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12 SPORTS



SHRI RAM SHAW ■ KORBA

Pak wants Rahul as PM 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 in the neighbourhood.

linking Congress with Pakistan came a day after Chaudhry Fawad Hussain, a former Minister in Imran Khan's Cabinet in Pakistan, reportedly shared a video featuring Rahul on his social media handle and praised him. "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

Rahul) the next PM. This is not surprising because we already know that Congress is Pakistan's 'murid' (follower). The partnership between Pakistan and Congress has now been exposed completely. It shows that the country's enemies want a weak Government in India, not a strong one...A weak Government which was there at the time of 26/11 Mumbai terror attack. They want a corrupt Government



which was there before 2014. 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 two countries, Modi said. The PM also reiterated that Congress wants to change India's Constitution to provide reservation of 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 on religious basis," he said.

Battle for Korba heats up as Saroj, Jyotsna make all-out efforts

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 Jyotsna Mahant. She reiterates that the active participation of Nari Shakti will undeniably accelerate the journey towards achieving a developed and empowered India. Women connected with Self Help Groups are the strong link for Viksit Bharat.

live here and calls me an outsider. If I am 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 government's accomplishments in the last few years.

Q - Your take on gender equality...

Our government and party recognise the achievements of women and their efforts in raising gender 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, education, healthcare must reach 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.



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 uncalled-for. 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 ES1 facilities for labourers are testimony to that. Nitin Gadkari 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 achieve everything that you set 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.

Maliwal cries foul as L-G sacks 223 DCW 'illegal' staff

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

With its topmost leader and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal still in Tihar, the AAP has received yet another blow as the Women and Child Development (WCD) Department of the Delhi Government has terminated the services of 52 "illegally" appointed contractual employees of Delhi Commission for Women (DCW). Earlier, Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on April 29, issued an order to discontinue the services of 223 contractual employees from the DCW, calling their appointment illegal. 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 employees.

Clandestine 'dole surveys' make poll panel see red



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid controversy over freebies promised by the political parties in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission (EC) took "serious view of activities by 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 have been engaging in activities that blur the lines between legitimate surveys and partisan efforts to register individuals for beneficiary-oriented schemes and individual benefits under

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 benefit schemes etc. Highlighting the possible "quid-pro-quo arrangement", the commission said the act of inviting or calling upon voters to register for post-election 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 quo 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 Section 127A of the Representation of People's Act, 1951, 123 (1) of the Representation of People's Act, 1951, and Section 171 (B) of the Indian Penal Code



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



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Ending weeks of speculation, the BJP on Thursday denied ticket to

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

Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) is currently facing allegations of sexual harassment levelled against him by six women wrestlers. Karan is likely to file his nomination on May 3. The move retains the seat's contest within the family 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 Raebareilly, 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 Rajasthan earlier this year. The deadline to file nominations for Amethi and Rae Bareilly 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 ■ NEW DELHI

It was just another start of the day 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; bye-bye' 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

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 the schools of Delhi and Noida.



Photo: Samar Pandey/Pioneer

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 day, and he as a parent was not

scared at all." He further added that this was only a way to create panic. Sadina Khatoun, a mother of two children, came to drop her

Hoax aimed at mass panic: FIR

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The 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 source. 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),

507 (criminal intimidation by an 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.

children at the Delhi MCD 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

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



who welcomed them with planters. After that a brief meeting

vided a comprehensive overview of the RLS construction and yard augmentation work. Emphasizing the importance of meeting project deadlines, NTPC officials sought wholehearted support from the Railways for timely completion. Subsequently, the team toured the Banadag Siding Area, RLS area, and the under-construction railway yard, observing various operations including rake loading, boundary construction, RLS construction, earth filling, construction of Bridge 4, and track laying. Dignitaries accompanying Tarun Prakash, AGM (ECR), included Manoj Singh, PCOM (ECR), Kamal Kishore Sinha, DRM (Dhanbad Div), Ramashray Pandey, CAO (Construction), and senior NTPC officials Faiz Taiyab (HOP PB-CMP), Sanjay Dubey (GM, Infrastructure), Amudala Prathap (AGM, Dispatch), and Basant Behera (AGM, Electrical Engineering). The visit concluded with lunch at the NTPC Transit Camp at Julu Park Hazaribagh. Before departing, 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 work.

