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Terror strikes IAF convoy in J&K, one soldier dead

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

In a stark reminder to the security personnel in February 2019 ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, an Indian Air Force (IAF) vehicle convoy was attacked in the Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir late Saturday evening in which one soldier was killed and four seriously injured.

The attack occurred near Shashidhar when the convoy vehicles were moving towards Sanai Top in the district's Surankote area.

The local military units launched cordon and search operations to capture the terrorists behind the strike, the IAF statement read.

This is the ninth major attack on security personnel since October 2021 in the region including this which comes right in the midst of 2024 General Elections.

A similar terrorist strike took place in the Poonch district on December 21, 2023. Four Army personnel sacrificed their lives and three others received critical injuries after their vehicles were ambushed by the hiding foreign terrorists in the general area of Dera ki Gali in the Poonch district.

Five Indian Army personnel including two officers were "killed in action" in the Kalakote forest area of Rajouri on November 22.

Meanwhile, the audacious



Security personnel stand guard after a militant attack on army vehicles, in Poonch district on Saturday. A search operation is going on in the woods amid inputs about the presence of the militants

strike has once again raised question marks as none of the terrorists were neutralised.

The attack comes three weeks ahead of polling in Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha constituency.

Poonch is part of Anantnag-Rajouri parliamentary constituency which is going to polls in the sixth phase on May 25.

The border district of Poonch along with adjoining Rajouri has witnessed some of the major terrorist attacks over the past two years, signalling return of terror activities to the region, which was once cleared of terrorism and remained peaceful between 2003 and 2021.

The officials said five security personnel were injured, two of them critically, when terrorists opened fire

on two vehicles, including one belonging to the IAF, near Shashidhar in the evening.

The vehicles were moving towards nearby Sanai Top in the district's Surankote area, they said, suspecting the involvement of the same group of terrorists who carried out an ambush on the troops in adjoining Bufliaz on December 21 last year, that left four soldiers dead and three others injured.

The Army truck bore the major brunt of the firing by the terrorists who were armed with AK assault rifles and are believed to have fled into the nearby forests, the officials said. Sources said reinforcements from the Army and police have been rushed to the area and a massive search and cordon operation was launched to

track down and neutralise the terrorists.

Police assisted by paramilitary forces carried out searches in Poonch town since Friday following inputs about movement of suspected persons. However, no one was arrested during the operation, said officials.

The latest incident in the Pir Panjal region followed the killing of a Government employee Mohd Razaq, brother of an Army personnel, by terrorists at village Kunda Top in Rajouri's Shahdra area on April 22 and a village defence guard Mohd Sharief in Basantgarh area of Udhampur on April 28.

Police have released pictures of two Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorists, including suspected Pakistani national Abu

Hamza, involved in the murder of Razaq and announced a cash reward of Rs 10 lakh on his head.

The Bufliaz ambush in December last year came weeks after a major gunfight in the Dharmal belt of Bajimaal forest in Rajouri that left five Army personnel, including two captains, dead a month earlier.

Two terrorists, including a top commander of LeT identified as Quari, were also killed in the two-day long gunfight. Quari was said to be the mastermind behind several attacks, including the killing of 10 civilians and five Army personnel in the district.

The stretch between Dhera Ki Gali and Bufliaz on the boundary of Rajouri and Poonch is densely forested and leads to Chamrer forest and then Bhata Dhurian forest, where five soldiers were killed in an ambush on an Army vehicle on April 20 last year.

In May last year, five more Army personnel were killed and a major-rank officer was injured in Chamrer forest during an anti-terrorist operation. A foreign terrorist was also killed in the operation. In 2022, five Army personnel were killed when terrorists carried out a suicide attack on their camp at Pargal in Darhal area of Rajouri district. Both the terrorists involved in the attack were eliminated.

Raigarh: It's BJP's last laugh or Congress' royal reclaim?

The Raigarh Lok Sabha seat reserved for Scheduled Tribes in north Chhattisgarh is also the home turf of Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, who won it in the 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014 elections. In 2019, the BJP's Gonti Sai defeated Congress' Laljeet Singh Rathia by 66,027 votes. Gonti Sai was elected to the Assembly last year. The ruling BJP has this time fielded Radheshyam Rathia, a fresh face. The BJP has not lost this seat in the last 25 years. Whereas, the Congress has fielded Dr. Menka Devi Singh, who hails from the erstwhile Gond tribal Sarangarh royal family. It was 33 years ago when her sister Pushpa Devi was elected to the Lok Sabha from Raigarh constituency on a Congress ticket; this time, the party has fielded Menka to reclaim the seat. Of the 11 Lok Sabha seats in the state, the electoral battle here is keenly watched. **The Pioneer** posers propelled Rathia to put forth his views and priorities candidly...

SHRI RAM SHAW ■ RAIGARH

Menka facing stiff challenge within her own party: Rathia

Radheshyam Rathia, the BJP nominee for the Raigarh seat, is a fresh face in the electoral arena, having represented panchayat bodies in the past. Over the years he has strengthened his credibility as a tribal leader of the Dharamjaygarh assembly constituency.

EXCERPTS...
Q - Why should people elect you as an MP?

The development of the Raigarh Lok Sabha constituency had come to a standstill during Congress rule. During this period, the welfare schemes of the Central government could not be implemented. Presently there is a BJP government. A double engine government will rapidly advance the pace of development. I will fulfill the aspirations of the people. I will continue to work as a public representative and servant. I am giving this assurance to the voters. It's for sure that BJP is going to form the government at the Center for a third time under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Q - What is your vision regarding the development of the area?
Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantee is the basic guarantee of development. We will accomplish the concept of holistic development. See, there's so many stalwarts in the party. Still, I was given the ticket. I don't know what qualities I possess that the party leadership has trusted

"THERE IS A RIFT IN CONGRESS PARTY. MENKA DEVI SINGH IS BEING CHALLENGED BY HER OWN PARTY WORKERS. CONGRESS LEADERS REMAINED INDIFFERENT AND ALOOF FROM THE CONSTITUENCY FOR MORE THAN TWO DECADES. CONGRESS IS BOUND TO FACE THE WRATH OF THE ELECTORATE."



Q - Do you feel stiff challenge from Congress candidate Menka Singh?

No way, not at all. She is herself facing stiff challenge within her own party. There is a rift in Congress party. She is being challenged by her own party workers. Congress leaders remained indifferent and aloof from the constituency for more than two decades. Congress is bound to face the wrath of the electorate.

Q - What will be your priorities for the constituency?

Under Modi's guarantee, there's always a priority to complete every work in stipulated timeframe. Whatever public welfare work is required to be done for Viksit Bharat will be done with utmost honesty and sincerity. It's important to provide the benefits of the ambitious Central government schemes like Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana to all people. Kelo Dam has been constructed, and a network of roads is being laid from the city to the rural areas.

EC's exemplary efforts to bring electorate to booths in C'garh

SHRI RAM SHAW ■ RAIPUR

Campaigning continues in full swing for the Lok Sabha elections as top leaders seek support for party nominees through public meetings, rallies and road shows. After the completion of two phases, high-voltage campaigning for the remaining seven parliamentary constituencies in Chhattisgarh is underway. The Election Commission and many other organizations are taking several unique steps under SVEEP (Systematic Voter's Education and Electoral Participation) to increase the voting percentage and motivate people to exercise their franchise in the state.

Reena Babasaheb Kangale, Chief Electoral Officer (Chhattisgarh), told **The Pioneer**: "In the four Lok Sabha constituencies where voting took place in the first two phases in Chhattisgarh, the voting percentage has increased compared to 2019. At the national level, voting percentage was 66.14 in the first phase of polling whereas it was 68.30 per cent in Chhattisgarh. The voting percentage in the state was 66 during the previous general elections. In the second phase of polling it was 66.77 percent at the national level this year whereas it was 76.24 percent in the state -- almost 10 percent higher than the national average. In last Lok Sabha polls, the voting percentage in the state was 74.94."

Gaurav Singh, Collector and District Election Officer of Raipur, told **The Pioneer**: "In the third phase, it is a challenge to increase the voting percentage in the remaining seven parliamentary constituencies amid heat



Reena Babasaheb Kangale

wave. Efforts are being made by organising sports competitions, including cricket matches, cycle rallies, torch rallies and umbrella rallies, in various districts so that people, regardless of the heat, reach the polling booths in large numbers and cast their votes.

Commercial establishments, including hotels and various shops, have also announced special discounts on that day for people who vote. People in rural areas of Balrampur district have been invited to vote by writing invitations on the leaves of Sal trees. In Raipur district too, the Collector and District Returning Officer visited the homes of Padma Shri awardees along with many other people, delivering invitation letters and urging them to cast their votes, Singh added.

Considering the severe heat-wave conditions, several precautionary steps have been taken. The timing of the voting has also been extended for two hours till 6 pm in the evening from 7 in the morning. Earlier, it was from 8 am to 5 pm.

Voter awareness messages have been taken through a floodlight friendly cricket match in Durg;

invitation cards distribution 'Nevta-Pati', going door-to-door through Panchayat Secretaries in Dangaria village of Gaurela-Pendra-Marwahi district; a torch rally in Sarangarh-Bilaigarh district; "Collector Ki Paati" in Raipur; women in Balrampur inviting people to vote by giving them 'Saal Patra'; a poster competition in Jashpur; an umbrella rally in Kuriyari village of Janjgir -- these are some of the remarkable steps being taken by the Election Commission officials to bring voters to booths in large numbers.

Kangale said: "In Mungeli district, under "100% voting, pride of Mungeli district", "Ghar Aaja Sangi campaign" was launched to invite the voters who had gone out for employment back home to vote. Under this, Women and Child Development, Health Department and Voter Sangwaris spoke on phone to more than 22,000 voters who migrated from the district. Of these, more than 8,000 labourers have returned home. The district administration welcomed these labourers by applying tilak on their return home. Also, an oath was taken to ensure 100% voting."

EC shows off gargantuan poll exercise to 23 nations

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Amid Western media, intellectual think tanks, academics, human rights organizations, and other components of civil society and Opposition parties here expressing concerns about the state of democracy, the Election Commission has invited 75 international visitors from election management bodies (EMBs) of 23 countries, including Russia, Australia, Maldives, and Seychelles to watch the world's largest elections unfold. The invited delegates will visit six states in small groups to witness the elections and preparations

related to it in various constituencies. The Commission described the visit of the foreign delegates as a first in terms of scale and magnitude of participation. Beginning Saturday, the programme seeks to familiarise them with the nuances of India's electoral system as well as the best practices being used. Recently, representatives of 18 political parties from 10 countries met BJP president JP Nadda, Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar and Union Minister of Railways Ashwini Vashi in New Delhi on Wednesday to have a sense of the party's election campaign strategies and the electoral process of India.

For our unemployed youth
For the backbreaking inflation
For our suffering farmers
For our molested women
For the attacks on reservation

THE ANSWER IS IN YOUR VOTE

Vote for Congress!



HAATH BADLEGA HALAAT

Campaign to change the lives of poor in leadership of Modi

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

State President of Bharatiya Janata Party and Khajuraho MP Vishnudutt Sharma, while addressing the workers' conference in Raghogarh of Rajgarh Lok Sabha constituency, said that during the 10-year tenure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a campaign to change the lives of the poor is going on.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji did the work of bringing smile in the life of every poor. There has been a change in every village and household through poor welfare schemes. The work has been done to change the lives of people of any caste or religion in the country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has brought changes in the life of the last person in line. Narendra Modi ji is the son of an ordinary family,

who is the Prime Minister of the country today. It is possible only in Bharatiya Janata Party that an ordinary worker reaches positions like Prime Minister and Chief Minister.

The Congress party has now become a family party. Narendra Modi ji knows what poverty is. That's why we are working to wipe the tears of the poor. Before the workers conference, State President Sharma addressed a public meeting in Ashoknagar in support of Guna Lok Sabha party candidate and Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia. BJP State President Vishnudutt Sharma said that when Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister, he started the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana for the poor. He guaranteed to change the lives of the poor. Congress ruled the country for 55 years, but did nothing for the development of the country. One

family has been ruling Raghogarh for many years, it has no connection with development.

Sharma said that by starting Ayushman Yojana, the Prime Minister has provided treatment facility of Rs 5 lakh per year to the poor. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is the most popular leader of the world. Under his leadership, India's reputation is increasing all over the world. In the times of Congress, if any leader did something wrong, he would never go to jail, but now if someone does something wrong, he will have to go to jail, this is the government of Narendra Modi ji. Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji has affection for the people of the state. The people of Madhya Pradesh have PM Modi in their minds and the people of Madhya Pradesh are in the minds of PM Modi. "The people of Raghogarh

have made up their mind to reject Congress' BJP State President Sharma said that while being the Prime Minister, Congress leader Late. Rajiv Gandhi used to say, if I send one rupee from Delhi, only 15 paise reaches the people. 85 paise is lost to corruption. After becoming the Prime Minister, Modi ji planned to open bank accounts for everyone. India is the only country in the world where most of the people across the country have received both the Corona vaccines free of cost. Whatever work Prime Minister Narendra Modi does, it has huge results. Today, the amount of beneficiary schemes is coming into the bank accounts opened by Prime Minister Modi ji with zero balance. Prime Minister promoted Digital India and today the amount goes directly into the accounts of the beneficiaries through DBT. Now

if Prime Minister Narendra Modi sends one rupee from Delhi for the poor, then only one rupee reaches the accounts of the poor. Not a single penny is misappropriated. The people of Raghogarh will reject those who reject the invitation for Ramlala's life consecration. BJP State President Sharma said that it is a matter of good fortune for all of us that our beloved Ramlala is seated in his grand temple. A grand Ram temple has been constructed under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Congress had even rejected the invitation to Lord Shri Ram temple. Now the people of Raghogarh will reject Congress. Mr Sharma said that Congress has not fulfilled even a single promise made to the public in 2018 during the 15 months of government. Congress leaders will come, lie and do politics of deceit.



BJP candidate Alok Sharma with Minister Krishna Gaur during a road show for Lok Sabha elections in Govindpura state assembly constituency in Bhopal on Saturday. Pioneer photo

CME held on MTP and medicolegal implications

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A CME on 'Medical termination of pregnancy (MTP) & Medicolegal implications' was organized on Saturday at AIIMS Bhopal. On this occasion, Professor (Dr) Ajai Singh, Executive Director of AIIMS Bhopal said that unsafe abortion has become the biggest cause of pregnancy-related death today.

Despite the enactment of the MTP Act 1971 and the MTP Amendment Bill 2020, a large number of illegal and unsafe abortions are taking place in India. Therefore, it becomes necessary that not only gynecologists and obstetricians but all people in the medical field including registered medical practitioners, students should have adequate knowledge in this field.

Professor Singh said most of the medicolegal cases relate to issues of consent, emergency



services, medical records, malpractice and negligence. These can be easily avoided with written consent, effective communication with the patient and his family, proper data recording and proper risk management.

Earlier, welcoming the presence, Dr. K. Pushpalatha, Head of the Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics, while discussing the objectives of organizing the CME, said that the objective of this CME is to create awareness among

the registered medical doctors, students, nurses, medicosocial workers working in the field. To create awareness about medicolegal and ethical considerations related to MTP.

During this, Dr. Prabhakar Tiwari, CMHO, while explaining the importance of this type of workshop, stressed on organizing more such workshops. Professor (Dr) Rajneesh Joshi, Dean (Academics) expressed hope that the participants would get a chance to learn a lot from this workshop.

Guest speaker from Ahmedabad, Gynecologist and Obstetrician and Medicolegal Expert Dr. MC Patel discussed the amendments made in the MTP Act while Dr. Geetendra Sharma discussed the topic of 'Criminal Negligence in Medical Practice' in detail with the participants and answered their questions.

Two minors from Ujjain drown in swimming pool of marriage garden

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Two minors including a girl drowned in the swimming pool of the Swagat Marriage Garden of Kohefiza area; boy died while girl is on ventilator; the family came to Bhopal from Ujjain for a marriage.

Police said that 5 year old Kamil died due to drowning in the swimming pool. Cousin brothers and sisters drowned in the swimming pool in Swagat Marriage Garden of Kohefiza area in Bhopal.

A five-year-old boy died while 7-year-old girl is on ventilator. Doctors said that his condition is very serious. The incident occurred at 9 pm on Friday night.

Both the children had come to Bhopal from Ujjain in a wedding procession. The wedding procession was held at the

ASI Shobharam Verma told that when the wedding procession was ready to leave, both of them were searched, then someone told that the children were in the swimming pool. Both were found drowned in the pool and were taken to the hospital, Kamil had died by then

Swagat Marriage Garden located on Janwasa Airport Road. The wedding program was in Gulshan Garden. The family was getting ready for the wedding procession when the children went towards the swimming pool.

ASI Shobharam Verma told that when the wedding procession was ready to leave, both of them were searched, then someone told that the children were in the swimming pool. When the family members came running, both were found drowned in the

side of the pool. There was no arrangement for even a guard there.

Father works in an auto deal. Was in Chennai at the time of the accident. Kamil has a younger brother named Taha. His mother is in bad condition after the accident. He had come to the wedding procession with his mother.

Kohefiza police station in-charge Brijendra Marskole said that according to the building permission of the Municipal Corporation, the pool is not approved separately, rather it is shown in the map of the building permission.

Marriage Garden operator Ravi Bhurani said that no permission is required to operate swimming pools up to 4 feet. Our pool is only 3 feet. There are railings around. There was no marriage at our place. 12 rooms were given only for public.

Voters slip distributed to 1.68 cr people in 9 constituencies

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan has said that voter information slips have been distributed to the voters in the 9 Lok Sabha parliamentary constituencies where voting is to be held in the third phase on May 7. This voter information slip also has a QR code.

In the third phase, voting will be held on May 7 in Morena, Bhind (SC), Gwalior, Guna, Sagar, Vidisha, Bhopal, Rajgarh and Betul (SC) parliamentary constituencies. There are a total of 1 crore 77 lakh 52 thousand 583 voters here. Out of these, voter information slips have been distributed to one crore 68 lakh 31 thousand 603 voters.

Rajan said that voter information slips with QR codes are being distributed to all the voters of the Lok Sabha constituencies going to polls in the next two phases.

