland KPK witnessed 31 attacks, resulting in 25 fatalities and 10 injuries.

Khan, Lakki Marwat, Bannu, and Tank were the most affect ed, with D.I. Khan and Lakki Marwat facing seven militant attacks each, Bannu facing six, and Tank experiencing two attacks. Together, these districts accounted for 71 per cent of the attacks in mainland KPK. Additionally, Peshawar faced four attacks while Swat, Swabi, Charsadda, Shangla and Battagram experienced one attack each.

In the tribal districts of KPK (formerly Fata), PICSS recorded at least 25 attacks, resulting in 18 fatalities and 22 injuries North Waziristan, Bajaur, and South Waziristan were the most affected districts, with nine five, and four attacks reported respectively. According to the report, Balochistan faced 16 attacks, resulting in 21 fatalities, including 17 civilians and four security personnel, with 31 individuals injured. Most of these attacks occurred in the province's Baloch belt, particularly in the south and

Bad weather returns to UAE, several flights cancelled

 $H^{\text{eavy rains and thunder-}}_{\text{storms lashed the UAE on}}$ Thursday, leading to the cancellation of several international flights, two weeks after Dubai was hit by unprecedented storms that paralysed the emirate for days.

On Wednesday, the country's National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority (NCEMA) elevated the readiness and preparedness levels of the national system to deal with the situation. While these rains are expected to be less severe than the unprecedented downpour that hit the country last month, the public is urged to take precau-

On April 14-15, extreme rainfall battered regions of the Arabian Peninsula, with Dubai experiencing the heaviest rains on record since 1949.

Dubai-based Emirates airline announced the cancellation

due to bad weather across the UAE as movements at Dubai International Airport (DXB) were reduced.

"Customers arriving or departing from Dubai airport on 2 May can expect some delays as flights are rescheduled," Emirates said in a statement. The following flights have been cancelled on May 2: EK 123/124 - between Dubai and Istanbul, EK 763/764 between Dubai and Johannesburg, EK 719/720 – between Dubai and Nairobi, Ek 921/922 - between Dubai and Cairo, EK 903/904 between Dubai and Amman, and EK 352/353 – between Dubai and Singapore (EK353 departing 3 May, 12.30 am - UAE time). The airline has also waived rebooking charges to help stranded passengers. "Based on the expected weather conditions, the Ministry of Interior recommended, in coordination with NCEMA.

Thursday and Friday for all educational institutions, with decisions to be made by the competent authorities at the federal level and officials of local emergency management teams, in coordination with the Ministry of Education and the Emirates Schools Establishment," it said on Wednesday.

As heavy winds and light rains

lashed across the main cities, residents appeared more equipped to ride it out. Remote work systems were advised for all government and private sectors on Thursday and Friday, except for vital jobs that require presence at the workplace and those involved in response and recovery efforts. The Ministry of Interior, in coordination with NCEMA also decided to close all roads leading to areas prone to flash floods, water accumulations, and dams during the weather

Microsoft to invest USD 2.2 bn in Cloud and AI services in Malaysia

Microsoft is investing USD 2.2 billion over the next four years in Malaysia's new cloud and artificial intelligence infrastructure as well as partnering with the government to establish a national AI centre, its CEO Satya Nadella said on Thursday. It marks Microsoft's single largest investment in Malaysia, as the tech giant seeks to bolster support for AI development in the region and worldwide. "We are committed to supporting Malaysia's AI transformation and ensure it benefits all Malaysians," he said "Our investments in digital infrastructure and skilling will help Malaysian businesses, communities and developers apply the latest technology to drive inclusive economic growth and innovation across the country." Nadella on Tuesday also announced a USD 1.7 billion

investment in cloud and AI ser-

visit there as part of his Southeast Asia tour. On Wednesday, he said Microsoft will build its first regional data centre in Thailand.

In April, the tech giant similarly unveiled a USD 2.9 billion investment in Japan and USD 1.5 billion in G42, an AI firm in Abu Dhabi.

Microsoft also pledged to provide AI training for 2.5 million people in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam by 2025. Nadella earlier met Prime

Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who said the investment will be the key support pillar for the government's goal to enhance AI capacity in Malaysia. The new investment will

include AI training for another 300,000 people, the establishment of a national AI centre of excellence, enhancing the nation's cybersecurity capabilities and supporting the growth of Malaysia's developer commu-

Microsoft runs one of the world's largest cloud computing operations and has taken a leap into artificial intelligence through its partnership with OpenAI, developers of ChatGPT. Since then, Microsoft has integrated an AI assistant into its Microsoft Edge browser, named Copilot, helping lift its profits by 20 per cent in the first quarter.

Microsoft sees Southeast Asia, with its population of over 600 million people, as a growing market and potential location for more AI product development. A study held by global consulting firm Kearney said AI could contribute nearly USD 1 trillion to Southeast Asia's GDP by 2030. Indonesia is expected to capture USD 366 billion of the total and Malaysia USD 115 billion. Microsoft said in a statement that the investment in Malaysia will build on its 2021 program to support inclusive economic growth.

Death toll jumps to 48 in southern **China's highway**

Beijing (AP): The death toll climbed to 48 on Thursday as search efforts continued in southeastern China after a highway section collapsed in a mountainous area, sending more than 20 cars down a steep slope. Officials in the city of Meizhou said three other people were unidentified, pending DNA testing. It wasn't immediately clear if they had died which would bring the death toll to 51. Another 30 people had non-life-threatening injuries. The collapse happéned about 2 am on Wednesday after a month of heavy rains in a mountainous part of Guangdong province. Vehicles fell down the slope and sent up flames as they caught fire. The search was still ongoing, Meizhou city Mayor Wang Hui said at a late-afternoor news conference. No foreigners have been found among the victims, he said.

Russia proposes UN resolution on banning weapons in space

AP UNITED NATIONS

ussia has circulated a UN Russia has circulated a resolution calling on all countries to take urgent action to prevent putting weapons in outer space "for all time" a week after it vetoed a US-Japan resolution to stop an arms race in

The Russian draft resolution, obtained Wednesday by The Associated Press, goes further than the US-Japan proposal, not only calling for efforts to stop weapons from being deployed in outer space but for preventing "the threat or use of force in outer space," also "for all time." It says this should include deploying weapons "from space against Earth, and from Earth against objects in outer space." Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia told the Security Council when he vetoed the US-Japan draft that it didn't go far enough in banning all types of weapons in

space. The vetoed resolution focused solely on weapons of mass destruction including nuclear arms, and made no mention of other weapons in

 $I\bar{t}$ would have called on all countries not to develop or deploy nuclear arms or other weapons of mass destruction in space, as banned under a 1967 international treaty that the US and Russia ratified, and to agree to the need to verify compliance.

Before the US-Japan resolution was put to a vote on April 24, Russia and China proposed an amendment that would call on all countries, especially those with space capabilities, "to prevent for all time the placement of weapons in outer space, and the threat of use of force in outer spaces."

The vote was 7 countries in favour, 7 against, and one abstention and the amendment was defeated because it failed to

get the minimum 9 "yes" votes in the 15-member Security Council required for adoption. US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield told the council after the vote that Russian President Vladimir

Putin has said Moscow has no intention of deploying nuclear weapons in space "Today's veto begs the question: Why? Why, if you are following the rules, would you not support a resolution that reaffirms them? What could you possibly be hiding," she asked. "It's baf-

fling. And it's a shame." Putin was responding to White House confirmation in February that Russia has obtained a "troubling" antisatellite weapon capability, although such a weapon is not operational yet. Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said after casting the veto that the US-Japan resolution cher-

Lanka continues to service loans despite default

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lanka has maintained strict financial discipline while taking unpopular decisions to facilitate economic recovery and continues to service its multilateral debt despite the default announced in 2022 state minister of finance Ranjith Siyambalapitiya said on Thursday. He said USD 2.5 billion debt in 2022 and USD 2.6 billion debt in 2023 had been repaid to multilaterals such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Only the bilateral external debt payments had been suspended with the announcement of the debt default in mid-2022.

