



**OPINION 6**  
BUDDHIST INFLUENCE ON  
TAGORE'S WORK

**WORLD 8**  
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TAKE NOSEDIVE

**MONEY 10**  
NSE REDUCES TICK SIZE FOR SELECT  
STOCKS TO BOOST LIQUIDITY

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## IMD forecasts Fry-days, relief only after June 1

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

With temperatures soaring as high as 47 degrees Celsius in some areas of the national Capital, Delhi, and in North West States like Rajasthan, Punjab, Chandigarh, and Haryana, as well as in Central parts of the country, people are grappling with intense heatwaves that have made outdoor activities nearly impossible. This challenging situation is expected to persist for at least the next three days, with the weather department issuing a red alert for heatwaves in several northern Indian cities, including Rajasthan. The Union Health Ministry has already advised employers to take essential heat safety measures at the workplace. "From providing hydration stations to scheduling outdoor tasks during cooler hours, let's ensure our workers stay cool, healthy, and productive," the Ministry said in a post on social media platform X. It also advised employers to train workers to recognise symptoms of heat-related illness. Relief from the blistering weather is anticipated from June 1, thanks to a fresh western disturbance, according to forecasts by the



Tourists at the Taj Mahal on a hot summer day in Agra

Meteorological Department (IMD). The oppressive heat has driven residents indoors, resulting in public spaces being virtually deserted, particularly during the afternoon hours. In response to the ongoing intense hot weather in the national Capital, the Haryana Government has announced

the advancement of summer vacations in both State-run and private schools to begin on Tuesday. Additionally, Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj announced on Monday that 26 State Government-run hospitals will reserve two beds each for heatstroke patients, with an additional five beds reserved at the LNJP Hospital.

The Centre Government operated RML Hospital has already set up a heat stroke unit to tackle the likely heat-illness related cases. As large parts of North West and Central India experienced a punishing heatwave straining power grids, States are ready for disaster preparedness, like situation on Sunday.

## Two die, life and property hit as Remal pounds Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

At least two persons were killed and several others injured as severe cyclonic storm Remal hit Bengal coasts on Sunday night, sources at State secretariat Nabanna said, adding the NDRF and SDRF teams were working overtime to restore normalcy in affected areas most of which lie in the vicinity of Sunderbans. Though the speed of the storm reduced to a great degree by Monday morning, incessant rains continued to lash eight districts of South Bengal nearly throwing life out of gear. The first death occurred after a wall collapsed under the impact of the rains at Bibir Bagan near Park Circus and Entally area of Kolkata, police said. Another person died when a tree collapsed under the impact of driving rains and gusting winds at 135 kmph at Mousuni Islands at the mouth of Bay of Bengal off Sunderbans. At least eight other persons were injured at various places in Kolkata and Kakkdwip, sources said. Severe cyclone Remal made landfall between Sagar Islands in Bengal and Khepupara in neighbouring Bangladesh, sources said on Monday. Rivers surrounding most of the riverine islands — like Jharkhali, Geokhali,



Villagers at a flooded area following the landfall of Cyclone Remal in South 24 Parganas district on Monday

Kumirmari, Sandeshkhali Block I, Godkhali, Bakkhali, Gosaba — of the Sunderbans areas in two 24 Parganas districts were almost brimming and threatening to breach or overflow their mud embankments — under the impact of high tide and gushing rains — sources said, adding in many villages the embankments had been breached and salty water had entered the agricultural fields. "This flooding of the fields could have a deep impact on the local economy as there would be no agriculture for several years now," said former Minister from Sunderbans Kanti Ganguli who was actively involved in rescue work. By Monday evening the storm had nearly stopped but

rains were still continuing. "Severe Cyclonic Storm Remal over Coastal Bangladesh and adjoining Coastal West Bengal weakened into a cyclonic storm about 70km northeast of Canning and 30km west-southwest of Mongla on May 27. The system is likely to gradually weaken further," said India Meteorological Department post. "We have deployed appropriate number of teams all over Kolkata and adjoining areas to clear the uprooted trees and reach relief to people affected by the cyclone," Kolkata Mayor and Bengal Minister Firhad Hakim said, adding 14 teams of NDRF were working at various locations with modern equipment, cranes to hasten relief work.