From this QR code voter information slip, voters will be able to get important information like name, address, serial number, location, voter helpline number of the state and district of their polling station. If any voter has not received the voter slip, then he should go to the BLO of his polling station with his voter ID card. Show the Voter ID at the Voter Help Center established there. Here the BLO will give your voter information slip.

If a voter does not have a voter information slip and his name is registered in the voter list, then he can still vote by showing any one of the 13 documents.



All India Congress Committee Chairman, Media and Publicity, Pawan Kherra addresses a press conference ahead of the Lok Sabha elections at MPCC headquarters in Bhopal on Saturday. Pioneer photo

Car hits traffic cop, takes him over the car for 500 metres, FIR registered

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

A video has surfaced in Bhopal, in which a traffic policeman is sitting on a car. The car is running at high speed, while another policeman is chasing the car on a bike. This video is of Friday evening.

The traffic policeman on duty near Piplani petrol pump of the city had tried to stop the car that was moving away by breaking the signal. During this the car driver hit him. The traffic policeman jumped on the bonnet of the car, but the car driver did not stop. He continued driving the car in this condition for a distance of about half a kilometer.

Later, fellow policemen chased the car on the bike and caught the driver. He has been handed over to Piplani police. A case has been registered against the accused under other sections including attempt to murder.

According to Piplani police station TI Anurag Lal, vehicles are being checked on the road to ensure that the code of conduct is followed due to the Lok Sabha elections. As usual, the traffic ASI and two constables were deployed at the checking point at Piplani Petrol Pump intersection on Friday. There was more traffic pressure at this intersection in

the evening.

At around 6.15 pm, a gray colored car, which had black film covered with it, was going from Piplani towards Ratnagiri. He broke the signal, then constable Rahul Jaiswal on duty tried to stop him. Instead of stopping the car, the driver hit Rahul. Due to which he jumped and fell on the bonnet of the car. Still he did not stop the car.

The constable stuck on the bonnet kept calling the driver to stop the car. When Rahul raised an alarm, passers-by also tried to stop the car, but the driver did not stop the car. An elderly pedestrian riding a bike tried to stop the car by giving his hand. The car driver also hit the bike. Due to which the elderly fell and got injured. Here, other police personnel posted at the intersection chased him on the bike, somehow stopped him and arrested him. Black film was covered in the car, got scared after seeing the police.

The accused has been identified as Sujay alias Sanjay Singh (29), resident of Lavkush Nagar, Avadhपुरi. He works in marketing in a private company. Police have seized the Tata Altroz car of the accused. During initial interrogation, the accused told that he had gone out for some work in a car with his friend.

Awareness program on cancer organized

Bhopal: In view of the increasing cases of cancer in the country, it is very important to create awareness. HPV vaccination is very important to combat the problem of cervical cancer especially in women.

ED Prof Ajai Singh places great emphasis on the education of children in particular. According to him, educating or making a child aware means educating or making a generation aware. In this connection, Dr. Shashank Bansal, Assistant Professor, Department of Medical Oncology, AIIMS Bhopal, organized an awareness program on cancer for the students of Technocrats institute of technology Bhopal on 4th May 2024. In this awareness program, students were told about the screening technique through which any person can check himself at the primary level whether he has cancer.

The risk of cervical cancer in women is almost completely eliminated after HPV vaccination. Besides, students were also given information about how to maintain their lifestyle. Because in the present lifestyle, children are mostly attracted towards junk food. Around 100 students participated in this cancer awareness program.

Shodh Shikhar 2024 organised by RNTU concludes

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The international research and innovation conference Shodh Shikhar 2024 organised by Rabindranath Tagore University and affiliated institutions, concluded on Saturday.

The theme of the summit was "Developed India-New India". This year, the research paper 'Anushodhan' and research project 'Navnirman' competition was organized. First place in theme Innovation and Technology, Best Research Paper Award to Ganpat University, Gujarat, Devarshi Patel, Cutting Edge Machine Learning Model for Crowd Surveillance using Violo V8, Second place to Abhishek Gupta, CMBT Research and Training Institute, Bhopal, Processing of Instant Definition Tea Bag and Its importance in our daily life given in different context.

Aishwarya Vichare of Ganpat University, Gujarat got the first position in the theme Agriculture and Allied Science. Its title was Agri Export Digital Dashboard. The second place went to Surbhi Sharma of RNTU whose title was Impact of Organic Nutrition

PIMR students dive into foreign trade dynamics

PNS ■ INDORE

To offer students a comprehensive understanding of foreign trade dynamics, its evolution, and societal impacts, the Prestige Institute of Management Research (PIMR) organized an enlightening event, "From Port to Port: A Dramatic Trade Chronicle." The event, organized by the Outreach Club of the PIMR, unfolded a rich discourse on the intricacies of international trade.

The highlight of the event was a panel discussion featuring distinguished experts Gaurav Goyal, Assistant Director (Industrial Management & Training, Indore), and Rajneesh Sharma, Director (Global Trade House and Training Centre, Indore). They delved into the current challenges confronting international trade, shedding light on India's export performance, with a specific focus on Madhya Pradesh and its MSME sector.



They also elucidated the governmental initiatives bolstering foreign trade endeavors in India. Adding a creative flair to the proceedings, students from the PIMR Outreach Club, mentored by Ankit Nandwal, staged a compelling skit elucidating the import-export procedures. This interactive portrayal provided attendees with a practical insight into the complexities of global trade operations.

Dr. Raksha Thakur, the event

Electioneering will stop from 6 pm today for 3rd phase

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

In the third phase of Lok Sabha elections-2024, the election campaign will stop from 6 pm on May 5 in the 9 Lok Sabha parliamentary constituencies of Madhya Pradesh where voting is to be held from 7 am to 6 pm on Tuesday, May 7.

Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan has said that there is a provision to stop election campaigning in parliamentary constituencies 48 hours before the scheduled end of voting. After the deadline for campaigning to end, persons from outside the area, who are not voters in that Lok Sabha Parliamentary Constituency, will have to leave that constituency. For this, an intensive monitoring campaign is conducted. In the third phase, voting is to be held on May 7 in 9 Lok Sabha parliamentary constituencies of Madhya Pradesh, Morena, Bhind (SC), Gwalior, Guna, Sagar, Vidisha, Bhopal, Rajgarh and Betul (SC).



Congress candidate Digvijaya Singh with former Rajasthan chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and Congress State President Jitu Patwari in a public meeting during an election campaign for Lok Sabha elections in Chachaura, Guna district Madhya Pradesh on Saturday. Pioneer photo

Social media shaping political narrative in C'garh LS elections

ABHIJAT SHUKLA ■ RAIPUR

With three days to go for the third and final phase of the Lok Sabha battle in Chhattisgarh, the social media war between the political parties will shape the political narrative in the crucial two days left for balloting.

It should not be an exaggeration to say that the social media has tremendous power to modify the public opinion in any democracy; it can be even said that the elections are eventually 'rigged' by raising emotional issues during the final days.

Communication through social media brings politicians and political parties close to the electorate. The social media is decisive during the



elections due to its wide reach and accessibility.

In Chhattisgarh, the opposition Congress party is completely dependent on social media.

"The Lok Sabha polls are fought on national issues and hence we rely on the national body (AICC) for content creation and publicity", social media in charge of Chhattisgarh PCC

Jaivardhan Bissa said.

"However, we have our volunteers throughout the state and the cadres of 26 Morchas who are busy nowadays in publicizing the contents sent by AICC widely to the public," Bissa said.

The BJP too relies on the national team for the social media campaign even though it has a good network

of grassroots workers and cadres from booth to constituency level.

The media in-charge in the Chhattisgarh BJP, Amit Chimnani, told The Pioneer that his party has not hired any campaigning agency; it has good hands with dedicated workers from top to bottom.

"Actually, the social media influencers contribute to image building of politicians and shaping public opinion during the election time. The recent shifts in the digital media landscape have changed the interaction between candidate's campaign and the voting public," Chimnani said.

No doubt, the campaigning through social media includes mass connectivity, real-time

communication, access to information and image building.

Of course the media's primary duty is to present people information and alert them with important events that occur in the political arena. This information from it may affect what people think and the actions they take.

Social media activists utilize apps, social media and other technology to raise awareness and organize making opinions.

And they use social media to promote voting drives and other community engagement initiatives.

Out of 11 Lok Sabha constituencies, the final seven will see voting on May 7.

The campaigning will end on Sunday evening.

Congress should learn politics, leadership from Modi: Sharma



Sharma criticized the Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, Charandas Mahant, for his remarks on Modi and said: "Abusing Modiji has now become a tradition in Congress"

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Minister Narendra Modi.

In a statement to the media, Sharma criticized the Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, Charandas Mahant, for his remarks on Modi and said: "Abusing Modiji has now become a tradition in Congress."

How could a person like Mahant, who had born with

a silver spoon, digest a tea seller becoming the Prime Minister, Sharma said.

"Modiji not only ruled the Centre efficiently but has pushed the grand old party to get diminished and thrown it out of competition in the Lok Sabha polls," he said.

SVEEP Music Fest held to inspire voters



STAFF REPORTER ■ BILASPUR

Lok Sabha elections.

Artists conveyed the message of the importance of every single vote to the audience through their performances.

The people present took a pledge to vote in the general elections.

An official communiqué

said that this was organized by Bilaspur Smart City Lt in collaboration with the district administration and the university.

Bilaspur will see polling along with six other constituencies in the third and final phase of balloting on May 7.

The 'SVEEP Music Fest' was held at the Guru Ghasidas Central University in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur district on Friday night as a unique initiative to inspire youths to vote in the May 7

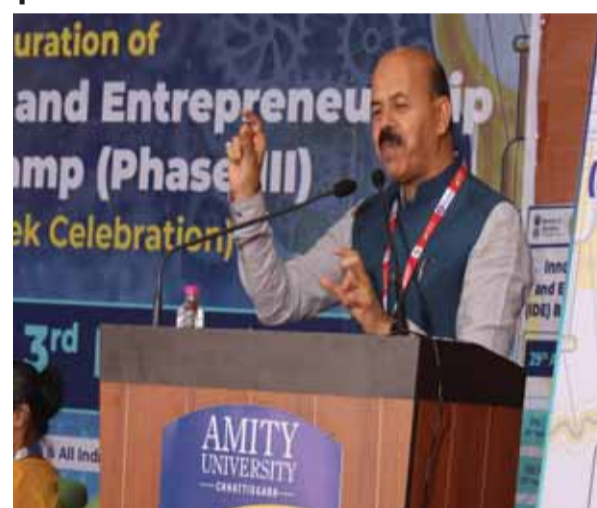
Innovative thinking must for startups: Prof Chandel

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Vice-Chancellor of the Indira Gandhi Krishi Vishwavidyalaya, Raipur, Dr Girish Chandel, on Saturday said that the first step for startup was innovative thinking and converting the idea into reality.

He said this at the valedictory 'bootcamp' function organized at Amity University's Raipur campus in collaboration with the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and the Ministry of Education's Innovation Cell (MIC).

Addressing as a chief guest at the function, Chandel said the startups and innovations will have a monumental impact on transforming developing India into a developed nation



by 2047. Prof Piyush Kant Pandey, Vice-Chancellor of Amity University, Raipur, who presided over the function, emphasized the need to focus on ideation in

Man held for evading GST worth Rs 71.38 cr

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Central Goods and Service Tax (CGST) and the Central Excise Duty in Raipur city on Saturday arrested a man for evading GST through bogus Input Tax Credit (ITC) of Rs 71.38 crore.

Sarvesh Kumar Pandey was nabbed following the investigation of bogus ITC passed by Hemant Katera for the Raipur-based M/s Triveni Metallic Industries, M/s Shri Triveni Enterprises and four other firms controlled and managed by Pandey.

Kesara was jailed last month for creating and managing a web of 13 fictitious firms to avail fake credit amounting to Rs. 62.73 crore.

The GST officers found that Pandey not only



purchased bogus bills from Kesara but also from other bogus firms.

Pandey has till now availed Rs 71.38 crore of bogus ITC to evade GST. A court sent him to judicial custody.



A delegation of seven diplomats from Nepal, Bangladesh, Mauritius and Russia met Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai in Raipur. Sai briefed them in depth about the electoral process in the country.

Centenarian exercises franchise for phase III

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Kanhai Ram, a 105-year-old voter in Raipur, exercised his franchise through the postal ballot for the third and final phase of general elections in Chhattisgarh, an official communiqué said.

Postal ballot facilities are available to voters over 85 years of age, disabled voters and COVID-infected people. To avail of this service, eligible voters will have to fill out Form 12D.

There are a total of 82,476 voters over the age of 85 and 2,855 over the age of 100 in the state. A total of 1,785 elderly people have used postal ballots for the third phase.

A communiqué from the Election Commission said transportation has been arranged to ferry the elderly and disabled wishing to vote on May 7. Voter buddies will be deployed at all polling centers to assist them.

They can also use the Saksham app to find their polling station and cast their vote.



Anwar Dhebar's bail plea rejected

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

A special Anti-Corruption Bureau/Economic Offences Wing (ACB/EOW) court here on Saturday rejected the bail plea of the brother Raipur's Congress Mayor Aijaz Dhebar in the Rs 2,000 crore alleged liquor syndicate scam in Chhattisgarh.

ACB/EOW Special Judge Nidhi Sharma Tiwari dismissed the bail application of Anwar Dhebar, ACB/EOW Deputy Director (Prosecution) Mithlesh Verma told The Pioneer.

He moved his bail application on Thursday.



The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday said it has provisionally attached 179 movable and immovable properties worth

Rs. 205 crore including 115 properties of Anwar Dhebar worth Rs. 116.16 crore in connection with an alleged liquor scam.

C'garh policeman commits suicide

STAFF REPORTER ■ BILASPUR

A 52-year-old Head Constable of Chhattisgarh Police was on Saturday found hanging in the backyard of his residence in Bilaspur city.

Lakhan Meshram, who hailed from Gaurela-Pendra-Marwahi district, was posted in the Sarkanda police station, Bilaspur Additional Superintendent of Police (Urban) Umesh Kashyap said.

On May 3-4 night, the family members started searching for Meshram when he did not return home after going out for dinner.

A police patrol found Meshram hanging from a tree. The reason for the suicide is not known.

26 held for accepting bets on IPL matches

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Police on Saturday arrested 26 persons from Maharashtra and brought them here for taking bets on the ongoing Indian Premier League (IPL) via betting apps.

Of these, 22 hailed from Chhattisgarh, three from Madhya Pradesh and one from Uttar Pradesh, Raipur Senior Superintendent of Police Santosh Singh said.

They were taking bets on IPL matches from two separate residential flats in Bharti Vidyapeeth area in Pune city.

The police seized 98 mobile phones, 81 ATM cards, 50 SIM cards, 30 bank passbooks, 11 laptops, three registers, two wi-fi routers and a calculator from them.



The police found betting transaction records of Rs 30 cores from the laptops and mobile phones besides involvement of 1,000 punters

through the betting apps. They were nabbed following the statements of the eight accused arrested from Goa last month.

21 per cent candidates in 4th phase of LS polls have criminal cases: ADR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Out of the 1,710 candidates contesting in the fourth phase of the Lok Sabha polls, 21 per cent have declared criminal cases against themselves and 24 candidates have declared zero assets, as per the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) report. The ADR and The National Election Watch analysed the self-sworn affidavits of 1,710 out of 1,717 candidates, who are contesting in the Lok Sabha elections 2024 Phase IV on May 13.

A total of 360 candidates have declared criminal cases against them. Emphasising the disparities amongst the financial backgrounds of the candidates with the richest candidate in the fray is Dr Chandra Sekhar Pemmasani of Telugu Desam Party with assets over Rs. 5,700 crore.

Among the 360 candidates (21 per cent) with criminal cases, 17 candidates were convicted, 11 declared cases related to



murder, 30 face charges of attempted murder and 50 candidates have criminal cases related to crimes against women, with 5 candidates facing charges of rape, the data showed.

The ADR findings also shed light on the distribution of candidates with criminal backgrounds across major political parties.

Among the major parties, 3 out of 3 candidates from AIMIM, 2 out of 3 candidates from Shiv Sena, 10 out of 17 candidates from BRS, 35 out of 61 candidates from Congress, 40 out of 70 candidates from BJP, 9 out of 17 candidates from TDP, 2 out of 4 candidates from BJD, 2 out of 4 candidates from RJD, 2 out of 4 candidates from Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb

Thackeray), 12 out of 25 candidates from YSRCP, 3 out of 8 candidates from All India Trinamool Congress and 7 out of 19 candidates from Samajwadi Party have declared criminal cases against themselves.

In addition to criminal disclosures, the ADR report also highlights significant diversity amongst the candidates' financial backgrounds.

A total of 476 candidates out of 1710 are "crorepatis", with assets exceeding Rs. 1 crore, with Dr Pemmasani being the richest. While, 24 candidates declared zero assets, the report showed.

In response to these findings, the ADR has proposed a series of reforms aimed at curbing the criminalization of politics.

These include permanent disqualification of candidates convicted of serious crimes, bringing political parties under the Right to Information Act, and implementing stricter penalties for candidates providing false information on election affidavits.

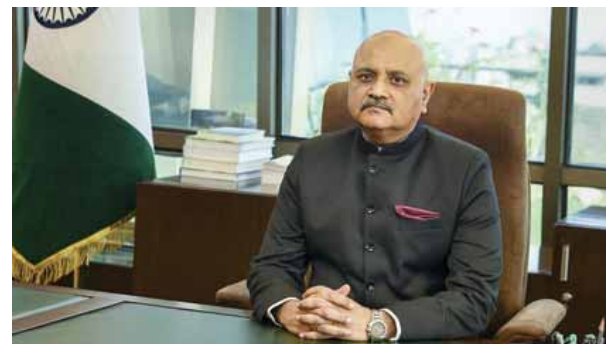
Online radicalisation poses significant challenge to global security: CBI director

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Underlining that there can be no distinction between "good terrorism and bad terrorism", India has said online radicalisation continues to pose a significant challenge to global security.

Heading the Indian delegation at the recently-concluded 19th Interpol Conference of Heads of National Central Bureaux at France's Lyon, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Director Praveen Sood highlighted the challenges posed by the nexus between organised crime, terrorism and extremist ideologies. Sood said online radicalisation poses a significant challenge to global security. He unequivocally condemned all forms of terrorism and conveyed that there can be no distinction between "good terrorism, bad terrorism".