'We have maintained strict financial discipline while taking unpopular decisions to facilitate recovery, economic Siyambalapitiya Meanwhile, the official sources said the talks with sovereign bondholders to restructure

about USD 46 billion debt are

being continued.

Ukrainian soldiers say rear defensive lines barely exist amid Russian advance

During pitched battles with far better-armed Russian forces, Ukrainian soldier Batyar's unit has few options. Devastating Russian aerial glide bombs that can drop up to 1.5 tons of explosives out of range of most of Ukraine's air defences are gnawing away at his men's positions in a new

Yet, to retreat carries no promise of safety — the rear defensive lines meant to give them cover barely exist, he said. Lack of ammunition is forcing the outnumbered Ukrainian soldiers to pull back, one village after another, including three surrendered on Sunday, as

intense fighting roils the countryside surrounding Avdiivka nearly three months after the strategic city fell to Russia. "It's necessary to increase the pace of building fortifications

will retreat to a prepared position," said Batyar, a unit commander who gave only his military call sign in line with brigade protocols. "These for-

so that when we retreat, we

tifications are not enough." Facing an outcry after Avdiivka's fall, Ukraine is rushing to build concrete-fortified trenches, foxholes, firing positions and other barricades on the front lines. But relentless Russian shelling, lack of equipment and crippling bureaucracy plague construction across vast 1,000-kilometre (600mile) front, even as a new Russian offensive looms, according to a dozen Ukrainian

directors interviewed by The Associated Press. The much awaited aid package passed by the US Congress last month is expected to help Ukraine close the firepower

soldiers, government officials

and construction company

DIG AND FIGHT Ukraine has allocated nearly 38 billion hryvnias (USD 960 million) to build an extensive fortification network this year. Soldiers across the front line maintain that should have happened last year, when Ukraine had the upper hand in the fighting, not in the heat of bat-

gap. But until replenishments arrive, which could take weeks,

Russia will continue to exploit

Ukraine's weaknesses.

Besides trenches and other barricades, the layered system includes mines and anti-tank obstacles known as "dragon's teeth", normally built in advance of fighting.

Russia's preparedness paid off during Kyiv's failed counteroffensive last summer: Ukraine's momentum was slowed in the Zaporizhzhia region by Moscow's extensive fortifica-

But Ukraine was slow to follow suit; it was not until this spring, when weather conditions improved, that any real progress was made. In March, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced Ukraine was building 2,000 kilometres (1,240 miles) of fortifications across three lines of defence.

"There was an absence of responsibility. ... People didn't understand that fortifications can save your life if you do it in advance," said Oleksandr, a deputy infantry commander with the 47th brigade in the Avdiivka area who gave only his first name in line with military rules. "Many people thought we ... wouldn't need to

prepare such lines. They didn't

expect a new Russian offen-

sive." Unlike Russia, Ukraine

does not have the option of

forcing thousands of prisoners

to do the work. That means

Ukrainian soldiers on the front lines must both fight and dig their own trenches. "It's very hard to do both," Oleksandr Building the second line, 2 to

5 kilometers behind the front line and within range of Russian artillery, is the responsibility of Ukraine's poorlyresourced engineering force. The third line, at a greater distance from battle, is constructed by companies under military contracts.

The reasons for Ukraine's lack of preparedness are rooted in the years after independence when it began downsizing its military because it couldn't afford to maintain the large force inherited from the Soviet Union. Its engineering regiments were dismantled until there were only a handful left. Equipment, including excavators and plows so direly needed now, were sold off.

"We entered the war with nothing," said a serviceman in Ukraine's engineering force, who spoke on condition of anonymity to talk openly about the lack of preparation. When he arrived to build fortifications in Ukraine's east in October, all his unit had were aging equipment from the 1960s and shovels, he said. "Accordingly, that's the kind of trenches we made."

DISCONNECTED PITS

Ukraine's lack of adequate defensive lines has helped Russia make significant military gains, and constant enemy fire hinders building.

Five commanders in Avdiivka and Chasiv Yar, which have been under relentless Russian assault, said without well-prepared positions they were unable to gain a foothold in unfamiliar terrain and defend without suffering huge losses. In Chasiv Yar, a strategic hilltop town in Donetsk, the lack of fortifications helped turn the tables in Russia's favor.

ry picked weapons of mass destruction.

In mid-March, Ukraine's 67th brigade was rotated in to hold positions roughly 3 kilometers from the town. "I would be hard-pressed to describe them as 'positions," said a Ukrainian serviceman who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the failings candidly.

He expected dugouts, a labyrinth of trenches and firing positions, but what he found were a series of pits, barely large enough to hide in during

artillery barrages. Under fire, "soldiers would climb out of pits and start digging in each other's direction so that there is at least some connection between them", he said. The soil was so sandy that whenever shells struck, the trenches they dug crumbled. With nowhere to take cover and no means to match the Russian barrages, they retreated 2 kilometers back. Over 100 Ukrainian soldiers were killed or are missing, he said. "We lost department comman-

ders, platoon commanders, company commanders and sergeants," he said. "That is, we lost the entire skeleton of the brigade." TIME, MONEY, PRESSURE

To rush building across the third line, construction compa-

nies were awarded contracts without the usual bidding process. "There was no time," said Kharkiv Gov. Oleh Syniehubov. The move speeded things up but raised concerns of potential corruption a worry Syniehubov asserted was overstated. "Believe me, we have so many checks-and-balances and government agencies overseeing the building, it is impossible to steal something,

Stock markets rebound as GST revenues hit record in April

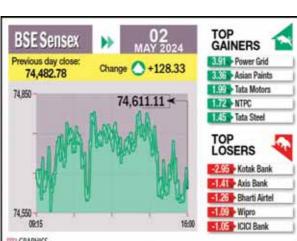
Stock markets rebounded Thursday with Thursday benchmark Sensex closing higher by 128 points as record GST collections in April, positive manufacturing data, and foreign fund inflows boosted investor sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 128.33 points or 0.17 per cent to settle at 74,611.11. During the day, it jumped 329.65 points or 0.44 per cent to 74,812.43.

The NSE Nifty went up by 43.35 points or 0.19 per cent to 22,648.20. From the Sensex basket,

Power Grid, Asian Paints, Tata Motors, Tata Steel, Pharma, NTPC. Sun Mahindra, Mahindra HDFC Bank, Consultancy Services and JSW Steel were among the major gainers.

Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bharti Airtel, Axis Bank, Wipro, ICICI Bank and IndusInd were among the



collections grew 12.4 per cent to a record high of Rs 2.10 lakh crore in April, aided by strong economic momentum and increased domestic transactions and imports, the finance ministry said on Wednesday.

The GST collections have breached the Rs 2 lakh crore mark for the first time in April this year, it said in a

Goods and Services Tax India's manufacturing sector activity moderated in April but still recorded the second fastest improvement in operating conditions three-and-a-half

> said on Thursday. seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell from 59.1 in March to 58.8 in April, signalling the

demand, a monthly survey

supported by

buoyant

second-best improvement in the health of the sector for three-and-a-half years.

In Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction. In Asian markets, Hong Kong settled with gains while Seoul, Tokyo and Shanghai ended lower. European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street ended mixed on

Wednesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 1.02 per cent to USD 84.29 a barrel..

Institutional

Foreign

(FIIs) bought Investors equities worth Rs 1,071.93 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. Domestic equity markets were closed on Wednesday on account of Maharashtra Day. Snapping its two-day winning run, the BSE benchmark declined 188.50 points or 0.25 per cent to settle at 74,482.78 on Tuesday. The NSE Nifty dipped 38.55 points or 0.17 per cent to finish at 22,604.85.