## 'Depressed, in shock' Revanna promises to meet SIT on May 31

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/BENGALURU

Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, who is facing charges of sexually abusing several women, has said he will appear before the Special Investigation Team (SIT), probing the cases against him, on May 31. Terming the cases against him as "false" and part of a "political conspiracy", he said he had gone into depression. "I will personally come before the SIT on May 31 at 10 am and cooperate with the investigation and also respond to it (charges). I have faith in the judiciary and I am confident that I will come out of false cases, through court," Pajwal said in a video statement. There was no independent confirmation from the JD(S) or the family of the suspended party MP immediately over the matter.



## 'Unwell' Kejriwal seeks weeklong reprieve from SC

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, currently out on interim bail in connection with the excise policy case, has approached the Supreme Court seeking an extension of the same by seven more days to undergo a host of medical tests, including a PET-CT scan in view of his "sudden and unexplained weight loss, coupled with high ketone levels", which are indicative of kidney, serious cardiac ailments and even cancer. Kejriwal, in his plea filed on May 26, stated that he will get all these tests done in the working week from 3.06.2024 (Monday) to 7.6.2024 (Friday) and then surrender on the weekend, i.e. 9.06.2024. Senior AAP leader and Delhi Minister Atishi also on Monday said Kejriwal has sought a one-week extension of his interim bail as he needs to undergo tests due to his recent weight loss and rise in ketone level which could be symptoms of some kidney problem or even cancer. Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva called this move a "drama" by the Chief Minister to avoid going back to jail after his interim bail in a money laundering case ends on June 1. The interim bail granted to Kejriwal has stirred controversy, with BJP leaders alleging preferential treatment by the Supreme Court. The PET-CT scan shows detailed pictures of organs and tissues. These tests are to be done in a particular sequence and would require about five-seven days, it said, adding "sudden and unexplained weight loss, coupled with high ketone levels could be indicative of kidney damage, serious cardiac ailments and even cancer". Early detection of these ailments is essential for preventing further progress of the disease and associated life risk and Kejriwal needed to undergo these tests, otherwise his life is at "high risk", it said. The fresh plea, which is likely to be taken up in the coming days by a vacation bench, said during the incarceration from March 21 to May 10, the Chief Minister suffered a lot of health-related complications which are also "partly attributable to the negligent and callous behaviour of the jail authorities".

## Valley's thumbs-up to poll engagement

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In the first major electoral exercise after Article 370 abrogation and the bifurcation of Jammu & Kashmir into two Union Territories, the Valley has recorded the combined poll percentage of 58.46 per cent for the five Parliamentary seats, which is the record highest voter turnout in last 35 years, witnessing a "massive" 30 points jump in poll participation compared to 2019. Data shared by the Election Commission (EC) shows that the voter turnout of 50.86 per cent from the three Parliamentary constituencies in the Kashmir Valley echoes the faith of the people in the democratic process. The poll participation percentage witnessed 30 points jump from the last Lok Sabha polls in 2019 when it was 19.16 per cent. The three seats in the Valley — Srinagar,



Baramulla and Anantnag-Rajouri — recorded turnout of 38.49 per cent, 59.1 per cent and 54.84 per cent respectively, the highest in last three decades. The other two seats in the UT — Udhampur and Jammu — recorded 68.27 per cent and 72.22 per cent voter turnout respectively.

According to data, as against 58 per cent voting reported in five LS seats in J&K this year, 44.07 per cent polling was reported in 2019, 49.58 per cent in 2014, 39.04 per cent in 2009, 34.07 per cent in 2004, 30.89 per cent in 1999, 43.35 per cent in 1998,

47.99 per cent in 1996 and 29.93 per cent voter turnout in 1989. Notably, Baramulla had witnessed 5.48 per cent polling in 1989; 46.65 per cent in 1996; 41.94 per cent in 1998 and 34.6 per cent in 2019. Anantnag witnessed voting at 8.98 per cent in 2019 and around 5 per cent in 1989. According to EC, more young people have asserted their faith and embraced democracy in a big way. Another interesting perspective is the electors in the age group of 18-59 years form the major part of electors in the UT, it underlined. As per data, Baramulla witnessed voter turnout (between age group of 18 and 39) at 56.02 per cent voting, Srinagar at 48.57 per cent; Anantnag-Rajouri at 54.41 per cent; Udhampur 53.57 per cent and Jammu at 47.66 per cent.