Adani Power announces Q4 FY24 results

PNS : AHMEDABAD
 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, Adani 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 importance, and acting as the balancing 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 anticipating the need for sustainable, affordable, and reliable power supply and serving it by building capacities in a timely and cost-effective manner." The operating performance 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 Q1 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, Udipi, and Mahan. Domestic power sales volumes continued to be driven by growing power demand across India, and off-take under Power Purchase Agreements ("PPAs") was further supported by falling prices of imported coal and alternate fuel.

Manoj Bajpayee joins 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 Nand 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 movement gaining momentum,

Bokaro Steel Plant bids farewell to retiring employees

PNS : BOKARO
 In a heartfelt ceremony held at the Main Auditorium of the Human Resource Development Department, Bokaro Steel Plant, retiring employees who bid adieu 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 executives and 55 non-executives, bid farewell in April 2024. The program was conducted under the guidance of Dr. Nanda Priyadarshini, Assistant General Manager (Personnel). Additionally, a separate farewell ceremony was organized for Ved Prakash Upadhyay, Chief General Manager (Refractories), in the Director's Conference Hall. Executive Director C.R. Mahapatra, along with other dignitaries including Suresh Rangani (Executive Director - Finance & Accounts) and Rajan Prasad (Executive Director - 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 future endeavours.



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Skoda Auto India comes up with MY24 updates

Skoda Auto India reinforces its commitment to safety with the introduction of six airbags as standard across all variants 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 Skoda Auto India, emphasized the 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 Skoda's made-for-India, ready-for-the-world approach, the Kushaq and Slavia maintain their position as top choices in the market, offering both safety and performance.

Axis Nifty Bank Index Fund unveiled

Axis Mutual Fund launches the '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. Detailed information is available at www.axismf.com.

Adani Enterprises Ltd announces Q4 and FY24 results

PNS : RANCHI
 Adani Enterprises Ltd (AEL), part of the Adani Group, today announced its results for the quarter and year ended March 31, 2024. The emerging core infrastructure businesses comprising of ANIL Ecosystem, Airports and Roads are making significant strides in their operational performance. The contribution of these businesses to the overall EBIDTA has consistently increased to 45% for FY24 compared to 40% in FY23. "Adani Enterprises has once again validated its position not only as the premier business incubator in India

but also as a global leader in infrastructure development," said Gautam Adani, Chairman of the Adani Group. "AEL's resilient growth model of incubation confirms the operational and organizational excellence. This is supported by high ratings and fully funded growth. Our commitment to excellence in project management and operations continues to set global benchmarks, ensuring sustainable long-term value creation for our stakeholders. We remain dedicated to corporate governance, meticulous compliance, robust performance and effective capital flow management."

Maoists put of posters for poll boycott in Palamu

PNS : DALITONGANJ
 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 confirmed the retrieval of the 3 hand written leaflets of the Maoists to boycott polls. He said the handwriting of the three looks quite identical to each other while 2 different pen strokes have been used. One such poll boycott stuff 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 Imanganj 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 than 29 years or so. This tokenism to boycott is more to suggest that Maoists are down, lesser in numbers but not out in Palamu.