The event was attended by the national central bureaux of 136 countries, represented by senior police officials, according to a statement issued by the CBI. The National Central



Bureau (NCB) in each country is the nodal organisation responsible for coordination with Interpol. In India, the CBI is the designated NCB.

The aim of the event was to strengthen the operational cooperation among the NCBs of Interpol to combat transnational crimes.

"During the event, the Indian delegation held discussions with law-enforcement agencies from multiple countries for enhanced coordination on Interpol channels for a concerted action to combat organised crime, terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering, online radicalisation, cyber-enabled financial crimes and to

the role of institutions set by the government. "India supported the adoption of key conclusions of the 19th INTERPOL Heads of NCB Conference, calling for supporting global efforts in the prevention and disruption of terrorism and organised crime in all its forms to create a safer world," the statement said.

India also supported key conclusions, such as strengthening the network of the NCBs to combat the threat of transnational organised crime, enhance global collaborative efforts in the fight against cyber-enabled financial fraud, promote the use of the Interpol network and global police databases, in the fight against child sexual exploitation and to improve data protection measures within Interpol, it said.

"It may be recalled that in 2023, as many as 29 wanted criminals and fugitives were returned to India through close cooperation via INTERPOL channels and 100 Red Notices were published by INTERPOL on the request of Indian law-enforcement agencies," the statement said.

Canada releases pictures of three Indians charged with Nijjar killing

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Canada has released the pictures of three Indians who allegedly killed Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar last year. The three were arrested by the police there late Friday. Nijjar's killing had become the epicentre of a diplomatic row between India and Canada last year after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alleged the role of "Indian agents" in the murder. India had rejected the charge as "absurd" and "motivated."

Canadian Police on Friday said they have arrested three Indians they suspect were part of the alleged hit squad that had killed Nijjar. The three arrested Indians - Karan Brar, 22, Kamalpreet Singh, 22, Karanpreet Singh, 28 - were living as non-permanent residents in Alberta for three to five years, said Superintendent Mandeep Mooker, who leads the Integrated Homicide Investigation Team.

The police also released their photos. They have been charged with first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder, showed court documents. Police said that none of the suspects were known to them earlier and they were investigating their possible ties to the Indian government.

The murder remains "very much under active investigation," Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Assistant Commissioner David Teboul told a press conference on Friday.

"There are separate and distinct



investigations ongoing into these matters, certainly not limited to the involvement of the people arrested today, and these efforts include investigating connections to the government of India," CTV News quoted him as saying. Nijjar, a Canadian citizen who was wanted in India on various terror charges, was shot dead outside a gurdwara in Surrey on June 18, 2023. Trudeau's charge against India sparked a massive row later that year with both countries expelling diplomats of the other country. A fresh row erupted earlier this week after separatist slogans on 'Khalistan' were raised at an event in Canada addressed by Trudeau, prompting New Delhi to summon their Deputy High Commissioner and lodge a strong protest. On the sidelines of the event, Trudeau told reporters that Nijjar's killing had created a "problem" that he could not have ignored. India rejected his comment and said it once again showed Canada provides political space given to separatism, extremism, and violence. "This not only impacts India-Canada rela-

tions but also encourages a climate of violence and criminality in Canada to the detriment of its own citizens," Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. Meanwhile, Canadian politician Jagmeet Singh has alleged that the Indian government was behind Nijjar's killing. However, Canadian police have not given any evidence linking the three accused to the Indian government. Jagmeet Singh of Canada's New Democratic Party claimed the Indian government hired assassins to murder a Canadian citizen on Canadian soil - at a place of worship. Today 3 arrests were made," he said. "Any Indian agent or state actor that ordered, planned or carried out this murder must be exposed and met with the full force of Canadian law. For Canada, democracy and free speech - there must be justice for Hardeep Singh Nijjar," Singh tweeted.

Army Summit on May 8 to highlight role of veterans in nation's progress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Army will host a summit next week with an aim to highlight the capabilities, potential and skills of military veterans as a driving force in the nation's progress, officials said on Saturday. The summit, which is being organised by the Army Welfare Placement Organisation (AWPO), will be held on May 8.

The event promises to provide a comprehensive understanding of how ex-servicemen can serve as an engine of growth for the nation, a senior official said. It will highlight the capabilities, potential and skills of military veterans as a driving force in the nation's progress.

With the participation of corporate leaders, military veterans, leading industry figures and veteran entrepreneurs, the summit aims to bridge gaps in training, orientation and preparation, paving the way for veterans to make significant contributions across diverse sectors of the economy, the army said. Since its inception in 1999, the AWPO has been instrumental in facilitating the seamless integration of veterans into civilian careers, while upholding the spirit of service and dedication that defines the armed forces, it said.

The AWPO serves as a bridge between the skilled workforce of veterans and the opportunities available in the corporate and public sectors, the officials said. The summit will be centred around three major themes --



harnessing veteran's potential and experience, skills required to meet public and private sector needs and unveiling opportunities for veterans in India's growth story. Discussions have also been planned on many other macro and micro issues concerning the veteran community.

Military veterans represent a profoundly trained, motivated and exceptionally skilled resource, capable of seamlessly transitioning into diverse sectors with minimal orientation, the army said. Annually, around 60,000 adept and driven soldiers, whose professionalism, leadership, technical and managerial abilities have been meticulously honed through extensive training, superannuate from service, it said.

These veterans, at the zenith of their capabilities developed through real-world high-pressure experience and a goal-oriented mindset cultivated over years of service, embody a significant national asset that must be effectively leveraged to

propel India's growth story, the army said. The AWPO empowers veterans for entrepreneurship programmes, government jobs and job opportunities in friendly foreign countries. It is pertinent to note that the AWPO has shown a 30 per cent increase in its placements during the last two years, the army said.

The bulk placements include 3,000 in the Indian Railways, 1,200 in dedicated freight corridors and approximately 3,200 as drivers for the Bihar Police, which is still under progress, it said. Some have also been placed with the Port Trust in Kolkata and Kandla ports, and as observers with the National Testing Agency.

In its latest drive, the AWPO, as a pilot project, has been able to place 10 veterans with the All Nippon Airways. They have been employed in Japan since March this year. In entrepreneurship programmes, approximately 900 veterans have been empowered in various fields, it added.

Colonel of Madras Regiment in veshti and pagdi performs ritual at Murugan Temple



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Colonel of the Madras Regiment of the Indian Army, Lt General Manjinder Singh, performed a sacred ceremony at the Murugan Temple of its regimental centre, wearing a traditional 'veshti', according to a post on X shared by the Army's Training Command. During the ceremony, the officer sported his traditional Sikh turban and also wore a 'veshti', a traditional wear of south India. "On the occasion of 15th Reunion & 35th BBCC of the Madras Regiment, Lt Gen Manjinder Singh, AVSM, YSM, VSM, GOCinC, ARTRAC and COLONEL of the Madras Regiment in the best secular traditions of Indian Army performed the sacred Kumbhabhishekam ceremony at the Murugan Temple of the Madras Regimental Centre, Wellington on 01 May 2024," the ARTRAC posted. "The ceremony was attended by the #Veterans and Serving Officers, JCOs & NCOs of the Madras

Regiment," it said. Underlining the ethos of the Indian Army, a senior official said, "Though, it is not a new thing for commanders in the Army to adhere to such a practice, yet the beauty of the ceremony doubled due to the gracious embracing of traditional south Indian 'dhoti' by a Sikh officer." The ARTRAC post has gained wide traction on X and has garnered appreciation from many people. "The Madras Regiment stands as one of the most distinguished regiments in the Indian Army, with a history that dates back to the 1750s. As the oldest regiment, it has been at the forefront of upholding the secular traditions of the Indian Army, a reflection of the nation's pluralistic society," the senior Army official said. The official said the regiment's ethos is vividly displayed in its religious functions, which are conducted in South Indian traditions. "These ceremonies are inclusive, respecting the diverse religious beliefs of its soldiers while maintaining a unified regimental spirit," he said.

SC stays High Court order to remove protesters from Chandigarh, Mohali road

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has stayed an order of the Punjab and Haryana High Court asking authorities to clear the Chandigarh-Mohali road blocked by a group of protesters.

A bench of justices BR Gavai, Satish Chandra Sharma and Sandeep Mehta issued notice on a plea of the Punjab government and sought the response of an NGO, which has filed the plea, the Centre and the Chandigarh administration among others. During the hearing, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said it is supporting the stand of the Punjab government.

Mehta said, "Federalism is always protected except when it comes to corruption. In Covid times, every state and the Centre worked together." Punjab advocate general Gurminder Singh said the high court order be stayed. In its orders dated April 9, passed in a batch of PILs, the high court said despite repeated opportunities given, neither the state of Punjab nor the Union territory of Chandigarh has been able to



give any redressal to the commuters of Chandigarh and SAS Nagar Mohali. "On account of a handful of people sitting and blocking the road, inconvenience is being caused to the commuters and residents of the Tri-city and the misery is continuing," it had said. It had noted that the Centre was also impleaded as party on October 9 last year in the matter. It is also to be noticed that the Director General of Police, Punjab, had also been summoned in the matter almost one year ago.

"Only on account of the fact that some of the protesters have been hiding behind a shield of religious legitimacy by placing the Guru Granth Sahib would not as such give the State reason not to act against the persons concerned, who are misusing the religious sentiments," it had said. The high court said it is also apparent from the photographs which have been placed on record that there is no large gathering. "In spite of the fact that it is well known that all the agita-

tors from the rural background are busy in harvesting and it is most opportune time to remove the blockage of the road, the State of Punjab and the Union Territory, Chandigarh, are dragging their feet for the reasons best known to them," it had said in its interim order.

The high court, while deferring the proceedings, further said it is hoping the Punjab and Chandigarh administration will wake up from their slumber and keep in mind the observations of the apex court given in various verdicts related to protests on roads. The high court had passed the order on a plea of NGO Arrive Safe Society which contended that local residents and commuters are facing unnecessary harassment because of the protest/morcha on the Chandigarh-Mohali road that have been ongoing since January 2023. The protesters have been seeking the release of Sikh prisoners, including Balwant Singh Rajoana, a convict in the former Punjab chief minister Beant Singh's assassination, and Devinderpal Singh Bhullar, a 1993 Delhi bomb blast convict.

Afghan diplomat resigns after report of smuggling 25 kg gold

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Zakia Wardak, the senior-most Afghan diplomat in India, has resigned from her position after reports emerged that she was caught at Mumbai airport last month for allegedly trying to smuggle 25 kg of gold worth Rs 18.6 crore from Dubai. Wardak had taken charge as the acting ambassador of Afghanistan to New Delhi since late last year after working as the Afghan Consul General in Mumbai for over two years.

In a statement posted on 'X', the Afghan diplomat said she decided to resign in view of numerous personal attacks on her that severely impacted her ability to effectively operate. She, however, did not mention the reports of the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) seizing 25 kg of gold from her at the Mumbai airport on April 25. It is learnt that the DRI did not arrest Wardak as enjoyed diplomatic immunity. "It is with great regret that I announce my decision to step away from my role at the consulate and embassy of



Afghanistan in India, effective May 5," she said. "Over the past year, I have encountered numerous personal attacks and defamation not only directed towards me but also towards my close family and extended relatives," she said. Wardak took charge of the Afghan embassy in New Delhi last November after the mission helmed by then ambassador Farid Mamundzay announced its closure. Mamundzay had moved to the UK. There was no comment by Indian officials on Wardak's resignation.

on those close to me. It is not fair to subject them to such unwarranted and horribly unfair experiences," she said. "The persistent and coordinated nature of these attacks, aimed at defaming my character and undermining my efforts, have surpassed a tolerable threshold," Wardak added.

"It has become increasingly clear that the public narrative is unfairly targeting the only female representative within this system, rather than focusing on constructive assistance and support," she said. "While it is my passion to serve my country and contribute to positive change, I find it necessary to prioritize my well-being and ability to function in a normal capacity. Therefore, I have made the difficult decision to resign from my current role." The Afghan diplomat also thanked India for its "unwavering support" during her tenure in the country. "It has been a great privilege working alongside the people of India for the past three years. I am grateful for the collaborative efforts and shared vision for progress between nations," she said.

"These attacks, which appear to be organised, have severely impacted my ability to effectively operate in my role and have demonstrated the challenges faced by women in Afghan society who strive to modernise and bring positive change amidst ongoing propaganda campaigns," Wardak said in her statement. She said the "persistent and coordinated" attacks have surpassed a "tolerable threshold". "While attacks on me and my character were not altogether surprising, as being in public life is something I had prepared myself for, I was unprepared for the toll it took

Hamas in Cairo as Egyptian media report progress in ceasefire talks

AP ■ TEL AVIV (ISRAEL)

A delegation of the Palestinian militant group Hamas was in Cairo on Saturday as Egyptian state media reported “noticeable progress” in ongoing cease-fire talks with Israel while an Israeli official downplayed the prospects for a truce. Pressure has been mounting to reach a deal — Gaza’s humanitarian crisis is dramatically escalating while Israel insists it will launch an offensive into Rafah, the territory’s southern-most city. The stakes are high to find a halt to the nearly seven-months-long war. More than 1 million Palestinians are sheltering in the city of Rafah, along the border with Egypt, many having fled northern Gaza where a top UN official says there is now a full-blown famine. Egyptian and American mediators have reported signs of compromise in recent days but chances for a cease-fire deal remain entangled with the key question of whether Israel will

accept an end to the war without reaching its stated goal of destroying Hamas. Egyptian state Al-Qahera news said Saturday that a consensus has been reached over many of the disputed points but did not elaborate. Hamas has called for a complete end to the war and withdrawal of all Israeli forces from Gaza. The war has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza’s local health officials, caused widespread destruction and plunged the territory into an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The conflict erupted on October 7, when Hamas attacked southern Israel, abducting about 250 people and killing around 1,200, mostly civilians. Israel says militants still hold around 100 hostages and the remains of more than 30 others. A senior Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss ongoing negotiations, played down the prospects for an end to the war. The official told The Associated Press that Israel will not agree

in any circumstance to end the war as part of a deal to release hostages. Israeli strikes early Saturday on Gaza killed at least six people. Three bodies were recovered from the rubble of a building in Rafah and taken to Yousef Al Najjar hospital. A strike in the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza also killed three people, according to hospital officials. In the last 24 hours, the bodies of 32 people killed by Israeli strikes have been brought to local hospitals, Gaza’s health ministry said Saturday. In related developments this week, Israel briefed Biden administration officials on plans to evacuate civilians ahead of the Rafah operation, according to US officials familiar with the talks. The United Nations has warned that hundreds of thousands would be “at imminent risk of death” if Israel moves forward into the densely packed city, which is also a critical entry point for humanitarian aid.

The US director of the UN World Food Program, Cindy McCain, said Friday that trapped civilians in the north, the most cut-off part of Gaza, have plunged into famine. McCain said a cease-fire and a greatly increased flow of aid through land and sea routes was essential. Israel recently opened new crossings for aid into northern Gaza, but on Wednesday, Israeli settlers blocked the first convoy before it crossed into the besieged enclave. Once inside Gaza, the convoy was commandeered by Hamas militants, before UN officials reclaimed it. The proposal that Egyptian mediators had put to Hamas sets out a three-stage process that would bring an immediate, six-week cease-fire and partial release of Israeli hostages, and would include some sort of Israeli pullout. The initial stage would last for 40 days. Hamas would start by releasing female civilian hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

Israel has briefed US on plan to evacuate Palestinian civilians ahead of Rafah op

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Israel this week briefed Biden administration officials on a plan to evacuate Palestinian civilians ahead of a potential operation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah aimed at rooting out Hamas militants, according to US officials familiar with the talks. The officials, who were not authorised to comment publicly and requested anonymity to speak about the sensitive exchange, said that the plan detailed by the Israelis did not change the US administration’s view that moving forward with an operation in Rafah would put too many innocent Palestinian civilians at risk. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to carry out a military operation in Rafah despite warnings from President Joe Biden and other western officials that doing so would result in more civilian deaths and worsen an already dire humanitarian crisis. The Biden administration has said that there could be conse-

quences for Israel should it move forward with the operation without a credible plan to safeguard civilians. Some 1.5 million Palestinians have sheltered in the southern Gaza city as the territory has been ravaged by the war that began on October 7 after Hamas militants attacked Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking about 250 hostages. The United Nations humanitarian aid agency on Friday said that hundreds of thousands of people would be “at imminent risk of death” if Israel moves forward with the Rafah assault. The border city is a critical entry point for humanitarian aid and is filled with displaced Palestinians, many in densely packed tent camps. The officials added that the evacuation plan that the Israelis briefed was not finalized and both sides agreed to keep discussing the matter. White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters on Friday that no “comprehensive” plan for a potential Rafah operation has been revealed by the Israelis to

the White House. The operation, however, has been discussed during recent calls between Biden and Netanyahu as well as during recent virtual talks with top Israeli and US national security officials. “We want to make sure that those conversations continue because it is important to protect those Palestinian lives — those innocent lives,” Jean-Pierre said. The revelation of Israel’s continued push to carry out a Rafah operation came as CIA director William Burns arrived Friday in Egypt, where negotiators are trying to seal a cease-fire accord between Israel and Hamas. Hamas is considering the latest proposal for a cease-fire and hostage release put forward by US, Egyptian and Qatari mediators, who are looking to avert the Rafah operation. They have publicly pressed Hamas to accept the terms of the deal that would lead to an extended cease-fire and an exchange of Israeli hostages taken captive on October 7 and

Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. Hamas has said it will send a delegation to Cairo in the coming days for further discussions on the offer, though it has not specified when. Israel, and its allies, have sought to increase pressure on Hamas on the hostage negotiation. Signaling that Israel continues to move forward with its planning for a Rafah operation could be a tactic to nudge the militants to finalise the deal. Netanyahu said earlier this week that Israeli forces would enter Rafah, which Israel says is Hamas’ last stronghold, regardless of whether a truce-for-hostages deal is struck. His comments appeared to be meant to appease his nationalist governing partners, and it was not clear whether they would have any bearing on any emerging deal with Hamas. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited the region, including Israel, this week and called the latest proposal “extraordinarily generous” and said “the time to act is now.”