India among fastest growing markets with potential to be among top 10: Airbnb CBO

but said India is a "focus

area" and "is one of our

When asked as whether India

figures among Airbnb's top

large travel market and we definitely think it can be.

specifically in India, where a

number of tourists travelling

to foreign destinations as

well as domestic places are

on the rise post-pandemic

and is supporting them to

stay in its range of "inexpensive homes all the

It has witnessed a whopping

way to luxe homes".

investing

That would be the goal."

Airbnb

fastest-growing countries".

markets

India is one of the "fastest-growing markets" for accommodation hosting platform Airbnb and the country has the potential to be among its top 10 global markets in the coming years, according to its Business Officer Chief Dave Stephenson. The company is investing in India to tap the opportunity of a rapid rise in tourists travelling to foreign destinations as well as domestic places that are rapidly growing post-pandemic and where 90 per cent of its first-time bookers are Gen Zs.

"It (India) is one of our growth markets and we see a huge opportunity for growth in India in the future. In In India, in the future. In India, nights booked grew by almost 30 per cent YoY (Year-on-Year) in 2023 compared to 2022 which in the future. 2022, which is a positive sign," Stephenson told PTI. For Airbnb, India is going to

be "a large travel market", where it has seen a "strong desire" among the "Indian travellers to venture overseas as well as explore domestic destinations, especially those off the beaten path", he said. Though, Stephenson did not any specific growth numbers it is helping these groups find a perfect place. "Indians are inspired by Cricket and Bollywood, and

they want to explore the world. If they stay domestically, they are going to places like Goa and enjoying. But also, if they have the opportunity to travel abroad, they love to go to Italy and places that they're inspired by from the 10 markets globally, Stephenson replied in negative. Further he said, "It should be one of the top 10 markets. It is getting to be a

movies," he said. Currently, 90 per cent of its first-time bookers are Gen Zs. Moreover, Airbnb is supporting the inbound flow of international travellers coming to India.

Airbnb is "working closely with the government in their vision to make India one of the most sought-after tourist destinations in the world" Stephenson said.

It has partnered with the Ministry of Tourism and curated a dedicated microsite which spotlights heritage stays across India. It has also partnered with governments Goa. Pradesh, Madhya Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, among others,

75 per cent jump in international group travel bookings from India, where to promote lesser-known families/friends are going abroad for vacations. It has destinations and conduct added features like the c a p a c i t y - b u i l d i n g workshops, he said. collaborative wishlist, where

SK Finance files draft papers with Sebi to garner ₹2,200 crore via IPO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

 $V_{{}^{
m ehicle}}$ finance and business loans-focused non-bank lender SK Finance has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to garner Rs 2,200 crore through an initial share sale. The proposed initial public offer (IPO) is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 500 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of up to Rs 1,700 crore by promoters and investor shareholders, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP)

filed on Wednesday. As a part of the OFS, Norwest Venture Partners X-Mauritius and TPG Growth IV SF PTE Ltd will offload shares worth Rs 700 crore each, Evolvence Coinvest I will divest shares to the tune of Rs 75 crore and Evolvence India Fund III Ltd will sell shares worth Rs 25

Additionally, promoters -Rajendra Kumar Setia and Rajendra Kumar Setia HUF offload aggregating to Rs 180 crore and Rs 20 crore, respectively. The Jaipur-based SK Finance plans to utilise proceeds from the fresh issue for augmenting the capital base to meet future business requirements of the company towards onward lending and for general

corporate purposes. The NBFC has been operating in two verticals — vehicle financing and financing for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). It has a presence across 11 states and one union territory through 535 branches as of December

According to a Crisil report, the overall vehicle financing segment in India stood at around Rs 11.85 lakh crore as of fiscal 2023, marking a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of around 11 per cent from fiscal 2019 and forward, outstanding credit is expected to grow at a CAGR of 16-18 per cent from fiscal 2023 to fiscal 2027 to reach Rs 21 lakh

raised Rs 1,328 crore from 415 crore for a minority stake

Company Ltd, Jefferies India Private Ltd, Motilal Oswal Investment Advisors Ltd and Nomura Financial Advisory and Securities (Indi Ltd are the book-running lead

Digital payment has transformed financial landscape: Airtel Payments Bank CEO

Airtel Payments Bank CEO Anubrata Biswas is optimistic that the payments bank momentum in India will yield strong growth horizons and opportunities in the coming years, supported by financial supported by inclusion imperatives and rapid pace of economic and digital growth.

In an interview to PTI, Biswas said FY24 has been a "remarkable year" for Airtel Payments Bank, which has been growing in double digits across all key metrics such as users, revenue, and profits. "We are still closing the books (for the fiscal) but as we stand today, we are going to see high doublegrowth rates on revenue, profit and users continue," he said.

Airtel Payments Bank has 500,000 banking points spread across the country, today.

It offers end-to-end digital banking solutions, along with a bouquet of digital and



Payments Bank has three clear segments when it comes to serving customers across geographies — the urban rural underbanked, and industries, and businesses.

Earlier this year, Airtel Payments Bank had cited a strong growth trajectory for the December 2023 quarter with revenues at Rs 469 crore, up 47 per cent year-on-year, while net profit stood at Rs 11 crore up 120 stood at Rs 11 crore, up 120 per cent over the year-ago period. Biswas asserted that

sustained have investment solutions. Airtel momentum on digital

banking in India which is a growing spectrum of urban users wanting a secondary digital banking option for payment and transaction needs. This is a business where we have seen dramatic surges over 3-6 months, which has driven up

revenue...," he said. Airtel Payments Bank is dominant in rural markets, he said, adding that "rural and urban combined, we are now opening a million bank accounts a month".

'The momentum the momentum on digital structural which means we about the next few years as well,

Whether the pace of new account openings accelerated at the fag end of the fiscal in the backdrop of the recent Paytm Payments Bank crisis, he said while on B2B and rural side of the business, the momentum has broadly been the same, there has been a significant uptick and uplift on the digital side from urban customers.

The uptick has been "very significant" in the number of new customers applying online for opening bank accounts, and offerings like FASTag.

Consumers looking at digital banking options is itself a 100 million opportunity, he said. "In India, digital payments has come, deepened and transformed the financial landscape. The time for digital banking has now come... People will use digital bank accounts to make payments, feel safe, and then look at many other second order needs," he said.

Biswas said he is optimistic about the prospects of market growth in FY25 and

banking digital opportunity, to our mind, is itself a 100 million user opportunity... The entire financial inclusion and digital inclusion market is actually a 500 million user opportunity... It will need several large banks with several different models because India is a large country, and it will need a variety of ways in which consumers will be served given India's aspirations for a USD 7-trillion economy in the coming years, and the growth targets beyond," he said.

So, while the banking momentum will remain strong, Biswas said, the payments bank momentum given the unique positioning of it as a regulated fintech — is going have "even stronger horizons opportunities?

"As consumers come to our platform and start using products and services, the opportunities remain for deepening both revenue as well as the user base itself, and equally on the rural consumer side. On the B2B side, we have just started... And there are a opportunities, as well," he

Federal Bank Q4 profit rises marginally to ₹906 crore

Federal Bank on Thursday reported a marginal rise in March quarter net profit at Rs 906 crore, impacted by pension provisions. In the year-ago period, profit was Rs 903 crore. In the full fiscal year FY24, profit increased to Rs 3,720 crore from the year-ago's Rs 3.010 crore.

The private sector lender said it is yet to send the names of potential candidates to succeed MD&CEO Shyam Srinivasan. His term ends in September this year.

In the March quarter, its core net interest income rose 15 per cent to Rs 2,195 crore on the back of a 20 per cent credit growth and narrowing of net interest margin to 3.21 per cent from 3.36 per cent in the yearago period.

Speaking to reporters, Srinivasan said the bank would want the risk adjusted calculated after including the credit costs to sustain between

3.20-3.25 per cent going forward.

It is targeting a loan growth of 18 per cent in FY25, and hopes that the 18 per cent growth in deposits in FY24 will keep

In the March quarter, it was hit by a Rs 162 crore provision towards pension which hurt the overall net profit, Srinivasan said.