Legal Awareness camp held in Garhwa

NITYANAND DUBEY : GARHWHA
 On the instructions of Principal District and Sessions Judge cum Chairman District Legal Services Authority Garhwa, on 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. PIV 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

from the District Legal Services Authority, and the provision of compensation in case of accidents of laborers. LADC Advocate Sudhir Tiwari expressed his views on legal points. Institute Director Indu Bhushan talked in detail about the self-employment training of laborers. Secretary of Janak Vikas Dhara Ramashankar Choubey made the laborers aware through song. PIV 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

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 pressing need for water infrastructure, Tata Steel UISL is set to extend water connections to various localities in both East and West Jamshedpur. Sinha promised

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 JBYNL for supplying electricity in government electricity areas, challenges remain in achieving this objective. Additionally, the company is focusing on enhancing cleanliness in several parts of Jamshedpur, with a special emphasis on reaching underserved areas that have been neglected in the past. 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 prioritizing 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 of 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, Tiimu chief Ashok Yadav, Mohan Yadav, Sanjay Yadav, Kuldeep Yadav, Aneshwar Munda, Mahendra Singh, Umesh Yadav, Jaggu Turi, 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 all-round 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.

Priyanka concerned over degradation in politics

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday expressed her concern over the degradation in politics.

She said two kinds of leaders were being 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 Raipur's Manendragarh-Chirmiri-Bharatpur district in



support of Congress candidate Jyotsana 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 on May 7.

HC stays FIR against GP Singh

STAFF REPORTER ■ BILASPUR

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 added.

A 1994 batch officer, Singh filed the petition in the High Court in November 2023.

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 case, a sedition and a disproportionate assets case was lodged against Singh in Raipur.

A couple of days ago, the



Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) ordered the Chhattisgarh government to reinstate him within four weeks. He was forcefully retired by the Centre in July last year following the recommendation of the service review committee of

A 1994 batch officer, Singh filed the petition in the High Court in November 2023.

the Chhattisgarh government to the Ministry of Home Affairs in September 2022.

Radhika makes veiled attack at Bhupesh

On misbehaviour with her at Congress headquarters



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The row over the alleged misbehaviour 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,

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

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

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

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

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 BJP failed to deliver on its promises. Now the



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 1990 and previous ministerial roles, can you

realized. So, we are quite hopeful. We are relentless fighters. We won't give up."

"For five years, the Bhupesh Baghel 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 BJP is detailing the success of its central schemes. In such a situation what's the strategy of the Congress?

Upadhyay replied: "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 them."

Dhebar, two others sent to jail till May 16

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh Anti Corruption Bureau/Economic Offences 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 scam 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 8.

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.

The court rejected the interim bail application of Sunil Gautam. He moved 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 scam.

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

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

BJP General Secretary Bvinod Tawde on Thursday said Chhattisgarh 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 to intellectuals to contribute in the nation building and contribute in economic development of the country. Professionals from more

than 15 fields including businessmen, teachers, economists and teachers participated in the event.

The convention was held at the Maharaja

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

'Collector Ki Paati' drive for 100 percent voting



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

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

He handed over an invitation card and appealed to a retired IFS officer and others to contribute their bit to ensure cent percent voting.

Anganwadi workers and assistants would go door-to-door and deliver the Paati with the cooperation of the Women and Child Development Department supervisors.

The campaign will be held till May 5. Over 3,000

During the special 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.

Tribal voting blossoms as EC's outreach bears fruit

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT ■ RAIPUR

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.

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



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

With a combined population of 1,86,918, five PVTGs are found in 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 eco-friendly 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

sustainable elections. In a remarkable feat, 100 percent Epic card distribution was ensured and "Chumai Madai" festival celebrations in Mahasamund district helped establish a connect with the tribes.

India has 8.6 percent tribal population which includes 75 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 voters from 14 PVTG communities: Kamar, Bhunjia, Baiga, Pahadi Korwa, 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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the organisation is known to be a "biased" entity with a political agenda.

"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

severe violations of the right to 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 Kashmir.

India protests against China's illegal construction in Shaksgam Valley

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has lodged a strong protest with China for carrying 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 part of India and New Delhi never accepted the so-called China-Pakistan boundary part of 1963 through which Islamabad "unlawfully" attempted to cede the area to Beijing. The Shaksgam valley is a strategically key region that is part of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). "We have consistently conveyed our rejection of the same. We have registered our protest with the Chinese side against illegal attempts to alter facts on the ground," Jaiswal said at his weekly media brief-

ing. "We further reserve the right to take necessary measures to safeguard our interests," he said. The terse response came in the wake of China building roads in the 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 Valley. Satellite pictures show the road in Shaksgam Valley, a part of Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK) ceded to China in 1963, branches out from an extension of Highway G219 in China's Xinjiang and disappears into mountains at a place (coordinate: 36.114783°, 76.671051°) approximately 50 km north of India's northernmost point, Indira Col in Siachen Glacier. Last year, India also lodged strong diplomatic protests with Beijing for showing Aksai Chin plateau as its official territory.