President Joe Biden awards the nation’s highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, to Michelle Yeoh during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House, on Friday in Washington. AP/PTI

King Charles III takes over hundreds of charity patronages on Coronation anniv

PTI ■ LONDON

Britain’s King Charles has significantly increased his charity patronages by nearly 300 this weekend to mark the first anniversary of his Coronation in May last year, taking over several that Buckingham Palace said were supported by his mother late Queen Elizabeth II. The palace said a major review of more than 1,000 royal patronages and charity presidencies was undertaken following the 75-year-old monarch’s accession to the throne in September 2022 after the death of his mother. Other working members of the royal family, including wife Camilla and son and heir Prince William, will also take on the patronage of a number of organisations previously supported by the late Queen to add to their existing portfolios. “The King and Queen [Camilla] will continue to serve as patron to many of the charities and institutions with which His Majesty was affiliated as Prince of Wales, and respectively Her Majesty as Duchess of Cornwall,” a Buckingham Palace statement said on Saturday. “In addition, their Majesties are pleased to continue the patronage of a great variety of charities and organisations previously supported by Queen Elizabeth II... Royal patronage highlights the vital work of these organisations and allows their many achievements and valuable contributions to society to be more widely recognised and promoted,” it said. “With his long record of support for the Commonwealth and as a champion of the environment, he embodies the values to which the Royal Commonwealth Society aspires, and which inspires our work to make a practical difference in the lives of the 2.6 billion people who make up the Commonwealth family,” said Dr Linda Yueh, Executive Chair of the Royal Commonwealth Society.

Probe accuses India of influencing Canadian politics, communities

PTI ■ OTTAWA

Indian officials, including Canada-based proxies, engage in a range of activities that seek to influence Canadian communities and politicians to “align” Ottawa’s position with New Delhi’s interests on key issues, particularly concerns over Khalistani separatists in Canada, an official probe has found. The findings in the interim report by Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue, who is leading the independent public inquiry, found evidence of foreign interference in Canada’s last two federal elections in 2019 and 2021 but the results of the votes were not affected and the electoral system was robust. India has previously rejected as “baseless” the allegations of its interference in Canadian elections and asserted that the core issue has been Ottawa’s meddling in New Delhi’s internal affairs. The report, published on Friday said the People’s Republic of China (“PRC”) stands out as the main perpetrator of foreign interference against Canada. “China has been assessed by Canadian authorities as the most active foreign state actor engaged in interference directed at government officials, political organisations, candidates for political office and diaspora communities,” it said. On India, the report said: “Indian officials, including Canada-based proxies, engage in a range of activities that seek to influence Canadian communities and politicians. These activities include

foreign interference, which aims to align Canada’s position with India’s interests on key issues, particularly with respect to how the Indian government perceives Canada-based supporters of an independent Sikh homeland (Khalistan).” India’s interest in Canada relates to Canada’s large South Asian community. India views part of these communities as fostering an anti-India sentiment, and represents a threat to India’s stability and national security, it said. “India does not differentiate between lawful, pro-Khalistani political advocacy and the relatively small Canada-based Khalistani violent extremism. It views anyone aligned with Khalistani separatism as a seditious threat to India,” the report said. “We strongly reject all such baseless allegations of Indian interference in Canadian elections,” External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in New Delhi in February. “It is not the government of India’s policy to interfere in the democratic processes of other countries. In fact, quite on the reverse, it is Canada which has been interfering in our internal affairs,” Jaiswal said in response to a question. The Canadian probe report said that the targets of Indian foreign interference are often members of the Indo-Canadian communities, but prominent non-Indo-Canadians are also subject to India’s foreign influence activities. These activities may not be directed at influencing Canada’s democratic institutions, but are still significant, it said.

Ready to hold talks but not for striking any deal, says Imran

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan’s jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has said that he is ready to hold talks but not to strike a “deal” with anyone who has stolen his party’s mandate in the February 8 general election. Talking to journalists at the high-security Adiala jail in Rawalpindi on Friday, the 71-year-old Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf founder asserted that negotiations were held only with adversaries and therefore the talks should be held with those who were the biggest opponents of PTI at present, apparently a reference to the military establishment, the Dawn newspaper reported on Saturday. Underlining that he had been saying for 18 months that he was ready to hold negotiations but not to strike a deal, Khan reiterated that his party would hold talks with everyone but

the three parties, the Geo News reported. “Someone who wants to leave the country or avoid imprisonment makes a deal,” he said, in an apparent reference to PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif. Khan named Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Omar Ayub and Leader of the Opposition in Senate Shibli Faraz for holding negotiations. “I have proposed these three names for talks and not for a deal,” he said. The February 8 general elections delivered a fractured mandate. Independent candidates, a majority of them backed by Khan’s PTI, won 93 seats in the 336-member National Assembly. Former three-time prime minister Nawaz Sharif’s Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) won 75 seats while the

Bilawal Zardari Bhutto-led Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) came third with 54 seats. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) won 17 seats. Khan’s PTI party has maintained that the powerful establishment had favoured Sharif’s PML-N and that the Election Commission of Pakistan deliberately used a different form to declare the results to “steal the mandate” that belonged to it. The PML-N struck a post-poll deal with Bhutto’s PPP and four smaller parties and formed the government in March. Khan reiterated that he was “always ready for talks, but it could only take place when their stolen mandate was returned and innocent imprisoned workers were released,” the Dawn newspaper quoted PTI’s media department as saying on Friday. Without naming anyone, Khan told reporters that “they” were

going to lodge the fourth case against him concerning the Toshakhana gifts. They should make whatever the cases they wanted all at once, he added. Khan’s statement came a day after PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan claimed that his party was neither holding dialogues with anyone nor had any special message for talks. Gohar, speaking to journalists outside Rawalpindi’s Adiala Jail, said that the former premier was facing “politically motivated” cases. He added that the PTI founder requested the judiciary to give judgements on his cases at the earliest, the Geo News reported. “Ali Amin Gandapur, Omar Ayub Khan and Shibli Faraz have been given the go-ahead to hold talks, but not to strike a deal,” Gohar said, adding that they were to talk to anyone except three political parties.

Yoga officially makes debut in Pak

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

After making global headlines, the ancient Indian physical, mental and spiritual practice of yoga has officially arrived in neighbouring Pakistan. According to the official Facebook page of the Capital Development Authority (CDA), which is responsible for the upkeep of Islamabad, the Metropolitan Corporation of Islamabad has launched “Free yoga classes in F-9 Park” in the capital. “Many people have already

joined in to kickstart their journey towards health and wellness,” the CDA said. It also posted pictures of people taking part in the yoga exercises. Recognising its universal appeal, the United Nations on 11 December 2014 proclaimed 21 June as the International Day of Yoga. A draft resolution establishing the International Day of Yoga was proposed by India and endorsed by a record 175 member states. Yoga is normally linked with India and there are not many

formal institutions in Pakistan to teach yoga. Though privately people like the physical part of yoga exercises. Many residents appreciated the move to organise Yoga classes with several people inquiring about the programme. A step at the official level to organise yoga at the most prominent park of the capital is a welcome move and may send a positive message across the border amidst a chill in bilateral ties over the Kashmir issue and cross-border terrorism. “Good job I really appreciate your work CDA pls send the timing,” Shahid Iqbal, a resident, commented. However, some criticised the CDA for failing to provide decent residential facilities to the people of Islamabad and instead resorting to showcasing sideshows. Ghulam Mustafa said in his comments that CDA failed to develop new sectors. “For God’s sake concentrate on your core functions and develop the residential sectors you failed to develop during the last 35 years,” he said.

Striking deals to end campus protests, some colleges invite discussion of their investments

AP ■ NEW YORK

Anti-war demonstrations ceased this week at a small number of US universities after school leaders struck deals with pro-Palestinian protesters, fending off possible disruptions of final exams and graduation ceremonies. The agreements at schools including Brown, Northwestern and Rutgers stand out amidst the chaotic scenes and 2,400-plus arrests on 46 campuses nationwide since April 17. Tent encampments and building takeovers have disrupted classes at some schools, including Columbia and UCLA. Deals included commitments by universities to review their investments in Israel or hear calls to stop doing business with the longtime US ally. Many protester demands have zeroed in on links to the Israeli military as the war grinds on in Gaza. The agreements to even discuss divestment mark a major shift on an

issue that has been controversial for years, with opponents of a long-running campaign to boycott Israel saying it veers into antisemitism. But while the colleges have made concessions around amnesty for protesters and funding for Middle Eastern studies, they have made no promises about changing their investments. “I think for some universities, it might be just a delaying tactic to diffuse the protests,” said Ralph Young, a history professor who studies American dissent at Temple University in Philadelphia. “The end of the semester is happening now. And maybe by the time the next semester begins, there is a cease-fire in Gaza.” Some university boards may never even vote on divesting from Israel, which can be a complicated process, Young said. And some state schools have said they lack the authority to do so. But Young said dialogue is a better

tactic than arrests, which can inflame protesters. Talking “at least gives the protesters the feeling that they’re getting somewhere,” he said. “Whether they are getting somewhere or not is another question.” Israel has called the protests antisemitic; its critics say the country uses such allegations to silence opposition. Although some protesters were caught on camera making antisemitic remarks or violent threats, protest organisers — some of whom are Jewish — have called it a peaceful movement to defend Palestinian rights and protest the war. Administrators at the University of California, Riverside, announced an agreement Friday with protesters to close their campus encampment. The deal included the formation of a task force to explore removing Riverside’s endowment from the broader UC system’s management and investing those funds “in a man-

ner that will be financially and ethically sound for the university with consideration to the companies involved in arms manufacturing and delivery.” The announcement marked an apparent split with the policy of the 10-campus UC system, which last week said it opposes “calls for boycott against and divestment from Israel.” “While the University affirms the right of our community members to express diverse viewpoints, a boycott of this sort impinges on the academic freedom of our students and faculty and the unfettered exchange of ideas on our campuses,” the system said in a statement. “UC tuition and fees are the primary funding sources for the University’s core operations. None of these funds are used for investment purposes.” Demonstrators at Rutgers University — where finals were paused due to the protests on its New Brunswick campus — similarly packed up

their tents Thursday afternoon. The state university agreed to establish an Arab Cultural Centre and to not retaliate against any students involved in the camp. In a statement, Chancellor Francine Conway noted protesters’ request for divestment from companies doing business with Israel and for Rutgers to cut ties with Tel Aviv University. She said the request is under review, but “such decisions fall outside of our administrative scope.” Protesters at Brown University in Rhode Island agreed to dismantle their encampment Tuesday. School officials said students could present arguments for divesting Brown’s endowment from companies contributing to and profiting from the war in Gaza. In addition, Brown President Christina Paxson will ask an advisory committee to make a recommendation on divestment by Sept. 30, which will be put before the

school’s governing corporation for a vote in October. Northwestern’s Deering Meadow in suburban Chicago also fell silent after an agreement Monday. The deal curbed protest activity in return for the reestablishment of an advisory committee on university investments and other commitments. The arrangement drew dissent from both sides. Some pro-Palestinian protesters condemned it as a failure to stick to their original demands, while some supporters of Israel said it represented “cowardly” capitulation. Seven of 18 members subsequently resigned from a university committee that advises the administration on addressing antisemitism, Islamophobia and expressions of hatred on campus, saying they couldn’t continue to serve “with antisemitism so present at Northwestern in public view for the past week.” Michael Simon, the executive direc-

tor of an organisation for Jewish students, Northwestern Hillel, said he resigned after concluding that the committee could not achieve its goals. Faculty at Pomona College in California voted in favour of divesting from companies they said are funding Israel’s war in Gaza, a group of faculty and students said Friday. The vote Thursday is not binding on the liberal arts school of nearly 1,800 students east of Los Angeles. But supporters said they hope it would encourage the board to stop investing in these companies and start divesting where it makes its investments. “This nonbinding faculty statement does not represent any official position of Pomona College,” the school said in a statement. “We will continue to encourage further dialogue within our community, including consideration of counterarguments.”

Government lifts ban on onion exports

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Saturday lifted the ban on onion exports subject to a minimum export price of USD 550 per tonne, a decision that can help boost income of a large section of farmers and comes ahead of the Lok Sabha polls in key producing regions including Maharashtra. The government has imposed a minimum export price (MEP) of USD 550 per tonne (around Rs 46 per kg) as well as 40 per cent export duty. Taking duty into account, the shipments will not be allowed below USD 770 per tonne (around Rs 64 per kg). On December 8 last year, the Centre had banned onion exports in early December to control retail prices amid concerns over likely fall in production. During the last 4-5 years, the country annually exported between 17 lakh and 25 lakh tonnes of onions. Consumer Affairs Secretary Nidhi Khare said the lifting of the ban would not lead to any price rise in retail markets. "Prices will remain stable. If at all there is any increase, it should be very marginal," she said, while asserting that the government is committed to protect the interests of both consumers and farmers.

Earlier in the day, the directorate general of foreign trade (DGFT) said in a notification that "the export policy of onions is amended from prohibited to free subject to MEP of USD 550 per metric tonne with immediate effect and until further orders." Last night, the finance ministry imposed a 40 per cent export duty. The decision assumes importance as it comes before the crucial Lok Sabha polls in key onion belts like Nashik, Ahmednagar and Solapur in Maharashtra. Farmers of this region have been demanding a lifting of the ban so that they can get a better price for their produce. Explaining the rationale behind the decision, Khare said the "ban on onion exports has been removed from today (Saturday) because the supply situation is comfortable and prices are stable in both mandies as well as retail markets." The modal price at Lasalgaon mandi in Nashik was Rs 15 per kg in April. She said the decision has been taken after considering the latest estimates of onion production in rabi season at 191 lakh tonnes, which is comfortable. Availability and



prices of onion in global markets were also factored in while taking this decision. The secretary said the monthly domestic demand of onion is around 17 lakh tonnes. "Lifting of the ban would also encourage the farmers to put more area under onions. The monsoon forecast is above normal," Khare said. The secretary noted that the decision has been taken after wider discussions with stakeholders. A high-level team also visited key onion producing belts in

Maharashtra to assess the ground situation. Khare also pointed out that the shelf life of onions is less and therefore a need was felt to export onions. The secretary said that the government is procuring 5 lakh tonnes of onions as buffer stock, so that it can intervene in the market in case of price rise. "We are continuously monitoring the prices of all essential food items. We will continue to keep a watch on the availability and price situation," she said.

A senior government official explained that there is an inter-ministerial committee (IMC) which reviews the prices, production, availability and exports of essential food items including onions. "So do not think of this as an isolated instance of decision making by IMC," the official said, when asked whether the decision has been made in view of general elections. The official said the IMC has been taking a series of steps in various commodities including wheat and rice to

boost domestic supply and keep prices under check. In March, the Union Agriculture Ministry released the data for onion production. As per the data, onion production in 2023-24 (First Advance Estimates) is expected to be around 254.73 lakh tonnes compared to around 302.08 lakh tonnes last year. This is due to a decrease of 34.31 lakh tonnes output in Maharashtra, 9.95 lakh tonnes in Karnataka, 3.54 lakh tonnes in Andhra Pradesh and 3.12 lakh tonnes in Rajasthan, the data showed. Last month, in an official statement, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution said the government has allowed export of 99,150 tonnes of onion to six neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, UAE, Bhutan, Bahrain, Mauritius and Sri Lanka. The Congress last month accused the Narendra Modi government of "callously neglecting" Maharashtra's onion farmers affected due to the ban on onion exports and said that its manifesto promises a predictable import-export policy to prevent such catastrophic last-minute policies being imposed on farmers.



NCLT registers 43 per cent jump in debt resolution cases: IBBI

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Among several bottlenecks, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) declared 2023-24 as a landmark year, with the National Company Law Tribunal achieving a significant 43 per cent increase in resolutions, jumping from 189 cases last year to 270 this year. The IBBI is expected to submit a report to the government over the next 2-3 months for including "mediation" in the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), which is currently under discussion and scrutiny. The regulator is also working on prepackaged insolvency for large corporate cases, which is only allowed in MSME cases as of now. For the first time in a year, the number of outputs has increased from the number of inputs, reducing the pendency across India, said Sudhaker Shukla, an IBBI whole-time member, while addressing the CII organised 7th Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code conclave. He said that despite bottlenecks in the last seven years, resolution of 3.5 lakh crore was achieved, and 27,000 applications worth Rs 10 lakh crore were withdrawn, making the IBC a powerful tool for debt resolution in the country. Shukla stated that the law has evolved over time and that the interventions to improve it have been remarkable. "In 2023-24, around 12 amendments and 86 interventions have been made in the IBC within a single year. This portrays that we are responding to market requirements to bridge the gaps," he said. He further added that a sectoral approach has been adopted to address unique problems for a speedy resolution, like in real estate. "We are trying to follow the sandbox approach. The recent amendments were made on real estate where project-wise resolution was made, keeping the allotted houses from liquidation was a big step forward in a sectoral approach," Shukla said. Speaking about the demand for mediation and prepacks for insolvency for large accounts, Shukla said it was currently under scrutiny and in the next 2-3 months, it will be submitted to the government. He further said prepacks for large accounts were also under consideration as they aim for speedy resolution. Prepackaged insolvency involves negotiating and agreeing on a resolution plan between the debtor and its creditors before going into formal bankruptcy. P. Santhosh, Managing Director of NARCL, the government-backed bad bank, asserted that a delay in resolution will deteriorate the quality of the asset, making revival difficult. "There are multiple factors contributing to this delay, and to avoid it, coordination with financial creditors is crucial. The concept of Prepack insolvency is yet to be adopted. However, many practitioners have discussed that this is one of the tools that can be extended to larger corporate disputes. Initially, there could be a promoter-led resolution plan, which can be improved over time," he said.



Air India reduces cabin baggage allowance to 15 kg for lowest fare segment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Loss-making Air India has reduced the free cabin baggage allowance to 15 kilogram from 20 kilogram for the lowest economy fare segment on domestic flights. The changes have been made in the menu-based pricing model fare families that were introduced by the Tata Group-owned Air India last August, with the airline saying that a one-size-fits-all approach is no longer ideal. There are three fare families - Comfort, Comfort Plus and Flex -- that offer different levels of benefits and fare restrictions at various price points, an airline spokesperson said on Saturday. With effect from May 2, the free cabin baggage allowance for the 'Comfort' and 'Comfort Plus' categories has been reduced to 15 kg from 20 kg and 25 kg, respectively. Prior to the introduction of the fare families concept, passengers on Air India's domestic flights were allowed to carry 25 kilograms of cabin baggage free of any additional charge. "On domestic routes in Economy Class, both 'Comfort' and 'Comfort Plus' fare families now provide 15 kg baggage allowance, while 'Flex' provides 25 kg allowance. "The Business Class baggage allowance on domestic routes ranges from 25 kg to 35 kg.