Two doctors of the Sassoon General Hospital being taken into police custody after their arrest for alleged manipulation of blood samples and destruction of evidence in the case of a car accident involving a 17-year-old boy in Pune

## Pune doctors manipulated teen's blood sample, 3 held

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a major development in the Porsche car crash case, two senior doctors and an employee from the State-run Sassoon Hospital have been arrested for allegedly "tampering" with the blood samples of the minor accused in the case. The arrests of the two doctors — Dr Ajay Taware, Head of the Forensics Department, Dr Shrihari Halnor the Chief Medical Officer of the hospital and Atul Ghatkamble, an employee who works under Dr Taware — came after the police established that the blood samples tested at the Sassoon Hospital did not match with that of the accused Porsche car crash. The three arrested persons — including two doctors — were on Monday produced before Pune's Judicial Magistrate First Class (Small Causes) AA Pande, who remanded them in police custody till May 30. Dr Taware, Dr Halnor and Atul have been charged with

the alleged "manipulation" of blood samples and destruction of evidence in the case. While seeking police custody of the three persons, the police told the court that some financial transactions had taken place to "tamper" with the blood samples and they needed to search the homes of the 17-year-old accused in connection with it. The police told the court that the juvenile's blood samples were thrown into a dustbin and replaced with the blood samples of another person on the instructions of Dr Taware. It may be recalled that in the small hours of May 19, the 17-year-old boy — after partying with his friends at a Pune bar — who had driven off in his Porsche car in his inebriated state at a speed of some 200 kmph and rammed into a motorcycle killing killing Ashwini Koshta and Aneesh Awadhya (both aged 24 years) who were returning home after a reunion with friends.

## INDIA Bloc strategy meet on June 1, minus TMC

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Riding high on speculations that the Opposition parties led by Congress under the INDIA Bloc may tally better than incumbent BJP-led NDA in this year's general elections, top leaders of the Bloc are likely to meet on June 1 to assess their performance in the Lok Sabha elections and chalk out strategy ahead of the results. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has convened the meeting in Delhi when the last phase of polling will be underway. Sources said Opposition leaders will discuss their strategy ahead of the June 4 results and assess their performance in the seven-phase elections. The ruling alliance led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav and CPI(M) Liberation general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya being garlanded during a public meeting in favour of INDIA Bloc (Congress) candidate Anshul Avijit for Lok Sabha polls, at Khusrupur, in Patna, on Monday

also claimed that it would form the Government at the Centre for the third successive time. Among those invited for the meeting is Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal who is also convener of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), and is currently on interim bail by the Supreme Court in the Delhi excise policy case. He has to surrender on June 2. Others invited are Sharad Pawar of NCP, Uddhav Thackeray of Shiv Sena, Tejashwi Yadav of RJD, Akhilesh Yadav from Samajwadi Party, Kalpana Soren (Hemant Soren's wife) from JMM, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK chief MK Stalin who have contested the ensuing Lok Sabha polls under an alliance with the Congress in several States.

## Once burned, Govt orders fire audit of all hospitals

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

In the aftermath of the deadly fire at a neonatal hospital that charred seven newborns and injured five others in the national Capital on Saturday night, the Delhi Government on Monday sprung into action directing all hospitals to complete a fire audit by June 8. Police investigations revealed severe lapses including the hospital operating on expired licence and no clearance from the fire department. On Monday, the Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj convened a meeting of the Health Department officials to

discuss the incident in east Delhi's Vivek Vihar area. Following the high-level meeting, Bhardwaj said the Delhi Government will issue directions to all private and State-run hospitals to complete a fire audit by June 8 and submit a compliance report. "On April 24, we had issued directions to all hospitals for fire preparedness. On May 8, we had asked them to conduct a fire audit. We will ask all private and Delhi Government-run hospitals to complete a fire audit by June 8 and submit a compliance report to the health department," Bhardwaj said.



He declared that no culprit will be spared, irrespective of their status and announced stringent new safety regulations for nursing homes over nine metres tall, mandating water sprinklers

and smoke detectors, and directed all CDMOs to conduct random inspections. "The owner of this hospital also runs another similar hospital in Paschim Puri. Cases have been registered against him twice in different incidents. These cases are going on against him in Karkardooma Court and Tis Hazari Court. A surprise inspection was done in which deficiencies were found, so a case was registered against him. Once he was found running the hospital without registration, a case was registered against him. It is expected that soon the court will give its verdict against

the owner of this nursing home in these cases and he will be given a severe punishment," he added. Bhardwaj, while pointing out a very shocking thing regarding the incident, said there is a suspicion that the work of refilling oxygen was going on the lowest floor of the nursing home. "We are also investigating this, if any such work was going on there, then does the hospital administration have its license and if not, then on what basis was this work going on in the hospital and by whom was this work being done, this is being investigated.