No political clearance sought or issued: MEA on Prajwal trip

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Amid 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 court.

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 constituency.

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

that the JD(S) leader used to 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 revocation 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 passports. "The matter is being investigated and we will be doing whatever is needed to be done," he said in reply to another question.

India, Indonesia to review bilateral defence ties during meet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Indonesia will review the entire spectrum of their bilateral defence ties here on Friday during the seventh Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC) meeting, Defence Ministry said here on Thursday.

Giving details, officials said the meeting will be co-chaired by Defence Secretary Girdhar 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,

science and technology. The defence relations form a significant pillar to this growing partnership. Defence engagements between the two nations have

diversified to include wide-ranging 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 Delhi and Pune.

Admiral Swaminathan takes charge as Navy Vice Chief

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 is a specialist in Communication and 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



Telecommunications from 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

Marshal Hardeep Bains on 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

Command (TC) on Monday. Air Marshal N Kapoor was 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 flying experience. 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 base.

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 musculoskeletal 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 lives. 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

concern in 2021, affected significantly more men than women, further emphasizing the importance of understanding and addressing these disparities. The study revealed that men lost 45 percent more life years from Covid-19 compared to women. This disparity underscores 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 disproportionately disadvantaged women, particularly in regions such as South Asia and Central Europe. The research highlighted that these health differences manifest from adolescence and persist throughout life, with women experiencing higher levels of illness and disability due to their longer life expectancy. The authors emphasized the importance of implementing "concerted, sex- and gender-informed strategies" to promote equitable health outcomes. 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.

Every Indian is votebank of Congress, claims Kharge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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 defeat. 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 said.

Rahul accuses Modi Government of snatching quota from Dalits, tribals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday accused the Modi 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 said. 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.

Women sarpanchs set to shine on global stage at UN

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Supriya Das Datta, SSBhadhipati of Sepahijala Zilla Parishad in Tripura, utilises her Diploma in Pharmacy to champion women's participation in decision-making and advocate for essential childcare facilities while Kunuku Hema Kumari, Sarpanch of Peckeru 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 Yadav, 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 conservation. 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 Governance in India Lead the Way," is being organized by the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations and the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) during the last day of the 57th Session of the

Commission on Population and Development (CPD57) which started from April 29th April, 2024. 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 Bhardwaj who will lead the delegation of these women from the grassroots 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

equality. 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 front-line health workers and women and girls in need of health services through her public outreach efforts.



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



Akhilesh-Dimple, Lalu Misa Bharti, Mamata Rabri-Tejashwi-Tej Pratap-Banerjee and Abhishek, KCR-

on bail. PM Modi wants to end corruption but the INDIA bloc leaders call for protecting the corrupt. RJD, whose leaders are on bail, means corruption. R stands for 'Rishwatkhor' (bribery), J for 'Jungleraj' and D means 'Daldal' (slough of mud)," he said. "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 Abdullah and Omar Abdullah, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and Mehbooba Mufti, Mulayam Singh Yadav and KTR-Kavita, Karunanidhi-Stalin-Udayanidhi... Congress has Sonia-Rahul-Priyanka... All of them are dynasts," the BJP national president alleged. "Corrupt leaders of INDIA bloc who are in jail include Delhi Chief Minister Arvind 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 of the society. The NDA government has 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 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 market, surpassing Japan."