The free baggage allowance on international flights varies from market to market," the spokesperson said. In other domestic airlines also, passengers are allowed to carry 15 kg of cabin baggage without additional charge. The Air India spokesperson said the fare families are designed to let passengers choose the kind of fare and services that best suit their requirements, given that travellers today have varied preferences, and a one-size-fits-all approach is no longer ideal. Elaborating on the proposition, the spokesperson said that for example, the price difference between 'Comfort Plus' and 'Flex' fares would typically be around Rs 1,000 in a domestic sector like Delhi-Mumbai, with the 'Flex' fare providing the value of nearly Rs 9,000, including 10 kilograms extra baggage and zero change or cancellation fees. The introduction of fare families is in response to customer feedback and Air India's own comprehensive study. It is also benchmarked against the offerings of relevant competition in each of the markets we have introduced it in, the spokesperson added. Tata Group has embarked on an ambitious plan to revive the fortunes of the loss-making Air India, which it had acquired from the government in 2022.

JK Bank reports highest ever annual profit of ₹1,767 crore for FY24

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

Jammu and Kashmir Bank on Saturday reported its highest-ever annual profit at Rs 1,767 crore for 2023-24. Its Managing Director and CEO Baldev Prakash said the net profit surged 48 per cent compared to the previous fiscal. "Beating its own highest-ever record of profits achieved only last year, the net profit surged in fiscal 2023-24 by 48 per cent to achieve its record profit figure of Rs 1,767 crore," Prakash told PTI after the bank's annual results for FY 2023-24 were released bank here. He said the bank will be sharing the historic profits with its shareholders by



making the highest dividend payment of around Rs 236.75 crore this year. The bank witnessed a 10 per cent increase in its total income to Rs 6,029.17 crore

from Rs 5,502.09 crore. It had posted a profit of Rs 1,197 crore last fiscal, which was the highest profit till last year. Prakash said the bank's asset

quality has improved by bringing the gross non-performing assets to a decadal low of 4.08 per cent, while the net non-performing assets to 0.79 per cent. With a provision coverage ratio (PCR) at 91.58 per cent, J&K Bank has reiterated its commitment to prudential provisioning and risk mitigation. On the business growth, Prakash said the bank's total deposits rose 10.44 per cent year-on-year to Rs 1,34,774.89 crore as of March 31, 2024, from Rs 1,22,037.74 crore recorded a year ago. Its net advances rose 14 per cent to Rs 93,762.51 crore in Q4 for FY2023-24 from Rs 82,285.45 crore a year ago.

Tata Renewable signs pact with SJVN for 460 MW clean energy project



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Power Renewable Energy Ltd (TPREL) on Saturday said it has signed an agreement with state-owned SJVN Ltd to set up a 460 MW Firm and Dispatchable Renewable Energy (FDRE) project. An FDRE plant enables round-the-clock power supply, assisting power

distribution companies (discoms) in fulfilling their Renewable Purchase Obligations (RPOs) and Energy Storage Obligations (ESOs). "The plant, designed to meet the 460 MW FDRE requirement, integrates solar, wind, and battery storage technologies to ensure efficient energy dispatch during peak hours, thereby stabilizing the grid," it said.

The plant is expected to generate nearly 3,000 million units (MUs) of power and offset 2,200 million kgs of CO2 emissions annually, TPREL said in a statement. "This partnership with SJVN Ltd will witness the deployment of sustainable energy solutions from TPREL. It will go a long way in meeting the green energy objectives of SJVN Ltd," said Deepesh Nanda, CEO and Managing Director, Tata Power Renewable Energy Ltd. With this addition, the total renewables capacity of TPREL has reached 9,421 MW (PPA capacity is 7,978 MW) including 4,906 MW projects under various stages of implementation. The company's operational capacity stood at 4,515 MW, which includes 3,485 MW solar and 1,030 MW wind power.



CDSL Q4 profit doubles to ₹129 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leading depository CDSL on Saturday said its net profit doubled to Rs 129 crore for the three months ended March 2024. It had posted a net profit of Rs 63 crore in the same quarter a year ago, Central Depository Services (India) Ltd (CDSL) said in a statement. Total income rose 86 per cent to Rs 267 crore in March quarter 2023-24 from Rs 144 crore in the year-ago period. For entire financial year 2023-24, the depository clocked a net profit of Rs 420 crore,

marking a surge of 52 per cent from the preceding year. Total income stood at Rs 907 crore in FY24, a growth of 46 per cent. CDSL had over 11.56 crore demat accounts in March this year. "We remain committed to empowering market participants with digital services like ASBA, e-AGM, eDIS, and Margin pledge mechanism. These tools enhance capital market efficiency and security, and our sustained business and financial growth is a result of the trust placed in us by the

stakeholders of the capital markets," Nehal Vora, MD & CEO said. The board also recommended a final dividend of Rs 19 per equity share for FY24, subject to approval of shareholders. Additionally, a special dividend of Rs 3 per equity share was recommended, bringing the total dividend payout to Rs 22 per equity share. This is subject to approval of shareholders. CDSL facilitates holding and transacting in securities in the electronic form and settlement of trades on stock exchanges.

BUSINESS BRIEF

DR ACHARYA TAKES NSIC CMD CHARGE
Dr. Subhransu Sekhar Acharya took over the charge of Chairman-cum-Managing Director (CMD), The National Small Industries Corporation Ltd. on May 2, 2024. Prior to his present assignment, Dr. Acharya was the Chief General Manager, Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), New Delhi. Dr. Acharya is a Ph.D in Management, Post Graduate in Science (M.Sc.), a Post Graduate in Business Administration (MBA) and a Certified Associate of Indian Institute of Banking & Finance (CAIIB). He has experience of over 3 decades in various facets of MSME Financing and Development including Credit, SME Rating, Risk Management, Bills Financing, New Product Development, Business Planning, Entrepreneurship Development, Innovation financing, Micro-Finance, Start-Up mentoring etc.

TATA POWER-DDL ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF 'GREEN WARRIORS 2.0'
Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (Tata Power-DDL), a leading power utility supplying electricity to a population of 8 million in North Delhi has announced the winners of "Green Warriors 2.0", - a sustainability awareness initiative. The first edition of the "Green Warriors" campaign focused on inspiring young minds on environmental conservation and saw an amazing response. In line with Tata Power-DDL's commitment to fostering sustainable practices, this campaign series is aligned with the "Urja Arpan" initiative and was run from December 2023-January 2024. The initiative is aligned with India's ambitious goal of reaching Net Zero emissions by 2070 and 50 per cent of electricity requirements from renewable energy sources by 2030.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Paper industry urges Government to allot degraded land for pulpwood plantation

The Indian paper industry has urged the government to provide degraded land on a long-term lease to paper mills for pulpwood plantation to address raw material shortage and boost rural employment. The industry has highlighted that a large chunk of degraded land is available in the country, and even if a small fraction of that is allotted on lease to paper mills for pulpwood plantation, it can be a game changer for industry growth and greening of India. The paper industry has faced shortage of wood, the key raw material, and it is the biggest concern for mills in India, the Indian Paper Manufacturers Association (IPMA) said in a statement on Saturday. While the paper industry is continuing with agro forestry efforts, pulpwood plantations need to be enhanced rapidly to meet the requirements of domestic industry, the IPMA

stated. "Even if a fraction of the degraded land available in the country is provided on lease to the industry for pulpwood plantation, the same can be a game changer for growth of domestic manufacturing, rural empowerment and greening of India," it said. "We have been trying to convince the government that this land can be given to the paper industry on long-term lease. It will provide the desired quantity of wood not only to paper mills, but to several wood-based industries while generating a huge amount of rural employment," IPMA President Pawan Agarwal said. If domestic agro forestry is



not encouraged, import of wastepaper and wood pulp will have to be further increased causing heavy strain on the industry and

economy, Agarwal added. The IPMA also said that for procurement of wood, the industry has worked incessantly with over 5 lakh

marginal farmers over the last several years and has successfully brought over 12 lakh hectares of largely degraded land under

plantations through agro forestry. The IPMA estimates a growth of 6-7 per cent per annum in paper consumption in the country for many years. Suitability of paper as biodegradable and sustainable material for packaging, especially for replacing single-use plastic is boosting the usage of paper across different sectors of the economy, IPMA mentioned. It stated that the move will also help reduce carbon footprint of the country. India needs to bring an additional 25-30 million hectares of degraded land under forest and tree cover to create an additional carbon sink of 2.5-3 billion tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent by 2030, it added.



ROHIT TO LEAD INDIAN JUNIOR MEN'S HOCKEY TEAM FOR EUROPE TOUR

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Defender Rohit has been named captain of the Indian junior men's hockey team, with Shardanand Tiwari as his deputy in a 20-member squad which will tour Europe from May 20-29. India will play five matches across three nations -- Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands -- during the tour, as part of Hockey India's initiative to help the team gain exposure and experience. "We have been training hard at

our camp and have developed an understanding of each other's gameplay," said captain Rohit in a Hockey India release. "It will be wonderful to play together against teams from other nations to help us build on our game and get better through this kind of exposure." India will play their first match on May 20 against Belgium in Antwerp, before playing the same opponents in Breda, Netherlands on May 22. India will then play the Netherlands' Club team Bredase Hockey

Vereniging Push in Breda on May 23, followed by a game against Germany on May 28 in Germany. They will then return to Breda to play Germany once again on 29th May in their final match of the tour. India vice-captain Shardanand Tiwari said, "This will be a wonderful experience and will go a long way in evaluating where we stand as a team and as individual players. "It will be a great way to figure out our strengths and what areas we would need to touch upon."

SQUAD:
Goalkeepers: Prince Deep Singh, Bikramjit Singh.
Defenders: Shardanand Tiwari, Yogember Rawat, Anmol Ekka, Rohit, Manoj Yadav, Talem Priyo Barta.
Midfielders: Ankit Pal, Roshan Kujur, Bipin Billavara Ravi, Mukesh Toppo, Manmeet Singh, Vachan H A
Forwards: Sourabh Anand Kushwaha, Arshdeep Singh, Gurjot Singh, Mohd. Konain Dad, Dilraj Singh, Gursewak Singh.

Savanier scores sweet volley, then gets red card as Montpellier beats Toulouse

AP ■ PARIS

Teji Savanier scored a goal-of-the-season contender and was sent off as Montpellier won at Toulouse 2-1 in the French league. The veteran midfielder caught a cross from the left with the sweetest of volleys to put the visitor ahead after 26 minutes. Thijs Dallinga equalized for Toulouse with a powerful header seven minutes later and Savanier's sending off 20 minutes into the second half looked to have swung the game in the direction of the home team. However, Khalil Fayad scored the winner with 10 minutes left when he slipped between Toulouse defenders to rifle home.



A minute later, Toulouse center back Rasmus Nicolaisen was red-carded for a second bookable offense. The win extended Montpellier's unbeaten run to seven games and lifted it into 10th

place, above Toulouse on goal difference. **LENS BEAT LORIENT:** Lens deepened Lorient's relegation worries after winning 2-0. Lens remained in sixth spot and in contention for a European place next season. Lorient was second to last, one point ahead of Clermont and three behind Metz, both of whom have a game in hand. The bottom two clubs are relegated and the third to last goes into a playoff. The first goal came from a woeful lapse in concentration by Lorient's Tiemoué Bakayoko. The former Chelsea midfielder was caught in possession just yards from goal and Elye Wahi made no mistake with only the goalkeeper to beat.

Williams brothers star for Athletic Bilbao in win over Getafe

AP ■ MADRID

Brothers Iñaki and Nico Williams combined twice to give Athletic Bilbao a 2-0 victory over Getafe in the Spanish league. Nico got an assist in each half and Iñaki scored twice before the team was reduced to nine men and coach Ernesto Valverde was red-carded, too. Athletic closed the gap to three points behind fourth-placed Atletico Madrid. The top four in La Liga go into the Champions League. Atletico has five games to play, including at Mallorca on Saturday. Athletic has four



games remaining. As has happened so often this season, the Williams brothers stood out for the Basque club. With 26 minutes gone, Niko played a short pass to Iñaki and from 20 meters out he curled the ball in. Six minutes into the second period, Nico played a defense-

splitting pass to his brother who swept the ball home with aplomb. Athletic was then punished for indiscipline. Yeray Alvarez was sent off for handball after 58 minutes and fellow defender Aitor Paredes joined him 11 minutes from time. Getafe threw men forward and was awarded a penalty with two minutes remaining but Mason Greenwood, one of the home side's stand-out performers, saw his spot kick saved by the outstanding Unai Simón. Athletic coach Valverde was shown a red card for protesting the spot kick decision.



Jordan Spieth got elbowed back in fairway, but missed cut at hometown Nelson

AP ■ MCKINNEY (US)

Jordan Spieth got elbowed back into the fairway on the 16th hole Friday, and still missed the cut in his hometown tournament. Spieth's wayward drive at the 495-yard par 4 went well right into the trees before suddenly rolling back into the fairway. The ball had ricocheted off the arm of a male spectator sitting with a group under the trees. After getting to his ball in the fairway 223 yards from the hole, Spieth took out another ball that he signed and walked over to the spectator who had a significant welt just above his right elbow. Even after that fortunate

bounce, Spieth's approach shot landed on the left fringe and he ended up with a bogey that dropped him to 4-under par. He parred his last two holes for a 1-under 70 at the CJ Cup Byron Nelson, and finished at 4-under 138, two strokes below the cut line. It was only the second time in his 12 Nelson starts that Spieth missed the cut. Before not playing last year because of a wrist injury, Spieth was the runner-up to K.H. Lee in 2022, and had his only other top-10 finish the previous year. His other missed cut was 2017. The Dallas native made his first PGA Tour start at the Nelson as a 16-year-old amateur in 2010, when he finished tied for 16th.

Mohammedan SC's David, Aizawl's Lalrinzuala among 26 India probables for World Cup qualifiers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Four I-League players were among a 26-member probables list announced on Saturday by India coach Igor Stimac for the FIFA World Cup 2026 Preliminary Joint Qualification round two matches against Kuwait and Qatar. Mizoram's 23-year-old forward David Lalhlansanga, who played a key role in Mohammedan Sporting's I-League triumph and securing a promotion to the top-tier ISL, has found his name in the forward lineup boasting the talismanic Sunil Chhetri.

Aizawl FC's forward Lalrinzuala Lalsakania was also included alongside Real Kashmir defender Muhammad Hammad and Inter Kashi midfielder Edmund Lalrindika. With Mohun Bagan and Mumbai City FC playing the ISL final, players of the two ISL heavyweights are expected to be named in the second list of probables to be announced "in a few days", the AIFF stated. India will begin training camp in Bhubaneswar on May 10. The Blue Tigers will take on Kuwait in Kolkata on June 6 before travelling to face Qatar in Doha on June 11 in their last



two matches of Group A. India are currently placed second in the group, with four points from as many matches. The top two teams in the group will qualify for round three of the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers and also book their berth at the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027.

Defenders: Amey Ganesh Ranawade, Jay Gupta, Lalchungnunga, Muhammad Hammad, Narendra, Nikhil Poojary, Roshan Singh Naorem.
Midfielders: Brandon Fernandes, Edmund Lalrindika, Imran Khan, Isak Vanlaluatfela, Jeakson Singh Thounaojam, Mahesh Singh Naorem, Mohammad Yasir, Nandhakumar Sekar, Rahul Kannoly Praveen, Suresh Singh Wangjam, Vibin Mohanan.
Forwards: David Lalhlansanga, Jithin Madathil Subran, Lalrinzuala Lalsakania, Parthib Gogoi, Rahim Ali, Sunil Chhetri.

Asian U-22 & Youth Boxing: India pugilists confirm record 43 medals

PTI ■ ASTANA (KAZAKHSTAN)

Akash Gorkha, Vishvanath Suresh, Nikhil and Preet Malik advanced to the U-22 men's finals as Indian boxers confirmed an unprecedented 43 medals across categories at the ASBC Asian U-22 & Youth Boxing Championships here on Saturday. Senior national champion Akash extended his dominating run in the 60kg category with a 5-0 win over Ilyasov Sayat of Uzbekistan in the semi-finals. Reigning youth world champion Vishvanath (48kg) won 5-2 against Baricuatro Bryan of Philippines after the bout was reviewed. The other two semi-finalists, Nikhil (57kg) and Preet (67kg) also won their bouts with a similar 5-2 scoreline after a review against Mongolia's Dorjnyambu Ganbold and Almaz Orozbekov of Kyrgyzstan respectively. Meanwhile, it was a heartbreak for M Jadumani Singh (51kg), Ajay Kumar (63.5kg), Ankush (71kg), Dhruv Singh (80kg), Jugnoo (86kg) and Yuvraj (92kg) as they ended their campaigns with bronze medals following their losses in the U-22 semis. Nine women boxers, including Olympic-bound Preeti (54kg), will be in action in the U-22 semi-finals. The U-22 finals will be played on Tuesday. In the youth women's semi-finals played on Friday night, reigning junior world champion Nisha (52kg) and Asian youth champion Nikita Chand (60kg) along with five other boxers entered the finals. Lakshay Rathi (92+kg), Annu (48kg), Yatri Patel (57kg), Parthavi Grewal (66kg), Akansha Phalasalwal (70kg) and Nirjhara Bana (+81kg) were defeated and ended their campaigns with bronze medals in the youth category. The youth finals will now have 14 Indian pugilists with seven each in both men's and women's category fighting for the gold. The finals for the youth category will be played on Monday. Overall, Indian boxers have secured 43 medals in the prestigious tournament, which has been witnessing high-voltage action with the presence of 390-plus boxers from more than 24 countries, including strong boxing nations such as China, India, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan fighting for the medals across 25 weight categories.