On the asset quality front, the fresh slippages came down to Rs 352 crore from the quarterago's Rs 479 crore and Rs 436 crore in the year-ago period, resulting in improvement in gross non performing assets ratio to 2.13 per cent as on March 31, 2024. Its overall capital adequacy stood at 16.13 per cent as on March 31, 2024. Amid speculation over the next candidate to succeed Srinivasan, the incumbent MD and CEO said there is a board search panel on the job and that it will be submitting a list of candidates in the next few

crore. Earlier this year, SK Finance investors. Motilal Oswal Private Equity pumped in Rs in the NBFC. Kotak Mahindra Capital

Rupee falls 3 paise

to settle at 43.46

China, Hong Kong account for 56 per cent of India's total imports of electronics, telecom, electrical products: GTRI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's imports of electronics Itelecom, and electrical products soared to USD 89.8 billion in 2023-24 and over half of these imports are sourced from China and Hong Kong, economic think tank GTRI said in its report.

China dominates with a commanding 43.9 per cent share of India's imports in electronics, telecom, and electrical sectors, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said. The data highlights a deep-

seated dependency on these two countries that has seen a dramatic escalation over the years, it added. It said that reducing this

dependency is crucial, not merely to boost economic resilience but to safeguard India's digital and technological sovereignty in a



more interconnected. 'These sectors are integral to

the daily lives of millions, enhancing communication, commerce, and information access. However, India's heavy dependence on imports, especially from China, presents formidable challenges to the nation's strategic autonomy and economic security," the report said. GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said that this profound

reliance on Chinese imports exposes severe vulnerabilities within India's supply chain and underscores the necessity strategic diversification of sources and enhancement of domestic production capabilities.

In the electronics segment, the report said that integrated circuits have experienced a significant import growth from USD 166.1 million during 2007-2010 to USD 4.2 billion in 2020-2022.

These circuits are critical for powering a wide range of electronic devices, from computers to smartphones illustrating a deepening technological dependency on China, with their market share increasing from 19.2 per cent to 33.4 per cent.

Similarly, communication devices, including phones and other wireless devices, have also seen a significant increase in imports, rising to USD 3.691 billion with over half of the market now dominated by China.

"Diodes, transistors, and similar semiconductor devices have seen their imports skyrocket from USD 113.3 million to USD 2,334.8 million, with the Chinese per cent, indicating a significant dependency on Chinese semiconductor market share jumping to 67.5 technology," it said.

Paul John Nirvana bags Gold medal in London competition

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

John Distilleries Ltd's Paul John single malt whiskey Nirvana' has been awarded "Gold" medal in the prestigious London Spirits Competition 2024. JDL's two other offerings — Roulette London Dry Gin and Paul John XO Brandy — have also wen "Silver" medals. JDL is won 'Silver' medals. JDL is the only Indian company to have been awarded in three different categories

whiskey, gin and brandy. 'We are honoured to have been awarded at the London Spirits Competition. It is indeed a privilege to be appreciated for the quality of our products," said JDL Chairman and Managing

Director Paul P John.
JDL is one of the most awarded Indian companies end consumers. Judging internationally as it has criteria include quality, bagged various prestigious value for money, awards in the events like the



International Wine and Spirit Competition, the World Whiskey Awards and the San Francisco World

Spirits Competition. London Competition, organized by Beverage Trade Network, aims to recognise and promote spirits brands that resonate consumers and offer value for both trade buyers and packaging appeal.



Thursday amid a strong American currency and rising crude oil prices in global markets. Forex traders said positive

sentiment in the domestic equity markets and the inflow of foreign capital capped a sharp fall in the domestic currency. At the interbank foreign

exchange, the domestic unit opened strong at 83.41 and touched the intra-day low of 83.49 against the greenback. The local unit finally settled at 83.46 (provisional) against the dollar, down 3 paise from its

previous close. The rupee had settled 2 paise higher at 83.43 against the dollar on Tuesday, a day after

losing 7 paise on Monday. The foreign exchange market was closed on Wednesday on account of Maharashtra Day. On Wednesday, the US Federal Reserve decided to maintain the status quo on the benchmark interest rates, in line with the market expectations

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the rupee fell on disappointing PMI data from India. "However, positive domestic markets...Cushioned the downside? Meanwhile.

India's manufacturing PMI fell to 58.8 **RUPEE VS DOLLAR**

in April 2024 from 59.1 in the previous month.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), however, recorded the second fastest improvement in operating conditions in threeand-a-half years supported by buoyant demand, a monthly survey said on Thursday.

'We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on dismal PMI data and expectations of a recovery in the US dollar amid further delay in rate cut by Fed. However, weak crude oil prices and positive domestic markets may support the rupee at lower levels," Choudhary said, adding, "USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.25 to Rs 83.70". Analysts also said market

participants are expected to keep a close watch on the US non-farm payroll data to be released on Friday. Besides, weekly unemployment claims, trade balance and factory order data from the US may provide

American Express will open its campus in India

PNS NEW DELHI

American Express will open its state-of-the-art campus in India, reaffirming the company's commitment to the country. Spanning nearly one-million square feet, this new facility exemplifies a forwardthinking approach to design, sustainability, health, and wellness for its colleagues. Colleagues will begin moving phases, starting at the end of May 2024. campus

American Express dedication to fostering a dynamic work environment. The facility has received Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Environmental (LEED) Gold certification for Building Design and Construction (BD+C) Core and Shell Development.

to the new facility, located in sector 74A Gurugram, in

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Tindal Stainless, on Wednesday,

announced its entry into a joint venture with a Singapore-based company to develop and operate a stainless steel melt shop (SMS) in Indonesia. The company further announced that it will invest around rupees 1,900 crores to expand its downstream lines in Jajpur and Odisha to increase their melting capacity. Jindal Stainless will also acquire a 54% equity stake in Chromeni Steels Private Limited (CSPL).

Abhyuday Jindal, Managing Director of Jindal Stainless, said, "With these acquisitions and investments, they have orchestrated a clear growth plan to



Jindal Stainless to operate stainless steel melt shop in Indonesia

world." He further added that this is a plug-and-play model, and there will be good growth in three years.

The company also addressed that although Jindal Stainless already has a facility in Indonesia, this will be a completely separate facility that will be operational in 2 years. The government of Indonesia promotes Foreign Direct

secure availability of raw materials and increased production efficiency in The Government of Indonesia has banned the export of nickel ore and is

Investment (FDI) and they would get a

promoting investments into downstream facilities through long-term tax holidays. The acquisition of Chromeni supports our strategy to increase cold rolled products in our product mix." said the CEO & Wholetime Director, Tarun Kumar Khulbe. Anurag Mantri, Executive Director & Group CFO, said these investments will especially contribute to the overall balancing of their downstream cold-rolled capacities, bringing them closer to the global benchmarks.

Travel Across Enchanted Landscapes

At an exhibition celebrated as Earth Day last month we stepped into a world where art embraces nature, says SAKSHI PRIYA

magine wandering into a world where art reflects the vibrant spirit of nature, capturing its rhythmic seasons and climates with elan. This is the es.sence of 'Paradise Regained,' an exhibition at Palette Art Gallery which celebrated Earth Day with a stunning display of landscape.

In a harmonious blend of acclaim for nature and artistic mastery, the title of the exhibition draws inspiration from renowned English poet John Milton's epic poem by the same name; indeed, a fitting tribute to Earth Month in April. Curator Uma Nair explains the choice, stating, "April is Earth Month, and landscapes are the most important part of the Earth. 'Paradise Regained' thus becomes a powerful symbol, not only honouring the artistic legacy but also emphasising the critical role landscapes play in our world."