Yogi accuses Kharge of hurting Hindu religious sentiments



PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday accused Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge of 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 candidate Shivkumar Dahariya, Kharge said, "His name is Shivkumar. He can compete with Ram because he is Shiva." "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 leaders. "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 versa, illustrating their mutual respect and 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 and manipulating the country's faith. 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 Devadhive 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 Dhundho 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.

Final electoral roll has over 4.14 crore voters in Andhra Pradesh

PTI ■ AMARAVATI



Andhra Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Mukesh Kumar Meena on Thursday published the final electoral roll of the state in the run-up to the forthcoming polls, pegging the total number of voters over 4.14 crore, which rose by nearly six lakh from January 1. In exact figures, the total number of voters in the southern state are 4,14,01,887, who include 2.02 crore male voters, 2.1 crore female voters, 3,421 third gender voters and 68,185 service electors. "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 voters," said Meena, addressing a press conference at the secretariat here. 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, April 25. Meena called on the electorate to check their names and polling stations at

<https://electoralsearch.Eci.Gov.In/> and on the voter helpline app. 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 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 in 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 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 loudspeaker violations, 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, umbrellas and shade structures, along with 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 on June 4.

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 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 sections of Muslim 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 Muslims," the defence minister said. Singh also claimed that the NDA was on course to achieve its target of 400-plus

"Mahatma Gandhi wanted the 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 Jawaharlal Nehru. "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 of Manmohan Singh was 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 to be among the top three by 2027," said Singh, who also pointed out that "organisations like the IMF say we have brought out 25 crore people from the clutches of poverty, something which the Congress could not achieve despite slogans of 'garibi hatao'". Referring to the advocacy of inheritance tax by Sam 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.

Dharmendra Pradhan files nomination from Sambalpur

PTI ■ SAMBALPUR (ODISHA)

BJP 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 PTI.

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 stable 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 Jammu-Kashmir, abolish the 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. "I then got a satellite survey 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 recently spoken about separating South India and forming a new nation, while those in the Opposition INDIA Bloc also make statements on similar lines, he

asserted. Speaking about reservation for Muslims, Modi said after Independence it was decided following careful deliberations that religion-based quotas would not be given. "Those deliberations went on 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

The 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 inertia, 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.

PICTALK



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

Upholding the Fourth Estate in digital age



SANTOSH MATHEW

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

Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a Government without newspapers, or newspapers without a Government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter - Thomas Jefferson

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 presented new challenges for press freedom. Social media platforms have become powerful tools for



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, with journalists being arrested, newspapers censored and the Government exerting tight control over media outlets.



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 individuals to participate in public discourse and challenging established institutions and power structures. Social media platforms

empower users to share news, opinions and perspectives instantaneously, bypassing traditional gatekeepers of information.

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 role journalists play in safeguarding democracy and promoting transparency.

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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.

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.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Time to curb fake videos in elections

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



VIVEK SHUKLA

The 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 'deep fake' 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 reservations provided to 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 SC 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 that video is fitted into the

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 society.

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 handle of Maharashtra Youth Congress and 16 others under various sections of the IPC and IT Act at Bandra-Kurla Cyber Police Station in Mumbai.

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)

India's semiconductor mission



Apropos 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 evidenced 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 single word.

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 the feet."



FIRST COLUMN

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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



SAKSHI SETHI

In 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. Stress-reducing 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 sustainability.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

AFSPA repeal: A step towards 'Naya Kashmir'



ABHINAV NARAYAN

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



Recently, the Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that the Centre will consider the removal of AFSPA 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 be 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 first.

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 7 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 -1. 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 seize it. -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 extrajudicial 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 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, it means that the adversary or any adverse situation will soon grip the state, leading to mayhem and a breakdown of national security.



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 NATIONAL SECURITY

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 national security. Such situations 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 AFSPA 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 Rashtriya Rifles fired upon civilians mistaking the sound of the tyre bursting for a bomb 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 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 socio-political 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 year.

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 be withdrawn. 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 AFSPA.

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

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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

In 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



RAJDEEP PATHAK

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 char-

ade 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 matter.