Chawrasia slips to tied 24 at Maekyung Open

PTI ■ SEOUL

SP Chawrasia carded a sloppy 2-Over 73 to slip down to tied 24th at the GS Caltex Maekyung Open here on Saturday. In the third round of the Asian Tour event, he is now 1-under 212 and 10 behind leader Junghwan Lee after being tied 13th a day earlier. Other Indian player Ajeetesh Sandhu who made the cut was tied 51 after 74 on the par-71 course. Lee birdied three of the last five holes to take the third-round lead to give

himself a chance of improving upon his joint second place finish here last year. The Korean, whose nickname is 'Ironman' because of his strong iron play, carded a five-under-par 66 to lead on 11-under at the Namseoul Country Club by a shot from Chonlatit Chuenboonngam, the leader at the start of the day, who returned a 70. Canadian Richard T Lee (69) and Hongtaek Kim (71) from Korea are another two strokes back - in the sixth event of the Asian Tour's season.



This year's Asian Tour Qualifying School winner Kristoffer Broberg (71) from Sweden and Korean Kyunnam Kang (73) are an additional two shots behind. The 32-year-old Lee started the day three behind the leader Chonlatit and trailed the Thai for much of the day. However, Chonlatit, who had a two-shot lead after nine, made a costly double bogey on the par-four 16th - where he left a chip short and failed to get up and down - while Lee was able to take to the front thanks to birdies on 14, 15 and 17.

IOC imposes 15 years ban on former Olympic power broker Sheikh Ahmad of Kuwait

AP ■ GENEVA

The International Olympic Committee has suspended former Olympic power broker Sheikh Ahmad of Kuwait for 15 years after his conviction for forgery was upheld on appeal this year at a Swiss criminal appeals court. Sheikh Ahmad al-Fahad al-Sabah's sanction for "a betrayal of his IOC Member's oath, as well as the seriousness of the damage to the IOC's reputation" was approved by the Olympic body's executive board in a decision seen by The Associated Press. The 15-year suspension starts from the date of his previous ban for a separate issue of unethical conduct, in an Olympic Council of Asia election. That was a three-year sanction imposed on July 27 last year. The sheikh, who turns 61 on the day after the Paris Games close in August, will be 74 when the latest punishment expires. Under IOC rules his membership ends at age 80. However, the Olympic Charter allows the annual meeting of IOC members to expel a colleague for betraying their oath. Sheikh Ahmad led the Olympic Council of Asia, created by his father in Kuwait, before joining the IOC in 1992. He was a longtime close ally of current IOC president Thomas Bach, whose election in 2013 he campaigned for. The Kuwaiti royal "self-suspended" as an IOC member after being indicted in Geneva in 2018. He also stepped aside as leader of the global group of national Olympic bodies, ANOC. In January, Sheikh Ahmad, his English



former lawyer, a Kuwaiti aide and a lawyer based in Geneva had their convictions from September 2021 upheld on charges linked to orchestrating a sham arbitration case a decade ago. The appeal court judges in Geneva changed the sheikh's prison sentence to a suspended sentence of two years deferred for a probationary period of three years. In 2013, he presented video footage to Kuwaiti authorities alleging to show a former prime minister, Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammed al-Sabah, and a former speaker in parliament, Jassim al-Kharafi, discussing a coup. They could have faced

the death penalty for treason. Lawyers for Sheikh Nasser al-Mohammed and the al-Kharafi family filed a criminal complaint in Geneva relating to the arbitration case. The arbitration which was later judged to be fake had been presented to the High Court in London as part of a process that sought to verify the videos. Sheikh Ahmad also was a senior International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) official from 2015-17 until withdrawing his candidacy for re-election when implicated by federal prosecutors in Brooklyn in steering bribes to soccer officials in Asia.

Haryana, Madhya Pradesh win in National Women's Hockey League

PTI ■ RANCHI

Haryana and Madhya Pradesh beat Bengal and Maharashtra respectively at the National Women's Hockey League 2024 (Phase 1) here on Saturday. While Haryana defeated Bengal 4-3 in a thriller to register their third consecutive win, Madhya Pradesh got the better of Maharashtra 2-1 in another match. In the opening match of the day, Bengal was off the blocks and running in no time with Silbiya Nag (2nd minute) converting a penalty corner early in the game. Selestina Horo (19th) then doubled their lead with a penalty corner conversion in the second quarter. Haryana captain Neelam (20th) quickly retaliated with a penalty corner conversion to reduce the deficit as Bengal led 2-1 at halftime. Nandni (41st) converted another penalty corner for Haryana to level the scores before Shashi Khasa (43rd) converted yet another penalty corner to help Haryana take the lead. Pinki (46th) scored a field goal early in the final quarter to take



Haryana to a 4-2 lead. Shanti Horo (51st) scored a field goal for Bengal to create a possibility of a comeback but Haryana held onto their lead to emerge winners. In the day's second showdown, Madhya Pradesh defeated Maharashtra 2-1. After a quiet first half without any goals, Madhya Pradesh broke the deadlock late in the third quarter with a field goal from Aanchal Sahu (45th) to take the lead.

Maharashtra captain Ashwini Kolekar (50th) scored a field goal in just under five minutes into the final quarter to level the scores. However, Swati (54th) put Madhya Pradesh back in the lead with a field goal. Thereafter, Madhya Pradesh played a tight defence game to retain their one-goal lead. Later in the day, Mizoram will take on Manipur, while Jharkhand will lock horns with Odisha.

"Disease is an experience of a so-called mortal mind. It is fear made manifest on the body"
— Mary Baker Eddy



Amid mounting concerns regarding Covishield's safety and the acknowledgment of potential adverse effects by its maker UK giant AstraZeneca, public unease is on the rise, with calls for accountability, says **ARCHANA JYOTI**

COVISHIELD'S SHIELD IN QUESTION



My CT scan result showed that they (doctors) had never seen anything like this before. Numerous blood clots were removed through surgery from my legs and lower abdomen, Alex Mitchell, a key litigant in the legal proceedings in the UK against British pharma giant AstraZeneca told a news channel in India about the side effects that he suffered after receiving the COVID vaccine.

Mitchell is not the only one who has been reeling under the side effects due to the COVID jab and taken up a legal battle against AstraZeneca over allegations linking its vaccine to fatalities and severe adverse effects. The firm is facing at least 51 such cases and has recently conceded that its vaccine could, albeit exceedingly rarely, induce Thrombosis with Thrombocytopenia Syndrome (TTS), a medical condition characterized by abnormally low levels of platelets and the formation of blood clots.

With this admission by the UK pharma giant, in India, the Serum Institute of India (SII), headquartered in Pune, which was a licensee to AstraZeneca's vaccine formula may too find itself mired in potential legal ramifications with the parents of a young woman who died purportedly due to complications arising ten days post her inoculation with the vaccine in 2021 said that they are contemplating legal action against both SII and AstraZeneca. Though a section of legal experts say that



BIG NUMBER

India's vaccination campaign began on January 13, 2021, administering Covaxin and Covishield. Covishield received approval for use in 49 other countries. As of April 29, 2024, India has administered 1,749,417,978 doses of Covishield, making it the world's largest vaccination program. India's vaccine arsenal during the pandemic included Covaxin, Covishield, Sputnik-V, Covovax, Corbevax, and ZyCoV-D, among others. Worldwide, 13.5 billion COVID-19 vaccines have been administered since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to science research organization Our World in Data. Around 71% of the world's population has received at least one dose of a Covid vaccine.

GLOBAL INSIGHT

According to global data on TTS available in the public domain, as of January 5, 2024, Canada had reported 89 cases of TTS, of which 56 cases were reported following vaccination with AstraZeneca's Vaxzevria/Covishield COVID-19 vaccine, and 24 cases were reported following vaccination with Pfizer-BioNTech's Comirnaty COVID-19 vaccine. Eight cases were also reported following vaccination with Moderna's Spikevax COVID-19 vaccine. In the U.K., 122 instances of TTS following the administration of the AstraZeneca vaccine have been reported as of November 2023.

OPP MAKES A GIBE

Where is the Thank You Modi ji banner now? Why are the PM and Health Ministry silent? Is this the reason why deaths due to heart attack at young age occur? Was this the reason why BJP took electoral bonds worth Rs 50 crore from Serum Institute? This issue is not a matter of politics but of safeguarding people's lives." Srinivas Bhadravathi Venkata, the National President of the Indian Youth Congress in a post on X.

monitoring and reporting of adverse events. Another netizen Parikshit Suri has emphasized on the rigorous testing and transparency in vaccine development and echoed widespread calls for accountability and scrutiny in the approval process.

Dr. A Rajkumar Sreenivasan's plea for informed consent highlighted the ethical dimensions of healthcare decision-making, emphasizing the need for individuals to have agency and autonomy in vaccination choices. Michelle Zeh's skepticism about vaccine necessity and safety shed light on broader concerns surrounding pharmaceutical influence and the importance of evidence-based decision-making.

Manish Kumar's observation of increased heart attacks post-vaccination prompted calls for comprehensive investigation and surveillance to ensure the ongoing safety and efficacy of vaccination programs. While many doctors have said that benefits outweighs the downsides Dr Sankha Shubhra Chakrabarti, Head-Geriatrics, IMS-BHU posted on X, @these genius Indian doctors who are self consoling by saying it occurs within few weeks and cannot after 3 years probably do not know how the AdenoV delivery system is designed to work.

Amidst these concerns and controversy over the safety aspects of the Covishield vaccine, the matter has now reached the Supreme Court on May 1, 2024, with a petition led by advocate Vishal Tiwari adding a layer of complexity and urgency to the discourse. Tiwari has sought the constitution of an expert medical panel to study the risk factors.

"More than 175 crore doses of Covishield have been administered in India. After Covid 19 there has been an increase in deaths due to heart attacks and sudden collapse of persons. There have been several cases of heart attack even in youngsters. Now after the document filed in UK court by the developer of Covishield, we are compelled to think on the risk and hazardous consequences of Covishield vaccine which have been administered to the citizens at a large number," the petition filed by advocate Tiwari says.

The plea points out that AstraZeneca, the company that developed the vaccine, has said that its AZD1222 vaccine against Covid-19, which was made under license in India as Covishield, could cause low platelet counts and the formation of blood clots in rare cases. The petition says the medical panel should

be headed by an expert from AIIMS and supervised by a retired Supreme Court judge. Tiwari has further sought directions to the Centre to establish a 'Vaccine Damage Payment System' for citizens or families who have suffered debilitating health setbacks or even deaths after taking the vaccine.

The plea has also called for strict action against the circulation of spurious Covishield, an offshoot of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, which underwent extensive administration across India. However, SII, conspicuously headquartered in Pune, has remained reticent in response to the looming specter of legal action. Equally intriguing is the silence maintained by the Union Health Ministry, notwithstanding mounting apprehensions and criticisms voiced by recipients of Covishield on various social media platforms.

Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj has already raised the Centre's attention to these links, saying that it should work to urgently address the alleged side-effects of the Covidshield vaccine as millions of people in India were administered the shot during the Covid pandemic. Bharadwaj expressed concern over the alleged link between the vaccine's side effects and a series of sudden deaths in India, claiming that Covidshield was banned in several European countries, including Germany, France, Spain, Finland, Norway, and Denmark.

Despite the government's formation of a national committee to probe such occurrences, the determination of insufficient evidence linking her demise to the vaccine underscores the intricate challenge of establishing causality in rare adverse events. However, the narrative shared by individuals such as Govindan underscores the exigency for robust surveillance, reporting mechanisms, and support infrastructure to address post-vaccination complications comprehensively.

Against the backdrop of Covishield's legal conundrum, SII's competitor Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech, has underscored the efficacy of its jab, Covaxin, saying that it was meticulously evaluated and efficacy trials were held within India.

Study confirms higher risk of very rare clot with AstraZeneca Jab

The Global Covid Vaccine Safety Project conducted an extensive analysis of adverse events associated with COVID-19 vaccines across multiple regions, including Argentina, Australia (New South Wales and Victoria), Canada (British Columbia and Ontario), Denmark, Finland, France, New Zealand, and Scotland. They employed a method called observed versus expected (OE) ratios to compare the number of adverse events reported with the expected baseline rates.

In simple words, this means first healthcare providers have a baseline 'expectation' of how many adverse events are likely given a certain number of vaccinated people, and compare it with the number of events reported to health systems. Expectations are formed based on experience with the rates of vaccination, and reactions observed historically. However, COVID-19 vaccination was an outlier event that saw billions of vaccines administered over a relatively short span.

OE ratios greater than 1.5, indicating 50% more adverse reactions than expected, were identified as potential safety signals requiring thorough investigation. Notable findings included elevated OE ratios for Guillain-Barré syndrome and cerebral venous sinus thrombosis following the first dose of the ChAdOx1 vaccine. Additionally, acute disseminated encephalomyelitis showed a high OE ratio following the first dose of the mRNA-1273 vaccine. Increased OE ratios for myocarditis and pericarditis were also observed following vaccination with BNT162b2 (Pfizer/BioNTech), mRNA-1273 (Moderna), and ChAdOx1 (AstraZeneca/Serum Institute of India) vaccines.

In India, as of December 6, 2022, a total of 92,003 Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI) were reported, accounting for approximately 0.009% of the population vaccinated against COVID-19. However, it's essential to note that the strength of adverse event reporting systems can vary



"There have been studies that show the baseline rate in European states (adverse events related to COVID-19 vaccines) is higher than Asia. This is a combination of both a better reporting system as well as physiological factors. Studies done in one country may not easily translate to another."
— CHANDRAKANT LAHARIYA
Physician and health policy expert

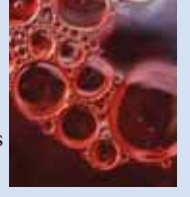
significantly between countries, influencing reported incidence rates. The study also highlighted differences in adverse event reporting rates between regions. For example, the affidavit submitted by the Indian government to the Supreme Court cited higher AEFI rates in the United States (0.2%) and the United Kingdom (0.7%) compared to India. These variations may be influenced by reporting system robustness and physiological factors.

Despite confirming previously identified rare safety signals associated with COVID-19 vaccination, the study emphasized the need for further investigation to confirm associations and evaluate clinical significance. An affidavit by the government to the Supreme Court claimed that compared with India, nearly 0.2% of the people in the United States who received COVID-19 vaccines showed AEFI, as did 0.7% in the U.K.

These ratios are, however, significantly influenced by the strength of the adverse event reporting system in countries. This can significantly vary among countries. "While our study confirmed previously identified rare safety signals following COVID-19 vaccination and contributed evidence on several other important outcomes, further investigation is warranted to confirm associations and assess clinical significance," the study by the Global Covid Vaccine Safety Project said.

Symptoms of TTS

A rare condition associated with Covishield, include severe headaches, abdominal pain, leg swelling, or shortness of breath, usually appearing two weeks post-vaccination. Timely identification and intervention are crucial in mitigating severe consequences.



SII may get clean chit in the case given it was a mere manufacturer of the jab, Venugopalan Govindan, bereaved father of the deceased Karunya has expressed profound dissatisfaction with AstraZeneca's belated admission, lamenting its timing vis-à-vis the lives already lost. He also castigated SII for its failure to suspend vaccine distribution following the restriction imposed by 15 European nations due to reported incidents of blood clot-related fatalities in March 2021.

Govindan has also implicated governmental agencies, regulatory bodies, and other stakeholders in the unfortunate demise of his daughter and numerous others post-vaccination. His sentiments have reverberated across social media platforms following AstraZeneca's acknowledgment of its COVID jab's potential to precipitate blood clotting.

Govindan spearheaded a petition titled 'Post-vaccination side effects - Blood clots, MIS-A, etc. Awareness was required' shortly after his daughter's tragic demise in 2021. As the petition gained traction, it served as a platform for individuals to share their own experiences, concerns, and opinions regarding COVID-19 vaccines. For instance, one Shikha Bhalla, a netizen, has given her account of losing vision in her left eye due to a rare side effect underscoring the importance of thorough

DOCTORS SPEAK



TTS is a very rare condition resulting from an abnormal immune response. While it has several causes, it has also been linked with adenovirus vector vaccines. The WHO has deemed the vaccine safe and effective for all individuals aged 18 and above. ...We are yet to fully understand the impact of coronavirus on people, also called long

Covid. The difficulty is to distinguish between the complications that are caused by Covid itself or the vaccine. That remains debatable. People who are vaccinated have an overall lower risk of complications such as post-Covid heart attacks and strokes among others.

— DR RAVI WANKHEDEKAR, Former national president of the IMA



"Like many things in medicine, the exact mechanism for this is also unknown. It is an unusual immune reaction to a particular vaccine genre which is called as adenovirus vector vaccine. Adenovirus vectors are not disease-causing viruses but these are artificially fitted with the spike of the virus that our immune system needs to fight. In the case of AstraZeneca's adenovirus vector vaccine, a chimpanzee adenovirus - ChAdOx1 - has been modified to enable it to carry the Covid-19 (SARS-CoV-2) spike protein injected into the muscles of humans."
— DR RAJEEV JAYADEVAN, Co-Chairman, IMA Covid-19 task force

A NIGHT IN OSTELLO BELL

SHARED STORIES, SHARED SPACES



BY PAWAN SONI

After watching Kangana Ranaut's film, Queen which includes a scene where she stays in a hostel, I was intrigued and mentally noted to experience it at least once. This opportunity arose when I was traveling alone for work in Milan for a few days. Since my wife is not keen on such experiences, I could only do it while traveling solo. I myself was a bit hesitant and booked the hostel room for only one night post which I booked a luxury hotel room.

Staying in a hostel room with bunk beds shared by eight tourists from different countries and continents was an eye-opening experience. As someone accustomed to the privacy of hotels, the idea of sharing a room with strangers was initially daunting. However, the warmth and friendliness of my fellow travelers quickly put me at ease. Additionally, in India, we would never think of sharing a room with both guys and girls. Here, we were six guys and two girls sharing the dormitory room.

One of the most memorable aspects of my stay was the interactions with my roommates. Despite our diverse backgrounds, we found common ground in our love for travel and adventure. Each person had a unique story to share, from their reasons for travelling to their favourite destinations. I learned about different



cultures, traditions, and ways of life, broadening my perspective and igniting my curiosity about the world.

The hostel's facilities played a significant role in fostering a sense of community among guests. The small locked storage below the beds ensured that our belongings were safe, while the charging points were necessary for



the phone charging, individual reading lights provided convenience without disturbing others. The common bathroom, although shared, was always clean and well-maintained, a testament to the hostel staff's commitment to guest comfort and roommates ensuring to leave the washroom with the same hygiene level

they expected from others. The common kitchen was a hub of activity, with guests preparing meals and sharing recipes from their home countries. It was a delightful experience to taste dishes from around the world, each one infused with the flavours and spices of a different culture. The complimentary

fruits and groceries added a thoughtful touch, making us feel at home in this foreign environment. Beyond the practical amenities, the hostel's vibrant atmosphere made it a memorable stay. It served as a meeting point for young travellers, where friendships were formed over shared meals and late-night conversations. The hostel also organised social events, such as pub crawls and city tours, allowing guests to explore the city together and create lasting memories.

(Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards. He can be reached at Pawan.Soni@indianfoodfreak.com)

EXPERIENCING CULTURE ONE COURSE AT A TIME POP-UP DINNERS

The industry's evolving nature is fostering a culture of shared knowledge, with chefs and restaurants collaborating more than ever. While the permanence of specific formats, like pop-ups, remains uncertain, the spirit of collaboration is undoubtedly a mainstay. It's a dynamic era where working together isn't just a trend; it's a fundamental shift shaping the future of the culinary landscape.

BY RUPALI DEAN

Pop-up restaurants are like culinary jazz performances, where chefs create impromptu meals in unconventional settings, such as dining rooms or even courtyards. These temporary dining experiences allow chefs to experiment freely with their cooking skills within a confined timeframe and for a select audience. For example, Chef Vladimir Mukhin recently hosted famous Chef Joan Roca from El Celler De Can Roca at Krasota restaurant in Dubai. They worked together to create a unique culinary experience, exploring the deep stories behind well-known dishes. By combining different textures, ingredients, and flavours, they presented a special event in Dubai that highlighted the perfect blend of artistry in both appearance and taste. Roca's 'Memories of a Neighbourhood Bar' paired with Deyneka's 'The Light of The Past' set the scene. This dish, from El Celler de Can Roca's cookbook, honours the family's legacy. The three brothers learned cooking early at Can Roca, perfecting their skills. Inspired by Roerich's 'Himalayas,' Mukhin's Artichoke Curry and Coconut Rice reflect the painting's colours. The Black Cod with Plum and Fig drew from Aivazovsky's art, symbolizing a shipwreck survival. Five Senses Bon Bons by Jordi Roca at Casa Cacao concluded the feast magically, blurring reality and fantasy.

THE WORLD IS GETTING SMALLER AND MORE INCLUSIVE

Engaging in pop-up events presents chefs with a valuable chance to acquire new skills and engage in the exchange of culinary knowledge amongst peers in the industry. "Pop-ups are a great platform of exchanging ideas and sharing our cooking philosophies and techniques. It's a true example of how the world is getting smaller and more inclusive. It's a sense of pride when I get an opportunity to cook Indian food for an audience that may not be well educated about Indian Cuisine, or when Chefs of the most renowned restaurants around the world join us at Trésind Studio to share their cooking philosophy with our guests. In the end it's a celebration of culture and creating new friendships. The ideas and brainstorming during pop ups sometimes create dishes that eventually



CHEF JOAN ROCA WITH CHEF VLADIMIR MUKHIN AND HIS TEAM AT KRASOTA, DUBAI



CHEF JOAN ROCA AND VLADIMIR AT A POP-UP COLLABORATION IN KRASOTA, DUBAI



CHEF HIMANSHU SAINI AND CHEF JITIN JOSHI

become part of our menu", says Chef Himanshu Saini of Trésind Studio (1 Michelin star), Dubai. Traditionally, pop-ups served as a stepping stone for aspiring restaurateurs to showcase their cooking prowess and test new concepts. However, nowadays, some chefs view pop-ups as standalone ventures, using them to delve into and share their cultural culinary heritage. "I have been doing pop up around the globe as a guest chef and this year I would be hosting a guest chef every month in our Private room at the Crossing Dubai. I think it is a great way to show a different and unique style of food philosophy with another chef in the same kitchen. It's not only a great showcase of talent, but also a great learning for the team. I don't think this trend will pass soon and personally would like to see more chefs collaborating and coming together", adds Jitin Joshi Director of Culinary, Lemon Butter, Dubai, U.A.E

THE LEARNING MUST NEVER STOP

These gatherings often feel like a blend of educational sessions and personal memoirs, weaving intimate tales through cherished recipes and unique ingredients. "As a chef, it's important to never stop learning. We love inviting chefs from various backgrounds into

our spaces for 4-Hands collaboration events. It's an excellent way for us to learn from each other and discover new possibilities. We've been fortunate to have the opportunity to travel overseas and meet fantastic people, learning and experiencing entirely new cultures, cuisines and ingredients. I always try to bring a few of my team with me on these trips, I believe that travel helps to widen one's perspective and encourage accelerated growth. It's fulfilling for me to groom and provide opportunities for my team to learn", says Julien Royer Chef Owner- Odette (3 Michelin stars), Singapore. These modern chefs charge for their dinners, yet none are earning vast fortunes from them. They often promote their events on Instagram and sell tickets digitally. Regardless of the practical details, pop-up dining enables them to innovate and test ideas with a small group of guests, fostering a fleeting sense of community. In a time where personal narratives hold greater significance in art and conversations, pop-ups provide chefs with a platform to express, through cuisine, "This is my heritage. This is my identity."



The Japanese celebrate the Hanami, the festival of Spring, with as much gusto as we Indians do. SHOBORI GANGULI participates in the gastronomical delights accompanying this ancient ritual at Guppy right here in Delhi

CHERRY BLOSSOMS, CHEER AND CAMARADERIE



This week I had the great fortune to partake of the Hanami festival at one of Delhi's finest Japanese restaurants Guppy (part of the Olive Chain). This is cherry blossom season of spring in Japan, a time to mark the Hanami festival — a unique cultural tradition of viewing flowers in full bloom, an ancient ritual which serves as a Japanese reminder of the transience of nature, the blossoms a metaphor for life, draped in the immortal philosophy of hope and renewal.

And no festival in the world is complete without its attendant share of feasts and festivities. Guppy, in an earnest attempt to keep this old Japanese heritage alive and robust in a faraway land from Japan, in the very heart of India in Delhi, laid out a sumptuous fare of what would typically be a part of a Hanami dining spread.

Among the salads on offer — Artichoke & Melon, Acvocado, Beet & Edamame and Chicken, Avocado & Greens — my friend and I settled for the first one which was a refreshing mix of



marinated artichoke, grapes, and seasoned melon served atop crisp rocket leaves and greens in a spicy Japanese wofu dressing. This salad was truly refreshing and welcome on a hot summer day working in perfect symphony with our Shinzuku Sour cocktail of Gin, fresh gooseberry, peach soju and stillabunt.

Skipping the Sushi selection, which we Indians are now quite familiar with, we opted for the translucent Tobanjan-spiced Chicken Steamed Dumplings, the filling a burst of minced chicken in a Japanese spicy tobanjan chili paste served with a ponzu dip.

Perhaps it is me and my changed taste buds over the years or a conscious attempt by Japanese kitchens based out of India, the element of spiciness has notched up a bit from what was often termed as a "bland" taste emanating from traditional kitchens, which may suit the Japanese palate even today, in Japan and elsewhere in the world, but were not embraced with the same degree of enthusiasm one has watched with Italian, Spanish, Chinese, West Asian and Mediterranean spreads across continents.

The fact that Guppy was brimming with people, almost all tables occupied, on a busy working week day, is perhaps testimony to the fact that Japanese cuisine has certainly found an innovative way to work around the Indian palate and its natural inclination for well-spiced food.

From their Small Plates offering we went past the vegetarian Stuffed Tofu Katsu to the Crisp Chicken Parcel, an oven-baked phyllo parcel with ginger flavoured chicken accompanied by soy apple salsa and a yuzu miso sauce.

For the Mains, while my friend settled for the undoubtedly healthy and delicious Grilled Yuzu Khoso Fish, marinated in Jaenese yuzu khoso and herb salsa, grilled and served with lemon butter soy, I ventured into the now universally forbidden territory of red meat. The Grilled Marinated Lamb Chop came with seasonal vegetables and was served with red wine miso. I must admit that while the flavours of the grill settled rather smoothly on my palate, the meat itself was on the rare side and a tad stringy. Red meat requires adequate time to be rested in its marination for it to step delicately away from the bone. In my opinion, the Lamb Chop needed some more attention.

That said, the experience was a rather cheerful one, given that the Japanese dedicate as much time to the aesthetics of the inanimate as to the animate. Guppy is that cheerful, pretty, comfortable Japanese place one would like to hang around at, with friends or family. Here's wishing everyone a happy Hanami, the Japanese spring festival so similar to our own spring festival of Basant Panchami.

Gurugram's latest Culinary Contender



BY PAWAN SONI

Nestled between two established dining spots at Two Horizon, Marieta emerges as Gurgaon's newest culinary contender, overtaking the space vacated by well-regarded Italian eatery Artusi. Although the name "Marieta" which is a popular female name hails from Greece, the restaurant's global menu lacks prominent Greek offerings.

The start was a bit of a let down. Not being served a hard copy of the menu and asking diner to scan a barcode for the digital menu at a fine-dine restaurant with an excuse that they are new doesn't go well with me. May be I am an old timer who doesn't like reading the menu on mobile's small screen. The manager quickly impro-

vised and offered to share a b&w printed menu with which I was okay but it never came. However he later shared his laptop with me to read the menu. For a classy looking restaurant they can easily do with few Ipads if even after a month of their opening they are finding it difficult to get the printed menu.

I am here with my wife and like most men opt for "The Second Date". Don't get me wrong. It is a tequila and sake based cocktail with a bit of lychee and Jasmine tea. Its delightful aroma and soothing taste set a pleasant tone for the evening. As I perused the drinks menu, I noticed a variety of tequila and mezcal cocktails, signaling an interesting trend. Just as gin has surpassed vodka in popularity for cocktails, it seems tequila-based cocktails might be the next big trend.

While the food initially took some time to arrive, once it did, the dishes came out in quick succession. Most of the dishes we ordered were impressive. The Mushroom and Cream Cheese (Rs495), encased in crispy kataifi on a cauliflowerer sauce base, was particularly exciting. Similarly, the Habanero Butter Shrimp (Rs750), served with airy sourdough bread, was noteworthy, although I expected a bit more heat from the habanero, making the dish's name somewhat misleading.

The Avocado Cream Cheese Uramaki (Rs750) sushi roll was

FACT SHEET
Sector 43, Gurgaon
Phone: 8800186953
Cuisine: Global with focus on Mexican
RATINGS
Food: 3.5/5
Drinks: 4.0/5
Service: 3.75/5
Ambience: 3.5/5
Overall: 3.5/5

enjoyable, with the added crunch of fried sweet potato crisps on top. However, the Spicy Sweet Potato Soft Shell Taco lacked the necessary spiciness to balance the sweetness of the potato. Adding a bit of spicy sauce on the side made it more enjoyable for me.

The only disappointment was the Neapolitan Margherita pizza, which fell short on the dough, kneading, and rolling. The edges didn't rise properly, the center wasn't thin enough, and the sauce was mediocre. However, the chef acknowledged the issue without making excuses, which in my view was commendable. Since we had no room for a main course, we opted for desserts directly. The Vanilla Bean Panna Cotta (Rs595) was exceptional, perfectly set and delicious. Topped with figs and caramel sauce, this dessert, an Artusi recipe, is reason enough to visit Marieta.

We arrived early for a Monday dinner and found the music to be too loud for an empty restaurant. However, as more guests arrived, the sound was absorbed, creating a more enjoyable ambience. The tables in alfresco settings are a bit small for four people; fitting more than two people would be a challenge. Despite minor initial hiccups, the service was good and well-informed. Overall, Marieta is worth a try, especially for the panna cotta.

(Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards. He can be reached at Pawan.Soni@indianfoodfreak.com)



YOUR WEEK AHEAD

MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

This week may fall short of your expectations, particularly regarding financial aspects. You may find yourself unable to make decisive choices at work, leaving tasks incomplete and your workspace disorganized. You might even delay important activities or travel due to uncertainty. However, as the week progresses, you'll discover a more stable approach to managing your responsibilities. Connections from distant locations could prove advantageous. Your team will look to you for more active involvement, and you'll rise to the occasion, regaining confidence and engaging more with your social circle. Despite these improvements, the week might conclude on a challenging note, with domestic tensions or significant health issues within your family demanding both your time and financial resources, which could indirectly affect your professional commitments.

Lucky number 7 | Lucky colour Teal
Lucky day Friday



LEO July 23-Aug 22

This week presents a challenging phase marked by a strong drive and assertive demeanor. Your focus is solely on your professional commitments, often at the expense of your emotional well-being. The overwhelming workload might lead to frustration as you struggle to see tangible outcomes in the distance. Midweek, expect a significant change in your social or professional circle, either through an unexpected arrival or a departure. This may cause a temporary spike in your temper, urging you to make impulsive decisions amidst confusion. While travel might be forthcoming, it's crucial to take moments for reflection to maintain your composure and gain clarity. Despite these testing times, your ability to remain objective during tough decisions shines through, though caution is advised to avoid rushed judgments.

Lucky number 17 | Lucky colour Indigo
Lucky day Sunday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

This week emphasizes the need for organization, focus, and self-discipline. A sense of uncertainty pervades, creating misunderstandings between partners. A situation arises where clarity and honesty are available, yet you may find yourself turning away from these truths due to a fear of worsening circumstances. Around midweek, expect challenges related to legal matters or external inquiries that could lead to disappointment. It's a good time to monitor your health and manage how you express yourself; resisting the urge to engage in conflicts with those who challenge you can be beneficial. Consider this period an opportunity for solitude, allowing for reflection and reassessment of your objectives. Healing and rejuvenating yourself during this time will prepare you to tackle upcoming challenges with renewed vigor. Patience is key, as the difficulties you face are only temporary.

Lucky number 12 | Lucky colour Fuchsia
Lucky day Saturday



TAURUS April 20-May 20

This week is set to be filled with abundant blessings. Your long-standing projects are likely to come to a successful conclusion, and there could be exciting developments regarding your living situation, such as moving into a new home through a fortunate opportunity. Expect heartwarming gatherings with family and friends that enhance your sense of community. You'll find yourself surrounded by a positive energy that boosts your confidence and inspires others. With your strong communication skills and magnetic personality, you naturally attract people who seek deeper, cooperative connections with you. Your leadership qualities shine brightly this week. As the week winds down, you'll be drawn towards spiritual practices. Engaging in these reflective activities will deepen your connection to the spiritual realm and spark your creativity. Enjoy every moment of this enriching week.

Lucky number 8 | Lucky colour Olive
Lucky day Tuesday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22

This week promises significant growth in your financial status, accompanied by joy and fulfillment. At work, you exhibit remarkable expertise and apply your vast knowledge in practical ways. Your approach is disciplined, with a keen adherence to schedules and procedures, which contributes to a strong financial foundation, security, and comfort. Additionally, there's potential for receiving substantial financial gains, possibly from unexpected sources. Opportunities for advancements and salary increases might arise, boosting your self-confidence. You may encounter new opportunities such as a job offer, project, or assignment. Utilize your resources judiciously and nurture a keen interest in acquiring and implementing new knowledge professionally. The vibrant energy of youthful colleagues at work also plays a crucial role in driving successful outcomes and bringing joy to your life.

Lucky number 9 | Lucky colour Coral
Lucky day Thursday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

This week marks a period of significant achievement following your persistent efforts and meticulous attention to detail. As the days unfold, you'll find yourself immersed in challenging tasks that require your full concentration and commitment. Your dedication to enhancing both your professional skills and personal growth will be evident. Despite the obstacles, the hard work will enrich your experience and knowledge, paving the way for notable successes. By the week's end, you will have every reason to feel proud and fulfilled. Additionally, this is an ideal time for deep spiritual rejuvenation and strengthening your connection with the divine. The week concludes with powerful transformative energies, fostering personal healing and possibly leading to meaningful relationship advancements, including new commitments or deepening existing bonds.

Lucky number 13 | Lucky colour Maroon
Lucky day Monday



GEMINI May 21-June 20

This week ushers in a spectrum of experiences encompassing deep emotions and spiritual growth, as well as an aggressive pursuit of prosperity. As the week begins, your financial endeavors start to bear fruit, leading to an increase in profits as the days progress. Your caring nature allows you to live lavishly, and your balanced, generous approach at work fosters a harmonious environment. Travel may be on your agenda, possibly including international journeys or leisure cruises with loved ones. Midweek brings a focus on home life, where you adeptly manage the demands of both your professional and personal spheres. As the week draws to a close, you will savor the rewards of your hard work, enjoying robust health and a burst of creativity.

Lucky number 19 | Lucky colour Golden
Lucky day Sunday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

As the week begins, you embark on a journey of discovery, seeking paths to resolve final challenges effectively. You are on the verge of completing a significant chapter, facing hurdles that you will navigate through successfully. Midweek brings a wave of affection and quality moments with your significant other. As the week draws to a close, conditions become favorable for making investments in real estate or similar significant acquisitions. This period marks a fortunate phase with exceptional opportunities enhancing your overall well-being. You are energized, spirited, and buoyant, surrounded by the warmth of family support that uplifts your confidence. The weekend is perfect for enjoying memorable times with your family and friends, celebrating the joys of togetherness.

Lucky number 2 | Lucky colour Beige
Lucky day Tuesday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

This week heralds a time of fulfillment and joy, as an abundance of blessings enriches your life across multiple fronts. Expect a surge of positivity that enhances your capacity for organization and sharpens your intuition. Harness this vibrant energy to boost your cognitive abilities. It's a rewarding period, both financially and emotionally, offering deep spiritual growth and emotional satisfaction. Relationships take center stage, enhancing connections and aligning closely with your aspirations. Opportunities in your professional life, such as new roles or ventures, are likely to materialize, positioning you favorably in your career path. Your overall vitality is robust, complemented by effective communication and leadership skills, setting the stage for a successful and harmonious week.