The exhibition featured works by 10 exceptional artists, each offering a unique perspective on the beauty and importance of landscapes. It was in fact a symphony of artistic interpretations. Each artist, with his or her unique style and vision, came together to paint a mesmerizing portrait of nature in all its splendour. Sanam

Narayanan's work invites us into a fantastical realm. His paintings, meticulously crafted on canvas with rice paper as the base, depict houses adorned with Kerala's verdant foliage. The technique of pointillism is used to create a captivating sense of depth and detail, highlighting the soil conditions and the ethereal mist that seem to cling to the trees. This interplay of imagination and reality creates a truly magical experience.



incomparable odes to nature's multilayered beauty. brushstrokes transport us to a world where nature thrives, and constantly remind us of power to captivate. His pieces are a subtle testimony to the delicate balance between humans and nature, an a stark pointer to the connection we humans often tend to overlook or

Paramjit Singh, a veteran artist with over six decades of experience, showcases his love for nature with vibrant oil paintings. His landscapes are pathways that draw the viewers in and invites them to explore a kingdom in which flowers reign supreme. Each piece reflects a lifetime dedicated to the artistic exploration of the natural world.

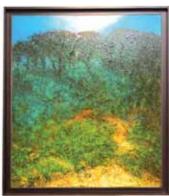
The beauty of 'Paradise Regained' is transcendental and is etched in one's memory beyond the initial visual impact. Each artist offers a window to his or her creative process and evokes artistic emotions through art. Sanket Viramgami's intricate miniature landscapes offer a glimpse into the future world, like postcards from an imagined future. Jyodip Acharjee presents a stark contrast with his geometric interpretations of landscapes, offering a fresh

Shaji Appukuttan transports

perspective of familiar scenes.

viewers to the lush, tropical forests of Kerala, so lifelike they almost seem to breathe. His detailed artwork captures the essence of a vibrant ecosystem. Curator Uma Nair describes artist Prasad KP as "the greatest discovery" by the Gallery. His paintings, with pathways and figures amidst detailed landscapes, offer a deeper look as we move forward. Jayashree Chakravarty's work draws inspiration from Kolkata's Salt Lake region, translating its unique beauty onto canvas. Sumesh Kamballur's work demands attention for not only depicting the magical essence of night, but for how he transforms it into a poetic dreamscape. Bathed in the soft glow of moonlight, his paintings capture the essence of nature with a touch of surreal beauty. The moonlight itself becomes a character and illuminates details with nature's signature writ large.

KP Pradeep Kumar delves into the realm of autobiographical landscapes. His paintings are not





just depictions of nature, they are reflections of his own lived experiences and emotions. In a conversation artist Pradeep Kumar described his artwork as a language that explores a multitude of themes; he emphasises that his art is a source of self-expression, a way to process his inner world. He finds freedom in creating art that resonates with him, hoping it will connects with others as well. He describes it as an "execution of my thought process into the painting," a freedom that allows him to explore his identity and translate his unique perspective onto the

Kumar emphasises that his artwork serves as a resource for him, a way to process and express his inner world. He finds a sense of freedom in the creative process, stating, "I never make art by keeping in mind that everyone would have to like it." His primary motivation is to create art that resonates with him, hoping it will connect with others as well. Uma Nair's vision as a curator

takes centrestage in 'Paradise Regained,' as her discerning eye for talent and craft come through in her exhibition that about the very essence of nature. Through an insightful walk-through, she acts as a guide, enriching the visitor's experience with each piece. Her discerning eve reveals every artist's inspiration and the deeper meaning informing their landscapes, allowing viewers to appreciate not just the art, but also the emotional depth that informs each piece of poetry. 'Paradise Regained' serves as a

powerful reminder of the importance of appreciating and protecting our planet, each piece a masterpiece in its own right, offering visitors a chance to experience the wonder of landscapes through the unique lens of artistic expression. This exhibition is truly a celebration of Mother Earth where one can immerse oneself and draw lessons from the fact that Earth Day is not just another Day; it is a call for action for each one of us, every day, a chance to celebrate and protect the paradise we have been blessed with. Only by appreciating its beauty, understanding complexities, and taking steps towards its preservation, can we ensure a healthier planet for ourselves and future generations. Photos: Pankaj Kumai

wonderland, a reality world that makes you think of the past and the future."

Saxena's exhibition is a testament to the power of art to inspire, provoke thought, and ignite our imagination. The exhibition showcases Saxena's excellence in creating a world that captivates everyone who views it, inviting them to lose themselves in his artwork. The paintings are evidence of his artistic vision, showcasing a world that seamlessly blends mankind's history and artist revealed that his main source civilization with each artwork telling a unique story of balance

> 'It Makes Me Wonder' is a dreamlike experience. transporting viewers to a world that is both familiar and unknown. Saxena's works is a testament to his ability to create a sense of wonder inviting viewers to get

lost in the fantasy world to a world where time stands still and imagination knows no bounds. So take a moment to immerse yourself in the timeless wonder of Saxena's art and let your imagination soar. It is a beautiful journey through history, mankind, and nature, inviting viewers to explore the beauty of the past and the potential of the future. His artwork is a gift to the world, and it reminds us of the power of creativity to transform our lives

AN ARTIST FINDS SOLACE IN NATURE

Ompal Sanswal's solo Exhibition JIVA reflects his unwavering commitment to preserve nature



BY SAKSHI PRIYA

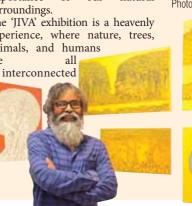
enowned for his exquisite artistry, National Awardwinning artist Sansanwal's solo exhibition, JIVA is a mesmerizing journey into the heart of nature. Featuring around 60 of Ompal's paintings, this marks his first solo outing after a hiatus of 15 years. Each piece of art in the gallery feels like a shower of rainbows, with every stage of colour highlighted, showcasing the artist's unparalleled skill and artistic vision. It serves as a poignant reminder of the beauty and importance of our natural surroundings, particularly as the world observed Earth Month last month.

Each artwork evokes a profound connection to nature, reminding us of the beauty that the artist has captured. It's akin to sitting in a peaceful forest, listening to the gentle chirping of birds — a hall full of paintings that truly lives up to the title of 'Meditations on Trees.' In his meticulously crafted paintings, the long roots and branches heavy with leaves take on various shapes, telling different stories mythological, others resembling human-like figures with eyes, nose, and mouth. Each painting reflects the deep bond between Ompal and his mother, evoking a sense of nostalgia and connection.

Curated by renowned art historian and scholar Uma Nair, the exhibition was hosted by Black Cube Gallery for its debut at Bikaner House. Uma Nair's eyes for art never fail to impress, showcasing each painting in its true essence, beyond mere visual appeal. Her ability to highlight the intricate details and deeper meanings embedded in each artwork elevates the exhibition to a whole new level. The timing of the exhibition during Earth Month in April adds to its significance.

Sanya Malik, the director of Black Cube Gallery, has played a pivotal role in bringing this exhibition to life. Her keen eye for detail and her dedication to presenting Sansanwal's paintings in the most captivating manner have truly enhanced the overall experience of 'JIVA.' As the world celebrates Earth Month, this exhibition serves as a poignant reminder of the beauty and importance of our natural surroundings.

The 'JIVA' exhibition is a heavenly experience, where nature, trees, animals, and humans



through Ompal's artistic vision. The balanced colors and techniques in each canvas create a visually stunning display. Ompal's fascination with trees is evident in every piece, embodying not just isolated entities in time but dynamic elements in a complex interplay with the environment.

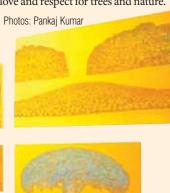
The acrylic, pen and ink on canvas, and watercolor pieces are striking for their intricate treatment and vibrant colors. They beautifully represent the connection between humans and trees, offering an immersive impact on viewers. Ompal's 15 years of paintings depict his journey of getting lost in his own world of art, where trees are not just subjects but extensions of his being, evoking beautiful stories. It's a meditation not just for him but for all visitors who stand in awe of his work, appreciating each piece.