# Make Modi PM for third time to end corruption in Jharkhand

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

State President of Madhya Pradesh Bharatiya Janata Party and Khajuraho MP Vishnudutt Sharma, while addressing a public meeting in Sridhar of Rajmahal Lok Sabha constituency on Monday, the fourth day of his stay in Jharkhand, said that Congress and Indira alliance are doing politics of lies, fraud and deceit. The British left the country, but Congress and the dynastic parties included in the Indian alliance want to move forward on the policy of divide and rule, but the people of the country will not accept it. Mr. Sharma said that before 2014, there were no roads in Jharkhand and people were worried about drinking water. After becoming the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has done the work of laying a net-

work of roads in Jharkhand and providing tap water to every house. He said that to end corruption in Jharkhand, make Narendra Modi the Prime Minister for the third time. People should give their blessings to BJP to save Jharkhand from the loot of Soren family. Before the public meeting, State President Sharma addressed the booth level workers meeting in Rajmahal and Dumka Lok Sabha constituency. BJP state president and MP Vishnudutt Sharma, while addressing the public meeting, said that remember Jharkhand before 2014 and look at the present Jharkhand. Before 2014, there were no roads in the entire Jharkhand and especially in the Santhal area and Rajmahal Lok Sabha constituency. It was not known whether there were potholes in the roads or roads in

potholes. After Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister in 2014, a network of roads has been laid throughout Jharkhand. Now tap water is being provided to every house. The Congress Party, which ruled the country for years after independence, never did any good to the poor. The Congress party only gave the slogan of eradicating poverty, but did not do any work to eradicate poverty. When Narendra Modi opened Jan Dhan accounts for the welfare of the poor after becoming the Prime Minister, the leaders of Congress and opposition parties were raising questions. Today, the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi is sending the amount of beneficiary schemes in the same Jan Dhan accounts and there is not even a single rupee of corruption. Whereas Congress leader Rajiv

Gandhi, when he was the Prime Minister, had said that if I send one rupee from Delhi to the poor, 15 paise reaches the poor and 85 paise goes to corruption. If Prime Minister Narendra Modi is taking action against this corruption, then everyone is unitedly protesting against corruption. Narendra Modi is providing free ration to 80 crore people for the welfare of the poor, along with gas connections for cooking to poor mothers and sisters under Ujjwala scheme, free treatment up to Rs 5 lakh to crores of people of the country under Ayushman Bharat scheme. Are running the plan. Now, after the formation of the government, the work of providing free treatment worth Rs 5 lakh to all senior citizens above 70 years of age and construction of Rs 3 crore Prime Minister's residence

is starting. This is the guarantee of Modi ji, all of you make Narendra Modi ji the Prime Minister for the third time and make BJP candidate Tala Marandi victorious from Rajmahal Lok Sabha seat with a historic majority. As soon as Narendra Modi becomes the Prime Minister for the third time, Rs 3 crore PM Awas will be built and all senior citizens above 70 years of age will start getting free treatment up to Rs 5 lakh. Senior leaders including party candidate Tala Marandi were present in the public meeting. BJP state president Vishnudutt Sharma said that in the corruption case in Jharkhand, a few days ago, Rs 35 crore was found from the house of a servant close to a minister. From this it can be estimated to what extent people's money is being looted in Jharkhand.



MP Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) Chief Chirag Paswan and BJP candidate from Palliputra constituency Ram Kripal Yadav during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections in Patna, Bihar on Monday. Pioneer photo

## Special judge of CBI convicts 7 accused in Vyapam

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

The Special Judge for CBI Vyapam Cases, Bhopal on Monday convicted eleven accused including Avinash Jayant, Rajesh Prajapati, Lokendra Dhakar, Bhoora Rawat, Radheshyam Yadav and Vikas Rawat (all 06 candidates of PCRT-2012) and Naresh Prajapati, Hariom Singh Tomar, Hemant Singh Jat, Rambir Rawat & Sarvesh Kumar Jha (all 5 accused impersonators in PCRT-2012) to 07 years Rigorous Imprisonment with combined fine of Rs. 1.10 lakh in a case related to Police Constable Recruitment Test-2012 (PCRT-2012) conducted by Vyapam, Bhopal. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) registered a case on August 03, 2015 in compliance of the orders of Hon'ble Supreme Court of India dated July 09, 02015, by taking over an FIR registered, vide Crime No.