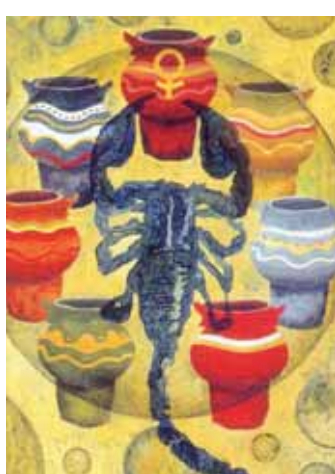
Lucky number 13 | Lucky colour Turquoise
Lucky day Friday



CANCER June 21-July 22

This week brings surprising shifts that may leave you feeling both proud and empowered to face the world's challenges. You find yourself unexpectedly stepping into a realm of success, particularly in areas you once thought were beyond your reach. Recognition and envy from others mark your newfound status, though those who truly support you will celebrate your accomplishments. This is a time of significant progress, aligning closely with your true interests. You've surpassed difficult obstacles, and your achievements are now publicly recognized and applauded. A sense of joy emerges, rooted in past experiences. As the week closes, you'll find comfort in cherished memories, reconnecting with the joys of childhood and enjoying moments with younger companions and old friends.

Lucky number 11 | Lucky colour Lavender
Lucky day Wednesday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

This week, your focus is primarily on professional endeavors. Embracing risk now may lead to significant financial gains due to your exceptional performance. You possess an abundance of creative energy, enabling you to overcome any barriers with bold confidence. A daunting challenge has captured your attention, but you have the capacity to master it with flair. Midweek, anticipate a period of stringent guidance from a senior female relative. Heeding her wisdom and suggestions will prove advantageous. Enhance your cognitive abilities by engaging with intellectually stimulating activities like reading substantive literature and tackling challenging puzzles. Such pursuits might also lead you to profound revelations in your spiritual journey.

Lucky number 18 | Lucky colour Amber
Lucky day Sunday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

Success this week seems highly linked to collaboration and teamwork, enhancing both productivity and rapport in your professional environment. You're stepping into a phase where self-respect becomes a cornerstone, fueling both your career and lifestyle with vibrant, innovative ideas. The horizon appears promising, with current ventures showing signs of prosperity and the potential for exciting job opportunities on the near horizon. Effective communication and mutual support are crucial right now, paving the way for fruitful negotiations. A sense of spirituality infuses your endeavors, adding a layer of depth to your pursuits. Joyous family developments, such as the anticipation of a new child, bring happiness and a sense of fulfillment. Your visionary outlook and proactive confidence empower you to explore new territories fearlessly.

Lucky number 1 | Lucky colour Ivory
Lucky day Wednesday

Madhu Kotiya is a tarot card reader, spiritual healer, and Founder, MShezaim Institute of Tarot and Divination. Contact details: madhu@indiatarot.com, www.indiatarot.com, M: 9873283331



ASTROTURF
BHARAT BHUSHAN PADMADEO

Mother teaches how to make life better



Carrying over from the previous issue, it is important to note that negative memory implants in our minds and the preconditioning thereof, can act a great devil for the self and those around. So, they will also come under the category of demonic forces. Such negative tendencies often foray into uncontrolled and fanciful inconsequential thoughts. They overtake our mind and distract our attention from priority preferences. We, thus, often misdirect our energies towards unproductive ends. In the process, our creative potential gets restricted from blooming out in full. Trapped into such unproductive voluminous thoughts, we are hardly left with mind-space necessary to invoke our faculty of discrimination. We, thus, lose our sense of reasons and direction, and thereby objectivity. Therefore, it becomes imperative upon us to consciously strike upon such unbecoming tendencies, for which we are very much capable. Otherwise, they will keep chasing us from within to our detriment. The question now is: how to figure out

true intent and character of varied demonic presences in disguise, well in time? And then, identify the most appropriate weapon to checkmate their assault? Evidently, it calls for being on full mental alert all the time. That alone can facilitate identifying right weapon for the right occasion. Mother's 10 arms also correspond to the positive and negative implications of man's sensory organs – 5 of perception and 5 of action. Experience suggests that in our usual flow of life, more often our sensory perceptions get stuck to the illusionary glare and glitter of the seeming world. Ego, further driving one's mind, makes one believe that what is apparent is to be taken as absolute truth. In the process, one forgets the necessity of invoking the indwelling faculty of discrimination necessary to figure out the underlying truths. True picture thus missing, one may inadvertently respond unintelligently on instinctive judgment. By the time one realises, the danger would have caught us unaware. It, therefore, becomes incumbent upon us to be on full

mental alert to figure out one's own limitations of mind in time, work upon them aggressively, and ensure being in full control of the self. Now, why a Lion as Mother's mount? Remember, a lion is known to be a

very intelligent animal and supposedly the king of jungles. When a lion goes for a hunt in search of its feed, it moves strategically, carefully, cautiously, without wasting much of its energy, but with its eyes fixed on its

prospective kill. It ensures not being noticed by the kill, till it is ready for its final assault. However, once the prey comes within its reach, it extols all its energy and pounces upon it. But then the lion does not go for its next kill till it has become hungry once again after exhausting its feed. The killing too is, therefore, need based and not out of greed. In fact, in nature's scheme of things, there exists a food chain. It is so made out as that there exists a predator to check the outgrowth of any creature. Bacteria in a drain treats the night soil. But its excessive presence will make living inhabitable. So, to keep their outgrowth in check, there exist other creatures. This way nature's biodiversity is kept in equitable balance. Here again, the animals, unlike human beings, invariably live in their present moment. They do not dwell on their past nor do they care for future. They are not tempted to encroach upon other's share to secure their future concerns either. Human beings, on the contrary, recalling their unpleasant memories of the past invite sense of fear. They also keep dreaming about

making a better future. In the process they dissipate their energies and mind space towards unproductive ends. Consequently, they are hardly left with enough to do justice to the callings of the present. What we forget that the seed planted today will turn into a fruit bearing tree tomorrow. Accordingly, we need to shed the past that has become history and forget about future that is uncertain. Following which we can put in our whole into present, which alone will prepare the ground for a better tomorrow. If the above inputs are made to sink in deep in one's mind through continued reflection, it will induce a person to act accordingly, which one could carry on effortlessly. Following which, one may be able to successfully steer life with ease and comfort, despite all oddities and hazards coming in the way. Life will then turn into a beautiful experience. The writer is an astrologer, vastu consultant and spiritual counsellor. Connect with him at Tel: 91-11-9818037273/9871037272 Email: bharatbhushanpadmadeo@gmail.com



CSK EYE PAYBACK IN SECOND SUCCESSIVE CLASH AGAINST PBKS

PTI ■ DHARAMSALA

Defending champions Chennai Super Kings will look to set their house in order and get back to winning ways when they face an upbeat yet unpredictable Punjab Kings for the second time in a row in the IPL here Sunday. Just three days back, PBKS outclassed CSK by seven wickets at Chepauk, considered their fortress. The two losses in the last three games at home have put Chennai in a spot. They are placed fifth on the table with 10 points and the five-time champions will hope the change of venue would bring a change in fortune as well with just four games to go to seal their place in the knockout stage. CSK's failure to push the pace in the middle overs against the spin duo of Harpreet Brar and Rahul Chahar saw them post a below-par score of 162-7. Their batting has become too dependent on skipper Rituraj Gaikwad and six-hitting machine Shivam Dube and the moment one of them fails, it puts the pressure on others who have not been consistent in bailing out the team.

While Gaikwad hit his fifth 50-plus score of the season to hold it together, veteran batter Ajinkya Rahane once again failed to capitalise on the starts, while Ravindra Jadeja and Sameer Rizvi struggled against spin. CSK also has been hampered by the health and fitness concerns of their pacers, including Deepak Chahar, who limped off holding his hamstring after bowling just two balls and is likely to miss the reverse clash against PBKS. The absence of their frontline bowlers, Matheesha Pathirana (niggle) and Tushar Deshpande (flu), also didn't help matters the other day. Add to that the dew factor which took the spinners out of the equation and PBKS romped home comfortably. While Richard Gleeson made his IPL debut in the last match, CSK might bring back Mukesh Choudhary. Punjab Kings, on the other hand, have seen a resurgence as they registered back-to-back wins to re-ignite their playoffs hopes. En route to their win over CSK, Punjab became the second team after Mumbai Indians to beat the defending champions five times in a row and they



will fancy their chances. Punjab remains an unpredictable side as although it notched up wins over Gujarat in Ahmedabad, Chennai at Chepauk and also chased down a T20 record score against KKR, it has struggled at home against RR, SRH and Gujarat. With back-to-back wins, PBKS climbed to seventh spot with 8 points and will need to carry the momentum to salvage their slim hopes. Jonny Bairstow, who made a hundred against KKR, will be their go-to man, while Rilee Rossouw, Shashank Singh and Prabhsimran Singh too have to raise their hands. PBKS' bowling department has experienced names such as Kagiso Rabada, Harshal Patel, Arshdeep Singh and Sam Curran and they need to be consistent. Rabada was brilliant the other day but others have gone for runs. If PBKS has to repeat their performance against CSK then the spinners -- Harpreet Brar and Rahul Chahar - will have to deliver once again. Interestingly, the first IPL match in Dharamsala stadium was a clash between Chennai and Punjab in 2010. The venue

offers a lot of runs and dew remains a factor, making it an enticing contest. **TEAMS (FROM):** CSK: Rituraj Gaikwad (c), MS Dhoni (wk), Aravelly Avnish, Ajinkya Rahane, Shaik Rasheed, Moeen Ali, Shivam Dube, RS Hangargekar, Ravindra Jadeja, Ajay Jadav Mandal, Daryl Mitchell, Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner, Nishant Sindhu, Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande, Mukesh Choudhary, Mustafizur Rahman, Matheesha Pathirana, Simerjeet Singh, Prashant Solanki, Shardul Thakur, Maheesh Theekshana and Sameer Rizvi. **PBKS:** Shikhar Dhawan (c), Matthew Short, Jonny Bairstow (wk), Prabhsimran Singh (wk), Jitesh Sharma (wk), Sikandar Raza, Rishi Dhawan, Liam Livingstone, Atharva Taide, Arshdeep Singh, Nathan Ellis, Sam Curran, Kagiso Rabada, Harpreet Brar, Rahul Chahar, Harpreet Bhatia, Vidvath Kaverappa, Shivam Singh, Harshal Patel, Chris Woakes, Ashutosh Sharma, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, Shashank Singh, Tanay Thyagarajan, Prince Choudhary, Rilee Rossouw.



Hardik Pandya looks flattened, drained and under pressure: Aaron Finch

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India vice-captain Hardik Pandya looks drained, flattened, under pressure and Mumbai Indians looks like a confused unit under him, reckons former cricketers Aaron Finch and Graeme Smith as five-time champions continue to struggle in the IPL. Pandya once again walked out to loud boos around the Wankhede Stadium here on Friday during Mumbai Indians' yet another disappointing outing, which they lost by 24 runs to Kolkata Knight Riders. Mumbai Indians had begun the contest on a positive note by snaffling five quick wickets to leave KKR reeling at 57 for five, but the visitors fought back to post 169 on the board. In reply, Mumbai crashed out for 145 in 18.5 overs despite Suryakumar Yadav's 56. Pandya lasted only two

deliveries as Mumbai's batters once again cut a sorry figure on a two-paced track to succumb to their eighth defeat in 11 matches this season. "He just looks really flattened at the moment, he looks really drained and someone who is feeling the pressure. I feel for him; I have been in that situation myself where everything that you're trying personally doesn't seem to be working," Finch was quoted as saying by Star Sports. "When the team isn't performing as well, that is a very difficult place to be. It one thing where you're not performing and the team is winning — that is something you'd take as a captain. You bear all responsibility as captain for the team's performance and that is an incredibly hard place to be, particularly in this competition where it's so brutal," Finch added.



The former Australia opener conceded Mumbai Indians should have got over the line chasing 170 at a ground considered a haven for batters. "You would expect them to chase 170 with the dew falling at the Wankhede stadium. It's a beautiful place to bat, generally. Yes, it was a bit uncharacteristic in the way it turned a bit more two-paced than what we have seen in the past," Finch said. South Africa's legendary

captain Graeme Smith said MI have been a 'confused team' under Pandya with plenty of changes being made with the personnel. "Hardik has really struggled, he's looked like a man under pressure. That has created a little turmoil in the air, who knows how that has affected the people. But even the batting lineup, they look like they're confused," he said. "Tilak Varma and Naman Dhir were fighting in the middle order, Dhir was batting at No 3,

and Hardik moving all over the place. They should have had Tilak at (No) 3, Sky at (No) 4, and Hardik batting at (No) 5 throughout the season, with David at (No) 6. Then, figure out your bowling units," he said. "All over and all around, they've been a very confused team this season and it's been hugely disappointing from one of the mega franchises of the IPL. A lot of people in the MI fanbase and camp will be very sore," Smith added.

IPL playoffs hopeful LSG wary of dominant KKR's all round firepower

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow Super Giants will have to bring their 'A' game forward to prevail against a dominant Kolkata Knight Riders when the two teams, marching towards IPL playoffs, clash here on Sunday. With an all-round win by 24 runs over Mumbai Indians propelling the second-placed KKR to 14 points - one more step closer to qualification - the pressure will be on KL Rahul's LSG to find a way past the threat that Shreyas Iyer's side poses. Lucknow Super Giants are placed just one rung below KKR at number three with 12 points from 10 matches with six wins and four defeats. With a rampant Sunrisers Hyderabad (12 points) hot on their heels at fourth, followed by the dangerous Chennai Super Kings (10 points) and Delhi Capitals (10 points) on the points table, LSG will be under pressure to avoid getting into a mid-table battle as the race for the final-four has intensified. LSG were far from convincing in their previous assignment at Ekana Stadium here as they were made to work hard in a modest 145-run chase by Mumbai Indians, winning by just four wickets in the last over. Skipper Rahul and all-rounder Marcus Stoinis have been the key players for LSG and it remains to be seen if South Africa veteran Quinton de Kock is brought back in place of young Arshin Kulkarni, who opened the innings in the last game. Even though he has gone without a fifty since the first game, Nicholas Pooran has consistently notched up crucial scores but LSG's overall finishing skills is under question following their struggles against Mumbai Indians. LSG seemed to have made

heavy weather towards the end giving MI a real sniff by losing wickets in a flurry and completing their modest chase with some stutter. Ayush Badoni has had a subdued run in this IPL and the uncapped Indian player would be keen to shrug off the rustiness. LSG's bowlers will also face a stern test with none of them making a real dent with individual brilliance in this IPL. LSG are also likely to be without express pacer Mayank Yadav. Having lost only three of their 11 matches so far, it has taken something out of the ordinary to stop KKR in their tracks. CSK used a spin-friendly surface to eke out a win in Chepauk, while RR's all-round class helped them pip KKR in a high-scoring thriller. If anything, KKR's bowling woes were exposed when Punjab Kings recorded IPL's highest chase ever against them, but Iyer's side has emerged strongly from that setback with two impressive wins. However, having trumped MI on a sluggish wicket which exposed their batting frailties, KKR will aim for a much improved performance with the bat. For the second time in this IPL, KKR batters struggled when the ball did not come on to the bat and they were forced to change gears in order to build a strong target. KKR slipped to 57 for five at one stage and ran the risk of being shut out for a paltry total, but Venkatesh Iyer (70) and Manish Pandey (42) came to the rescue with a fine 83-run stand. Iyer and Pandey were forced to soak pressure, curb their attacking game and look to farm the strike to build a recovery path for their side before the bowlers carried out a perfect job to secure a 24-run win.



Mild back stiffness forced Rohit Sharma to play as impact sub in MI, KKR clash

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India captain and Mumbai Indians opener Rohit Sharma was forced to play as an impact sub in the IPL clash against Kolkata Knight Riders due to a "mild back stiffness," said leg-spinner Piyush Chawla. Playing as an impact sub, Rohit managed just 11 runs in 12 balls in the second innings during their 24-run loss against KKR, which has nearly put the five-time champions out of the IPL this year. "He just had a mild back stiffness so it was just a precautionary thing," Chawla told the media after the match here at the Wankhede Stadium. Mumbai's defeat was their eighth in 11 matches, essentially shutting the doors on the Hardik Pandya-led side and Chawla too conceded that it is only "pride" that they are left with to play for. "For the pride and the reputation, because sometimes when you enter on the field, you don't think whether you are going to qualify or you are not going to qualify," he said. "You have to play for your name and that's what we are playing for," he added. Chawla pointed MI's inability to attain momentum at any stage in this IPL as the reason behind

their poor performance. "You must have often heard about that T20 is all about momentum and just that we didn't get that momentum going this season and it can happen to any team," he said. "It's not like it's happening to us for the first time or any other team for the second time. It can happen to anyone and it's just that that momentum was not our way." The 35-year-old Chawla became IPL's second leading wicket-taker when he went past Dwayne Bravo on Friday to take 184 wickets. "It has been a beautiful journey because IPL started 17 years back and at that time nobody gave that much preference to the spinners, but now if you see that in top few wicket takers in India, especially all the spinners, Ashwin, Yuzhi, myself (are there), so it's a good feeling," he said. Chawla also praised Manish Pandey for delivering in a pressure situation while playing his first game this season. Pandey (42) added 83 runs for the sixth wicket with Venkatesh Iyer (70) as KKR posted 169 all-out in 19.5 overs. "It was a good partnership and credit has to go to them because they batted beautifully. Well, T20 is something in which experience plays a big role, (which is) what we saw today.



फिर एक बार
मोदी सरकार



मोदी की गारंटी
विष्णु का मुशासन

भाजपा राष्ट्रीय अध्यक्ष
श्री जेपी नड्डा जी
का
हार्दिक स्वागत है...

05 मई 2024, रविवार
प्रातः 11:00 बजे
अग्रसेन स्टेडियम, सूरजपुर
संयुक्त लोकसभा
आप सादर आमंत्रित हैं...

मोदी है तो मुमकिन है...

- दुनिया में भारत का गौरव बढ़ाया
- 500 वर्षों के संघर्ष के बाद प्रभु श्रीराम के मंदिर का निर्माण
- गरीबों के सर पर पक्की छत दी
- हर रस्सोई में गैस सिलेंडर देकर महिलाओं को धुएँ से मुक्ति दिलाई
- शौचालय बनाकर भारत के हर गांव को स्वच्छ बनाया
- नल-जल योजना के माध्यम से हर घर तक शुद्ध पेयजल पहुंचाया
- विदेशों में फंसे भारतीयों की सुरक्षित घर वापसी सुनिश्चित की

भारत की एकता, अखण्डता, संप्रभुता, सामाजिक एवं आर्थिक विकास के लिए भाजपा को वोट दें

भारतीय जनता पार्टी, छत्तीसगढ़

कमल के बटन दबाना है  **भाजपा ल जिताना है**