In a conversation with the artist Ompal, he shared that his mother is his greatest inspiration. Growing up surrounded by trees and forests near his hometown, he drew inspiration from the stories and environment around him. For Ompal, painting trees and nature, and even humans, is a form of meditation, deeply involving him in the process of creating art. His paintings, deeply rooted in humanity and nature, carry a special message to love and preserve trees and nature—plant as many as you can and save our planet.

The 'JIVA' exhibition by Ompal Sansanwal is not just a collection of paintings but a profound reflection of the artist's soul and his deeprooted connection with nature. Through his meticulous artistry, Sansanwal transports viewers into a world where trees are not mere subjects but living beings, each with its own story to tell. His paintings, with their intricate details and vibrant colors, evoke a sense of tranquility and harmony, inviting us to contemplate our relationship with the natural world.

journey, a meditation, and a celebration of our deep-seated connection with nature. It urges us to cherish and preserve our environment for generations to come, echoing the artist's message of love and respect for trees and nature.

'JIVA' is not just an exhibition—it's a

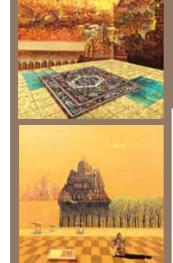


THROUGH TIME AND IMAGINAT

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

tep into a world where art tells stories, and dreams come to life. Kumar Vikas Saxena's latest exhibition, 'It makes me wonder, is a magical journey through time and imagination. Each painting is like a window to a different world, inviting you to explore and discover. Drawing inspiration from history and culture, Saxena's art blends reality with dreams, that is unique and captivating.

'It Makes Me Wonder,' is a series of paintings that explores the human subconscious through surrealistic lens. Each painting is a visual narrative of history and culture, seamlessly weaving together elements of the past and present, taking viewers on a breathless journey through time. The well-balanced colours of yellow and brown, coupled with the rustic feel of the theme, evoke a sense of time travel to ancient civilizations. Saxena's solo exhibition is a historical and an immersive experience through a series of thought-provoking paintings. Each artwork feels like a pathway to a history book, every piece discovering its own historical



reflection of humanity, nature, and history. What sets his artwork apart is the combination of different architectural styles, his creations resonating with his love for ancient architecture.

What sets Saxena's artwork apart is

his ability to combine different

architectural styles, creating a harmonious blend that resonates with his love for ancient architecture. His paintings are not mere depictions of buildings; they are monuments to the human spirit, testaments to our capacity for greatness and our quest for

meaning. Saxena's childhood spent in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, where his home environment was full of art, is reflected in his solo exhibition. His love for nature, nurtured during his solitary moments in the lush pine forests of the mountains, is evident in every piece of art. Each painting captures the beauty of nature in the raw, a textured rawness that retains its innocence. Saxena's art is a tribute to his sense imposing his thoughts on his viewers, preferring instead to let them interpret his artwork in their own way. "I don't give titles to my paintings because I don't want to impose my thoughts," he says adding, "I want people to think whatever they want to think of my

of freedom. He does not believe in

This approach has resulted in a body of work that is both personal and universal, inviting viewers to embark on their own journey of discovery. In a conversation the of inspiration is his love for ancient architecture. "I love creating art between man and nature.

that is mostly in a rustic form, which takes me into history whenever I go to any historic place," he says, emphasising that, "I want to live in that moment, as if I was there at that time."

He expressed a desire to create art that not only

reflects the past but also speaks to he has created that transports you the present and the future. His paintings are a testament to his belief that the future is built upon the foundations of the past, and he seeks to celebrate the timeless beauty of heritage while embracing the dynamism of progress.

In the words of Kumar Vikas Saxena, "Every piece of art resonates with a dream within a dream, the mesmerizing art that allows us to get lost in the fantasy world. Each piece of artwork takes you on a journey to a fascinating



and our world.

Balancing professional and civic duties

URVASHI RAUTELA has been in the limelight of late for the song 'Vigdiyan Heeran' with singer HONEY SINGH. In a conversation with SAKSHI PRIYA, she reflects on the significance of a citizen's duty as a voter

ou recently cast your vote. How important is it for celebrities to actively participate in the democratic process?

It is very important. I was the first person in the queue to cast my vote at 6:45 am to focus as it is our birthright, and similarly for responsible Indian citizen. At the same time as artists, we inspire today's generation, so it is very important for all of us to set a great and positive example. I feel the more youth participate in the electoral process, the better the result for our country and nation.

What challenges did you face breaking into Bollywood as an outsider, and how did you overcome them?

I believe people are familiar with my journey, including my background, the titles I have won, and my filmography. I feel the power and love of my audiences, which has made the entire journey great. I am grateful and blessed by the kind of love I have received on social media. I

visited a blind school in and the fondness for Honey Whether it's a house, property, or Uttarakhand for some Urvashi Rautela Foundation work, and the response was beautiful.

Vigdiyan Heeran with Honey Singh has generated a lot of excitement. What drew you to this project, and what can audiences expect from it?

Yes, it has received a lot of love. Even though the video was short, being a part of the legendary and cult song 'Love Dose,' 'Vigdiyan Heeran' instantly became a hit the moment it was announced. It's a great track, part two 'Love Dose' after 10 years. There will be a part three as well as people love me and Honey's pairing. They have an emotional connection with us, and fans love us together. It's all about the love from the people

Theres a great back-and-forth energy between you and Honey Singh in the video. How was it working with him again?

My experience working with Honey Singh was amazing and fantastic. But I really want to ask Honey Singh about his working experience with me. Next time, I will definitely meet him and ask as I really want to know.

Finally, there is a lot of buzz about your stunning palace-like home in Uttarakhand, reportedly valued at Rs 25 crore. Why has it taken so long to complete? It is a beautiful property, and

generally, amazing and beautiful

things take time to build.

handle negative comments? I don't let success get to my head,

and I don't let negative comments affect me either. They are just momentary things for me. I believe in improving myself and keeping things simple. I focus on making myself better and don't really pay attention to negative

soon, and I will definitely do a

As a public figure, you often

face both praise and criticism

on social media. How do you

housewarming soon.

Looking back at your journey so far, what would you say has

even the Ram Mandir, it takes moment of your career, and time to construct. It will be ready

This is a difficult question for me, but I believe there isn't just one defining moment. Meeting the Prime Minister of Israel stands out to me. I gifted him the Bhagavad Gita and had a two-hour conversation with him and my family. He is a very powerful political leader and one of the most influential people in the world. Additionally, being the youngest judge in the history of Miss Universe was another defining moment for me.

What are your thoughts on the current music scene in India, and how do you see it evolving in the future?

been the most defining I believe that old songs had a different charm, and their lyrics meaningful. very However, today, I feel more inclined towards old cinema and songs from the 80s and 70s. I think that era was great, and I prefer the music from that

> professional commitments, especially in an industry as demanding as Bollywood? I believe it's all about balance. Despite the demanding nature of the industry, I try my best to

> How do you balance your personal life with your

balance my personal and professional life. For example, I recently voted and also made sure to spend quality time with my family.

KKR look to iron out flaws against off colour MI

olkata Knight Riders will look to iron out their flaws and get the better of a misfiring Mumbai Indians when the two teams, placed on the opposite ends of IPL points table spectrum, clash here on Friday.

With six wins in nine games giving them 12 points and the second position in the IPL points table, a berth in the playoffs looks within the grasp of two-time winners KKR. But the Shreyas Iyer-led side will have to find consistency across departments and avoid any slip-ups in order to make it to the final four. Each of their three losses have come in the last six games for KKR, who were at the receiving end of a record run chase by Punjab Kings but did well to bounce back with a sevenwicket thrashing of Delhi Capitals. With the bat, KKR's requisite firepower in the ranks entwined with an ultra-aggressive approach has delivered the goods more often than not but it is their bowling which needs improvement.

Mitchell Starc has given nearly 12 runs an over while managing a mere seven wickets in eight outings. On flat, batting-friendly pitches, the

lanky Australian's lack of control has also been exploited well by zealous batters. Harshit Rana is among those with most wickets (11) for KKR this season but the right-arm seamer will serve a one-match ban for his animated celebrations after dismissing DC's Abhishek Porel.