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 bolstered 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 characterised by extravagant 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 backdrop of waving flags and resonant slogans, the democratic 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 mobilisation of supporters for these occasions. One cannot forget that in this grand symphony, the Election Commission stands as the linchpin, ensuring the sancti-

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)

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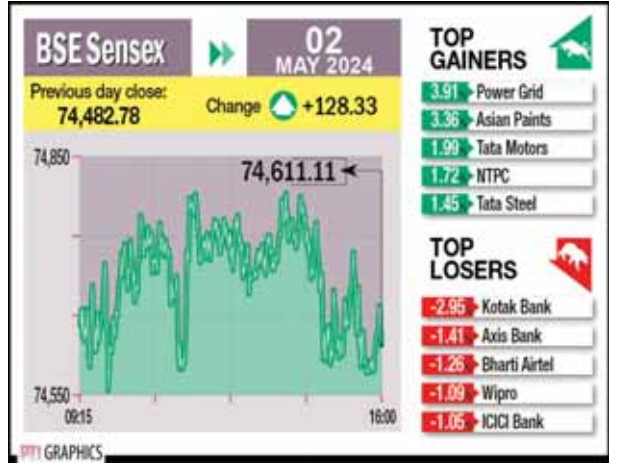
Stock markets rebound as GST revenues hit record in April

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stock markets rebounded on Thursday with 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, NTPC, Sun Pharma, Mahindra & Mahindra, HDFC Bank, Tata Consultancy Services and JSW Steel were among the major gainers.



Goods and Services Tax 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.

India's manufacturing sector activity moderated in April but still recorded the second fastest improvement in operating conditions in three-and-a-half years supported by buoyant demand, a monthly survey said on Thursday.

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. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought 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.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India is one of the "fastest-growing markets" for online 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 Chief Business Officer Dave Stephenson.



it is helping these groups find a perfect place. "Indians are inspired by Cricket and Bollywood, and they want to explore the world."

When asked as whether India figures among Airbnb's top 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 large travel market and we definitely think it can be. That would be the goal."

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.

Digital payment has transformed financial landscape: Airtel Payments Bank CEO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



Payments Bank has three clear segments when it comes to serving customers across geographies — the urban digital, the 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 per cent over the year-ago period.

banking in India which is a growing spectrum of urban users wanting a secondary digital banking option for their 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.

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.

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.

Federal Bank Q4 profit rises marginally to ₹906 crore

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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.

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

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, telecom, 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.



world that is becoming ever 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.

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.

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.

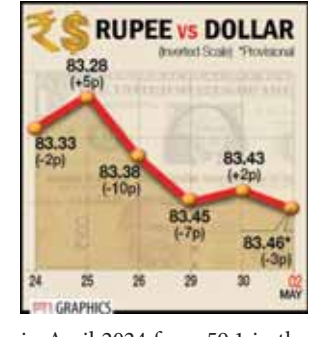


International Wine and Spirit Competition, the World Whiskey Awards and the San Francisco World Spirits Competition. The London Spirits Competition, organized by the Beverage Trade Network, aims to recognise and promote spirits brands that resonate with consumers and offer value for both trade buyers and end consumers.

Rupee falls 3 paise to settle at 43.46 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee stayed range-bound and closed 3 paise lower at 83.46 (provisional) against the US dollar on 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.

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 three-and-a-half years supported by buoyant demand, a monthly survey said on Thursday.

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 forward-thinking approach to workplace design, sustainability, health, and wellness for its colleagues.

to the new facility, located in sector 74A Gurugram, in phases, starting at the end of May 2024. The campus reflects American Express' dedication to fostering a dynamic work environment. The facility has received Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certification for Building Design and Construction (BD+C) Core and Shell Development.

Jindal Stainless to operate stainless steel melt shop in Indonesia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Jindal 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.



become one of the leading players in the 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.

Investment (FDI) and they would get a secure availability of raw materials and increased production efficiency in Indonesia. "The Government of Indonesia has banned the export of nickel ore and is 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 & Wholtime Director, Tarun Kumar Khulbe.