**During the CBI investigation, absconding accused were traced. Thereafter, a supplementary chargesheet was filed by CBI on Sept 28, 2016**

05/14 dated March 13, 2014 at STF PS, Bhopal on the allegations of illegal selection of candidates (Avinash Jayant, Rajesh Prajapati, Lokendra Dhakar, Bhoora Rawat, Radheshyam Yadav & Vikas Rawat) who were allegedly involved in cheating through impersonation in connivance with middlemen/solvers and others in the Police Constable Recruitment Test-2012 (PCRT-2012) held on September 30,

2012. It was also alleged that the accused were involved in forgery of valuable security, using forged documents as genuine, criminal conspiracy, using unfair means, etc. After investigation, STF, Bhopal had filed initial charge sheet on 07.06.2014 and a supplementary charge sheet on September 14, 2014. Further, 2nd Supplementary charge sheet dated January 26, 2015 was also filed by STF, Bhopal. STF had kept further investigation open with regard to other absconding/untraced persons. During the CBI investigation, absconding accused were traced. Thereafter, a supplementary chargesheet was filed by CBI on September 28, 2016. After completion of further investigation, CBI also filed another supplementary chargesheet on June 30, 2017. The Court, after trial, held 11 accused guilty and sentenced them accordingly.

## Serviceman cheated to the tune of Rs 3L

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Bhopal: Koh-e-Fiza police have registered a case of forgery on the complaint of an army personnel who provided documents for a car loan of Rs 3 lakh which was availed by a fraudster. The agent of the finance company had taken documents from him in the name of getting the car financed. The installments started being deducted from the complainant's bank account and when the victim inquired into the investigation, it was found that he had car finance in his name. However, he never received delivery of the car. After which the matter was reported in the police station. After investigation, the police have registered a case. Kohafiza police said that army personnel Sunil Kumar lives in a colony along Narmadapuram Road. Two years ago he had planned to buy a car. He wanted a car loan. During this time, he met a young man named Amar Singh. He worked as an agent for

Kohafiza-based Meghna Finance Company and offered facilitating loan from Indo Star Company based in MP Nagar. After the deal was finalized, Sunil Kumar gave his documents to Amar Singh. Army jawan had applied for a car loan of Rs 4.21 lakh, his loan of Rs 3.09 lakh was also approved. Meanwhile, when Sunil Kumar was posted in Ayodhya, the entire process got delayed a bit. The same Sunil Kumar did not get the loan but two installments of Rs 15240 each were deducted from his bank account. They were surprised that when the loan money did not come into the account then how could the installments be deducted. When he told this to Amar, he told him not to keep the money in his account. Hearing this, he became suspicious and reported the matter to the police. When the police investigated, they found out that Amar had deposited both the installments in his account.

## 912 employees deployed in counting of votes in Bhopal

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Counting of votes for Bhopal Lok Sabha seat will take place on June 4. With this, EVM will come out from the strong room of the old jail and then the fate of 22 other candidates including BJP, Congress will be decided. A total of 912 employees have been deployed for counting. They will be given final training on 31st May. Training was given on May 25 at Model Higher Secondary School and Coordination Building of Apex Bank. In which a total of 912 employees including micro observers were trained. They will get training again on May 31. So that they can become familiar with every detail related to counting. First the votes cast in Bhopal North and last in Govindpura Assembly will be

**Training was given on May 25 at Model Higher Secondary School and Coordination Building of Apex Bank**

counted. There will be a minimum and maximum number of rounds here. There will be 16 rounds in Bhopal North, while there will be 20 rounds in Govindpura. 17-17 votes of Narela-Bhopal South-West, 18-18 votes of Berasia-Central, Huzoor's votes will be counted in 19 rounds. Sehore is the eighth assembly in the Bhopal Lok Sabha. Whose votes will be counted there and the data will be sent to Bhopal. Only after this the round wise figures will be

revealed. However, the postal ballot of Sehore Vis will be counted in Bhopal only. The officers and employees engaged in counting will reach the old jail at 6 in the morning. Counting of the first postal ballot will begin at 8 in the morning on the RO table. Observers will keep an eye on the count. They will mention everything related to counting in every report. Apart from EVMs, 9 tables will be installed for each postal ballot. The first round can be completed by 9 o'clock. After that there will be a round every half hour. The situation will be clear by 6 pm. Counting of votes from EVMs will start after 30 minutes from the scheduled time for counting i.e. from 8.30 am. The results of the first round can be known in 30 minutes.



Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia attends the invited guests during the Terahvin programme of his mother Rajmata Madhavi Raju Scindia, at Jai Vilas Palace in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh on Monday. Pioneer photo

## CEC reviews preparations of counting of votes though VC

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Election Commissioner, Election Commission of India, Rajiv Kumar, held a review meeting through video conferencing on Monday, 27 May, to take stock of the preparations for the counting of votes for Lok Sabha Elections 2024. Chief Electoral Officer (Madhya Pradesh) Anupam Rajan along with Collectors and District Election Officers of all the districts of the state and Returning Officers of 29 Lok Sabha parliamentary constituencies, participated in the meeting. Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar told to ensure that all the preparations and necessary arrangements related to vote counting are managed properly. He instructed to get all arrangements including the security of the counting venue, entry into the counting com-

**Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar told to ensure that all the preparations and necessary arrangements related to vote counting are managed properly**

plex, ambulance given the heat, medicines, fire brigade, rotation-wise exchange of counting information, transportation of EVMs from the strong room to the counting center, counting of postal ballots, etc. under their supervision. He told to provide thorough training to all counting personnel and micro observers so that there is no scope for error in the counting of votes. Chief Electoral Officer Rajan informed the Election

Commission of India about the preparations being made for the counting of votes to be held on June 4 in all the districts of the state. In the VC, Election Commissioner of India Gyanesh Kumar, and Dr. S.S. Sandhu were also present. Only those with admit cards will be allowed. Chief Election Commissioner Kumar said that special attention should be paid to the arrangements for entry into the counting center. Only officers, employees, counting agents, journalists and security personnel holding authorization letters will be allowed to enter the counting center. Also make necessary arrangements for crowd management outside the counting center premises. Install adequate number of CCTV cameras. An adequate number of CCTV cameras should be installed outside and inside the premis-

es and every activity should be closely monitored. Chief Election Commissioner Kumar said that all returning officers should thoroughly study all the rules and guidelines regarding the counting of votes and accordingly get the counting done without any hindrance. Kumar praised the returning officers, collectors and district election officers, and police officers of all 29 Lok Sabha parliamentary constituencies of Madhya Pradesh for conducting peaceful voting and said that it was a big teamwork, which was completed without any hindrance. Additional Chief Electoral Officer Rajesh Kaul, Inspector General of Police and State Police Nodal Officer Anshuman Singh, Joint Chief Electoral Officer Basant Kurre, Tarun Rathi, and Deputy Chief Electoral Officer Pramod Shukla were present in the VC.

## Patwari reaches HC on FIR against him, notice issued to Imarti Devi

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh High Court has served notice to BJP leader and former minister Imarti Devi, by accepting the plea of State Congress president Jitu Patwari for quashing the FIR lodged by her at Dabra police station in Gwalior. Imarti Devi had lodged a complaint on the controversial remark on her by State Congress President Jitu Patwari. He had filed a petition in the High Court challenging the police registering the case under other sections including the SC-ST Act. While hearing the petition, a single bench of High Court Justice Sanjay Dwivedi has issued a notice to former minister Imarti Devi seeking her reply. The next hearing on the petition has been scheduled for July 2. In the petition filed on behalf of petitioner Jitu Patwari, it was said that the statement he had given, in which he had not made any kind of caste based comment. Apart from this, there was no such intention, which has been mentioned in the FIR. Eight

hours after giving the statement, he also publicly apologized. Hours after apologizing, an FIR was lodged against him. Not only this, complaints were also made in other police stations of the state. The FIR lodged is completely politically managed. Advocate Vibhor Khandelwal, appearing on behalf of the petitioner, told the single bench that an offense is not made out against the petitioner under the SC-ST Act, which is non-bailable. Other sections registered in the case are bailable. In his statement, Patwari did not make caste based statements against anyone and did not make any indecent gestures, which has been mentioned in the FIR. A case has been registered against him under SC-ST Act on the basis of no evidence. After hearing the petition, the single bench has issued a notice to Anavedika Imarti Devi and sought her reply. The single bench has given freedom to the State Congress President to file a petition in the High Court for anticipatory bail against the registration of FIR.