Vaibhav Arora's nine scalps in five games make him KKR's best bet with the ball. A small Wankhede Stadium with a batting-friendly wicket tends to encourage scores in excess of 200 and the team would be mindful of that.

Spotlight will also be on Rinku Singh, whose exclusion from India's main squad for the T20 World Cup, has triggered an outpouring of sympathy for the 26-year-old. The power-hitter has not got enough game time this season which probably tilted the scales against

For Mumbai Indians, the race to the IPL playoffs seems lost even though the five-time winners have five more games to play.

Even if Mumbai Indians win each of these, they can only get to 16 points and somewhere in the middle of the points table - not necessarily challenging those who have been consistently good.



Gerald Coetzee (13) have been MI's best bets with the ball but despite their impressive showing, the batters' collective failure has resulted in the team's underwhelming season. Tilak Varma has been MI's best

batter with 343 runs, including three fifties this IPL, but his performances have not been enough to hide the failings of

Ishan Kishan has struck the ball well but severely lacks consistency at the top and losing wickets in heaps in the powerplay has been one of MI's

biggest woes in this season. India skipper Rohit Sharma's (315 runs at strike rate of 158.29) selfless approach with the bat has not given him big scores consistently but his form will be in focus given the T20 World Cup is now just one month

All eyes will also be on Suryakumar Yadav who has two fifties in seven IPL games this season, but it is not the consistency which is expected from the batter of his calibre.

Mumbai Indians' under-fire skipper Hardik Pandya has neither dazzled with the ball nor the bat after a long injury lay-off. But the fact that he finds himself in the Indian side as vice-captain for the World Cup should motivate him to turn things around.

TEAMS (FROM):

Mumbai Indians: Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Dewald Brevis, Jasprit Bumrah, Piyush Chawla, Gerald Coetzee, Tim David, Shreyas Gopal, Ishan Kishan (wk), Anshul Kamboj, Kumar Kartikeya, Akash Madhwal, Kwena Maphaka, Mohammad Nabi, Shams Mulani, Naman Dhir, Shivalik Sharma, Romario Shepherd, Arjun Tendulkar, Nuwan Thushara, Tilak Varma, Harvik Desai (wk), Nehal Wadhera, Luke Wood.

Kolkata Knight Riders: Shreyas Iyer (c), KS Bharat (wk), Rahmanullah Gurbaz (wk), Rinku Singh, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Manish Pandey, Andre Russell, Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Anukul Roy, Singh, Varun Ramandeep Chakravarthy, Narine, Sunil Vaibhav Arora, Chetan Sakariya, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Starc, Mitchell Dushmantha Chameera, Sakib Hussain, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Gus Atkinson, Állah

Deepak Chahar does not look good: Fleming on his possible injury

Chennai Super Kings head coach Stephen Fleming admitted that seamer Deepak look good" but he is hoping for a positive report from the franchise's medical team ahead of the business phase of the

ongoing IPL.
Although Fleming did not divulge any details on Chahar's new injury, the 31-year-old seamer was seen pulling off his run-up in just the second ball of Punjab Kings chase here on Wednesday night.

possible It could be a hamstring injury as, after having a chat with skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad and the physio, Chahar walked off ground holding his hamstring and did not bowl any further in the match.

Chahar's career has been marred by injuries in the last couple of years, costing him a permanent spot in the Indian team. "Yeah, the travelogue is pretty busy. There's a lot of ins and outs. So, Deepak Chahar doesn't look good," said Fleming during the postmatch presser

"The initial feeling wasn't great. So, I'm hoping for a more positive report when the physio and the doctor have a

Chahar's injury somewhat forced Gaikwad to bring in Shivam Dube for an over, who has mainly been used as a batter this season.

But Dube went for 14 in the only over he bowled, and Fleming admitted that with the Impact Player rule, Dube is not suited for the role in the IPL and will have his chances in

proper conditions. "He (Dube) is ready to bowl and is working hard on it. He will play a role in the right conditions, and with the Impact Player rule, we have players who can fit the role better. Currently, his necessity to bowl is pretty much small," the coach said.

CSK suffered a seven-wicket defeat to PBKS, their second loss at home this season, managing a meagre 162 for 7, which was comfortably chased down with 13 balls to spare.

Talking about the demanding

wicket at Chepauk, Fleming said, "It's difficult, and we have spoken on the unpredictability of the wickets here before. Batting first makes it difficult o indge as to what a good competitive score is.

We had a couple of 200s (before), which was in our minds today. But, the wicket was very stićky.

"We also had a good start in the (first) six overs before things became difficult. We also tried a few lefties in the form of Dube and (Ravindra) Jadeja but we just couldn't get anything through the middle. They bowled really well, they got good purchase and held onto it. We just got stifled through the middle, which prevented us from getting a

score of 180," he said. With a low score to defend, Fleming was impressed with commitment performance shown by English pacer Richard Gleeson, who

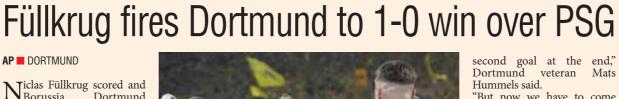
made his debut last night. "Richard Gleeson was good, and it was a positive. Losing Fizz (Mustafizur Rahman) is disappointing.
"Tushar (Deshpande) has a bit

of flu going around as well. So, we've had to make a few changes, which is unusual. Again, that's part of it, and we have got the resources," he said. "Just they haven't had the game time to be really comfortable with their roles and us to be comfortable with a game plan, which we're struggling a little." Although veteran opener Ajinkya Rahane managed to get to double figures after a lean phase in the last four games, he didn't last beyond a

24-ball 29. "I thought he (Rahane) was good today. He's been probably a bit too aggressive in what he wants to do," Fleming

observed. "Keep in mind, we're batting on wickets here that we don't know how they are gonna play. So, we got to take a bit of a pause to see what a good score is. If you are 3 for 30, the game

is pretty much over.
"His (Rahane) hitting that was so good last year, is more crisp. It's not for lack of intent. He has doubled up on intent. We're fine with Jinks and the role he



Niclas Füllkrug scored and Borussia Dortmund earned a 1-0 win over Paris Saint-Germain in the first leg of their Champions League semifinal. Dortmund defender Nico

Schlotterbeck sent a long pass over the top for Füllkrug to control brilliantly with his first touch before firing it past PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi goalkeeper Donnarumma with his next in 36th minute on Wednesday.

"It's not the first time that I've tried to stick the ball in at the near post this season. This time it worked out and I'm even happier that it's in such an important game," Füllkrug said. The win gives Dortmund a narrow advantage before the teams play again in the second leg in Paris next Tuesday, when the French champion will need to overturn the result if it's going to capture Europe's biggest prize before Kylian Mbappé leaves the club.

PSG is under pressure to League to justify more than a decade of huge investment from its Qatari owners. Dortmund's win ensured it

qualified for the tournament next season and it gives the Bundesliga five teams in the expanded tournament. Dortmund is assured of finishing at least fifth.

Roared on by most of the 81,365 fans present, including the famed "yellow wall" behind one of the goals, Dortmund made the busier start and maintained its intensity for the whole game. The home team 7 kilometers - almost 10 more than the visitors.

Defender Lucas Hernández stop Füllkrug from scoring. It

like Hernández suffered a left leg injury. PSG pushed hardest early in the second half, when Mbappé hit the right post before Achraf

Hakimi struck the left post. Gregor Kobel saved Mbappé's next effort and Dortmund survived the pressure. Füllkrug went on to miss

further good chances for the veteran Marco Reus for the German team, while Marquinhos made a crucial block to deny Iulian Brandt late will play either Real Madrid or

"It would have been nice if we went off injured after trying to could have made our counterattacks count to get a

second goal at the end," Dortmund veteran Mats "But now we have to come through in Paris."