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

Imagine wandering into a world where art reflects the vibrant spirit of nature, capturing its rhythmic seasons and climates with elegance. This is the essence 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. Umesh PK's landscapes are



incomparable odes to nature's multilayered beauty. His 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 stark pointer to the connection we humans often tend to overlook or forget. 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 perspective of familiar scenes. Shaji Appukkuttan transports 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 connect 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 canvas.

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 centre stage 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 eye 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 its complexities, and taking steps towards its preservation, can we ensure a healthier planet for ourselves and future generations. Photos: Pankaj Kumar

AN ARTIST FINDS SOLACE IN NATURE

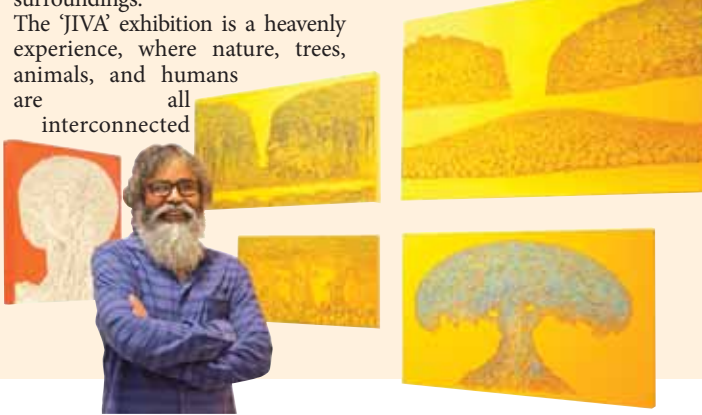
Ompal Sanswal's solo Exhibition JIVA reflects his unwavering commitment to preserve nature



BY SAKSHI PRIYA

Renowned for his exquisite artistry, National Award-winning artist Ompal Sanswal'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 — some 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 Sanswal'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.

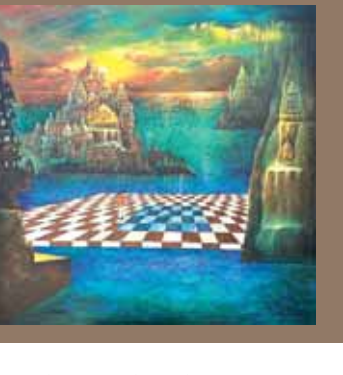
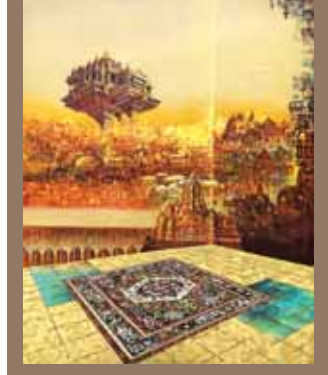
through Ompal's artistic vision. The balanced colors and techniques in each canvas create a visually stunning display. Ompal's fascination with trees is evident in every piece, embodying not just isolated entities in time but dynamic elements in a complex interplay with the environment. The acrylic, 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 Sanswal is not just a collection of paintings but a profound reflection of the artist's soul and his deep-rooted connection with nature. Through his meticulous artistry, Sanswal 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. 'JIVA' is not just an exhibition—it's a 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. Photos: Pankaj Kumar



A SURREAL JOURNEY THROUGH TIME AND IMAGINATION

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

Step 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 a 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



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

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

of freedom. He does not believe in 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 artwork." 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 artist revealed that his main source of inspiration is his love for ancient architecture. "I love creating art 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 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

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 civilization with each artwork telling a unique story of balance between man and nature. '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 he has created that transports you 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 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



You 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 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

and the fondness for Honey Singh.

There's 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.

Whether it's a house, property, or even the Ram Mandir, it takes time to construct. It will be ready soon, and I will definitely do a housewarming soon.

As a public figure, you often face both praise and criticism on social media. How do you 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 comments.

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

been the most defining moment of your career, and why?
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?
I believe that old songs had a different charm, and their lyrics were very meaningful. 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 time.

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