## Mega Yoga camp to be organised

Indore: To promote physical and mental well-being through yoga and pranayama, Hariom Yogpeeth will host a mega yoga camp on June 21 next month to mark International Yoga Day. The camp will be held, at MR 4 Garden in Mahalaxmi Nagar. The camp will showcase yoga practitioners trained under Yoga Guru Ramesh Patil, sharing how yoga has helped them overcome physical ailments and improve health. During the event, Hariom Yogpeeth will unveil an annual circular and souvenir outlining their activities. Testimonials from individuals embracing yoga and pranayama for a healthier lifestyle will be featured. Hariom Yogpeeth organized a group photo session for active members, including renowned practitioners like Jainendra Savla, Narayan Pagare, Shambhunath Singh, and others, highlighting their commitment to yoga. For the last 15 years, Hariom Yogpeeth, under the guidance of Yoga Guru Ramesh Patil, has offered no-cost yoga classes in Nipania and Piplyakumar, thereby enabling senior citizens, womenfolk to overcome their health ailments.

## AIIMS Bhopal takes special measures to combat rising temperature

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

As the mercury soars, Executive Director of AIIMS Bhopal Professor (Dr.) Ajai Singh has directed to take proactive steps to ensure the well-being of patients amidst the sweltering heat. With temperatures rising steadily over the past few days, there has been a notable surge in patients presenting with symptoms such as dehydration, fever, fatigue, weakness, vomiting, and diarrhea. Statistics from the Medicine Department's Outpatient Department (OPD) paint a concerning picture, with 653 patients on 24th, 462 on 25th and 723 on May 27 seeking medical attention alone. In response to the escalating patient numbers, the dedicated medical professionals of the Medicine Department at AIIMS Bhopal are working tirelessly to address the needs of every individual. To ensure seamless patient care from the moment of arrival, the hospital staff is extending their support, guiding patients through the registration process and assisting them in reaching the appropriate healthcare provider

**Ajai Singh has directed to take proactive steps to ensure the well-being of patients amidst the sweltering heat**

promptly. Professor (Dr.) Rajneesh Joshi, Head of the Department of Medicine, underscores the importance of preventive measures during this scorching summer season. He emphasized on staying covered while outdoors, staying hydrated, engaging in light physical activity, and avoiding unnecessary sun exposure, particularly crucial for individuals with comorbidity conditions such as diabetes or hypertension. Executive Director, Professor (Dr.) Ajai Singh, urged the community to prioritize their health by embracing these simple yet effective precautions amidst rising temperatures. Through collective efforts and mindful actions, individuals can safeguard their well-being and contribute to a healthier community.



A scene from the play 'Peeli Poonchi' staged at Shaheed Bhawan in Bhopal on Monday. Pioneer photo

## Activities with public participation will be done: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has said that a campaign will be run in the entire state, for the conservation and revitalization of water sources, from Environment Day on June 5 till Ganga Dashami festival. During the campaign activities will be conducted in every district to keep water sources like rivers, wells, ponds, step wells, clean and if necessary, deepen

them. This work will be done with public participation to awaken social consciousness toward water sources and develop a lively relationship between the common people and the water sources. Ganga Dashami festival is the incarnation day of Maa Ganga and it is through Maa Ganga that Indian culture is known throughout the world. Public representatives will lead this campaign in urban and rural areas and the

District Collector will co-ordinate the activities. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav said this in a message issued to the media. Yadav urged all social, government, non-government organizations and organizations associated with Jan Abhiyan Parishad to participate in the campaign. He said that water structures should be selected with public participation and intensive public awareness programs should be run for their conservation.



HC refuses to hear Saumya's interim bail plea

STAFF REPORTER ■ BILASPUR

The Chhattisgarh High Court on Monday refused to hear the interim bail plea of suspended deputy secretary Saumya Chaurasia in the alleged coal levy scam and money laundering case, a government lawyer said.

Justice NK Vyas passed the order. Enforcement Department lawyer Saurabh Pandey appeared for the state.