OTHER SPORTS

The visitors missed chances,

Ousmane Dembelé should have scored on his return to Dortmund when he blazed a shot over late, then Vitinha flashed a shot wide of the left most.
"We tried to keep the ball from difficult."

them but it's so difficult because they have a lot of quality," PSG coach Luis Enrique said.

"They are a great team on the ball and off the ball. Today in that environment they were great in both aspects of the game. I think we had maybe a lack of intensity in the first half, but in the second half we created clear, clear chances. But we couldn't score."

Dortmund coach Edin Terzic only made his first substitution in the 83rd, when he sent on exhausted Karim Adeyemi. Bayern Munich in the final in London on June 1.

Ghazanfar, Phil Salt

Salima replaces Savita as skipper

 $M_{
m on\ Thursday\ replaced}^{
m id ext{-}fielder\ Salima\ Tete}$ veteran goalkeeper Savita Punia as captain of the 24strong Indian women's hockey squad for the Belgium and England legs of the FIH Pro League starting later this month.

Navneet Kaur has been named her deputy for the

"I am happy that I have been appointed to lead the team. It is a big responsibility and I am looking forward to this new role. We have a strong squad and it's a mix of experienced and young players," Salima was quoted as saying in a Hockey India press release.

In the upcoming Belgium and England legs of the FIH Hockey Pro League 2023-2024, we look to put our strong foot forward. We have worked on areas where we team will take on Great needed to improve," she said.

Savita had captained India during the failed Olympic qualifying campaign and the pro league matches at home after that.

Barring three changes, the squad was the same that took part in the Bhubaneswar and Rourkela legs of the Pro League in February this year. Defender Gurjit Kaur, midfielders Sonika and Nisha and striker Beauty Dungdung have been dropped and were Mahima replaced Chaudhary, Manisha Chauhan, Pretti Dubey and Manisha

Deepika Soreng. The matches in Belgium will begin on May 22 and end on May 26, while the England leg will commence on June 1 and conclude on June 9.

India will play against Argentina, and Belgium twice during the first leg, starting May 22 against Argentina.

Ouring the London Britain and Germany.





AP MADRID

arlos Alcaraz's bid to win a Uthird straight Madrid Open title ended with a three-set loss to Andrey Rublev in the quarterfinals.

The second-seeded Spaniard got off to a good start but then was outplayed by the seventh-seeded Rubley, losing 4-6 6-3 6-2 at the Caja Magica centre court on Wednesday. Alcaraz, who had already struggled in a threeset win over Jan-Lennard Struff on Tuesday, looked out of sorts and was mistake-prone toward the end.

It was his first tournament after missing Monte Carlo and Barcelona because of a right forearm injury. The 20-year-old Alcaraz had arrived in Madrid saying he would be happy to play three or four matches in the Spanish capital

Already in a hole in the third set, Alcaraz pressed the forearm during a stopover. He was wearing a long sleeve over the injured

Today probably I felt more in the forearm than yesterday's

match. I mean, playing three

hours yesterday, I knew that I'm going to feel something or I'm going to think about it even more," the third-ranked Alcaraz

"Playing someone like Rublev that I couldn't push him to the limit in every point is tough." Alcaraz plans to play in Rome to continue his preparation for the French Open later this month. "I'm going to go to Rome. I'm going to work to be close to 100% or in a good way to play Rome, but I'm going to decide these days. But I think I'll be OK," he said.

"I have to work hard if I want to go to Rome with good feelings, without pain, without thinking about my forearm, but it's going to be a slow process, I guess. I have to be patient in that way." Alcaraz was trying to become the first player to win the claycourt tournament three straight times. He hadn't lost on Spanish soil since 2021.

Rublev, seeking his second ATP 1000 title after winning Monte Carlo last year, will play Taylor Fritz in the semifinals. The world No. 8 was solid from

the start and overpowered

Alcaraz with 30 winners. 'The serve saved me a lot of

times today," Rublev said. The key was I was completely calm the whole match. I did not say one word, even if I was losing. That was the key and I was able to serve even better near the end. In the beginning, I was not serving that well but little by little, after set one, I served better and better and finished really

well."
The 12th-seeded Fritz defeated 22nd-ranked Francisco Cerundolo 6-1 3-6 6-3. It was the 250th tour-level win for Fritz, who is the third American man to reach the Madrid semifinals and first since Robby Ginepri in 2005. Andre Agassi won the Madrid title in 2002. Cerundolo, the Argentine who upset world No. 5 Alexander Zverev in the fourth round, was trying to reach his second ATP 1000 semifinal.

Top-seeded Jannik Sinner withdrew because of a hip injury, saying he didn't want to risk making it worse. Sinner defeated Karen Khachanov on Tuesday and was scheduled to face Felix Auger-Aliassime in the quarterfinals on Thursday.

SABALENKA ADVANCES: Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka defeated 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva for the second straight year in Madrid to reach the women's semifinals.

The second-seeded Sabalenka didn't face a break point on her way to a 6-1 6-4 win in Wednesday's quarterfinals. She had beaten the teenage sensation in straight sets in the fourth round last year.

Phoenix ARC Private Limited

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Notice is hereby given to the public in general and to the borrowers/guarantors/mortgagors in particular, that the under mentioned property mortgaged to Phoenix ARC Private Limited pursuant to assignment of debt by Motilal Oswal Home Finance Limited (Earlier Known as Aspire Home Finance Corporation limited -Assignor) will be sold on "As is where is", "As is what is", and "Whatever there is", by way of "online e-auction" for recovery of dues and further interest, charges and costs etc. as detailed below in terms of the provisions of SARFAESI Act read with Rules 8 & 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002) through website https://www.auctionbazaar.com/ as per the details given below

Immovable

Demand Notice Description of the

Date and

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	LAN: LXRAI00317- 180058243 Branch: RAIPUR Borrower: PADMASHRI VIJAY DAS VAISHNAV Co-Borrower: VIJAYDAS VISHRAM DAS VAISHNAV	07-12-2020 For Rs: 616472/- (Rupees Six Lac Sixteen Thousand Four Hundred Seventy Two Only)	Ews Flat No 8/1, Ground Floor, Housing Scheme, At Nardha, Raipur, Chhattisgarh - 492001	Reserve Price: Rs.1100000/-(Eleven Lakh Only) EMD: Rs. 110000/- (One Lakh Ten Thousand Only) Last date of EMD Deposit:06-06-2024	Date: 07-06-2024 11:00 Am to 05:00 Pm (with unlimited extensions of 5 minute each)
	LAN: LXDUR00417 -180069421 Branch: DURG Borrower: DILIP KUMAR SEN Co-Borrower: SAROJ BAI SEN	29-11-2021 For Rs: 674056/- (Rupees Six Lakh Seventy Four Thousand Fifty Six Only)	Kh No - 98, Ph No - 01, Rnm - Kowwa, Village - Hasgaon, Near Shiv Mandiir, Berla, Bemetara, Chhattisgarh - 491332	Reserve Price: Rs.1000000/-(Ten Lakh Only) EMD: Rs. 100000/- (One Lakh Only) Last date of EMD Deposit:06-06-2024	Date: 07-06-2024 11:00 Am to 05:00 Pm (with unlimited extensions of 5 minute each)
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	LAN: LXDUR00417 -180068181 Branch: DURG Borrower: KISHAN CHAITU YADAV Co-Borrower: GIYARSI KISHAN YADAV	28-01-2021 For Rs: 459992/- (Rupees Four Lac Fifty Nine Thousand Nine Hundred Ninety Two Only)	Kh No - 388 (P), Ph No - 7, Rnm Saja, Village Motesara, Saja, Bemetara, Durg, Chhattisgarh - 491993	Reserve Price: Rs.900000/-(Nine Lakh Only) EMD: Rs. 90000/-(Ninety Thousand Only) Last date of EMD Deposit:06-06-2024	Date: 07-06-2024 11:00 Am to 05:00 Pm (with unlimited extensions of 5 minute each)
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