During the hearing, Chaurasia's lawyers argued that the apex court had given interim bail to one of the accused, businessman Sunil Agrawal. But the High Court did not hear the interim bail plea. It fixed June 11 for the next hearing.



In 2022, the ED had alleged that a "grand conspiracy" was hatched to perpetrate a coal levy scam in which Rs 540 crore was extorted over the last two years.

Expedite Vision Document 2047 drafting work: Singh



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh NITI Aayog Chairman Ajay Singh on Monday gave directions to expedite the drafting work of the Vision 2047 document. He said this at the second meeting of the document

committee held in Raipur. Co-chairman and Chief Secretary Amitabh Jain and senior officials were present. The government is preparing a vision document called 'Amritkal: Chhattisgarh Vision @ 2047' which will contain a detailed roadmap to transform the region from a developing state to a developed one. The document is scheduled to be released on the state's foundation day, November 1.

'Mahtari Vandan making women financially secure'

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Monday said women were happy with the Mahtari Vandan scheme as it has made them financially secure. Sai posted on X that so far more than 70.12 Lakh women in the state have been given Rs 1,956 crore in three instalments of financial assistance. The government is committed to uplift all sections of the society, he said.



Under this scheme, married women aged 21 and above are provided a monthly assistance of Rs 1,000.

Registered Office : 6th Floor, Tower A, Peninsula Business Park, Senapati Bapat Marg, Lower Parel, Mumbai - 400013



POSSESSION NOTICE

The undersigned being the authorized officer of the DCB Bank Ltd., under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest (54 of 2002) and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice on below mentioned dates calling upon the borrowers (Borrower's and Co-Borrower's) to repay the amount mentioned in the notice as detailed below in tabular form with further interest thereon from within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

The borrower and Co-Borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower, Co-Borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section (4) of section 13 of Act read with rule 6 also r/w section 14(1) of the Security Interest Rules 2002 on as 24th May, 2024.

The borrower, Co-Borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property (Description of the Immovable Property) and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the DCB Bank Ltd., for respective amount as mentioned here below.

The Borrower's attention is invited to provisions of Sub-section (8) of Section 13 of the act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Table with 6 columns: Demand Notice Dated, Name of Borrower(s) and Co-borrower(s), Loan Account Numbers, Total Outstanding Amount, Description of the Immovable Property, and Demand Notice Dated. It lists multiple loan entries with details on borrowers, amounts, and property descriptions.

Manjhi to return Padma Award

STAFF REPORTER ■ NARAYANPUR

Padma Shri winner Hemchand Manjhi on Monday said that he will return the award and discontinue his traditional medicine practice after Maoist threats. Manjhi, popularly known as Vaidyaraj, of Narayanpur district in Chhattisgarh received the Padma Shri from President Draupadi Murmu in New Delhi last month.

The Maoists set ablaze two under-construction mobile towers in Chameli and Gaurdand villages in the district and put up banners and left pamphlets there threatening Manjhi on Sunday night, the police said.



The Maoists alleged that Manjhi got huge kickbacks for helping in the commissioning of the Aamdai Ghati iron ore project and threatened him with dire consequences.

Refuting the charges, Manjhi said he has no connection with the mine. Manjhi said his family was under the shadow of threats.

"After discussions with the family, I have decided to return the award and stop the treatment of people through traditional medicines," he said.

Last year, Maoists killed Manjhi's nephew Komal Manjhi in Chhotodongar in the district after accusing him of acting as an agent of an iron ore project.

Court extends custodial remand of Ranu, Saumya

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

A court in Raipur on Friday extended the custodial remand of suspended IAS officer Ranu Sahu and suspended deputy secretary Saumya Chaurasia to the ACB/EOW in an alleged coal levy scam money laundering case.

Additional Sessions Judge Dilesh Yadav extended their custody till June 3, ACB/EOW Deputy Director (Prosecution) Mithlesh Verma said.

The two and eight others were jailed in the alleged scam. In January 2024, the ACB/EOW named 36 persons including two former cabinet ministers in a FIR



related to the alleged multi-crore coal scam based on a complaint by the Enforcement Directorate.

Chandrakar sent to jail in custom milling scam

RAIPUR : The court here on Monday sent a rice miller Roshan Chandrakar to jail till June 10 in the alleged Rs 175 crore Chhattisgarh custom rice milling scam. District and Session Judge Abdul Zahid Qureshi passed the order. The Dhantari-based Chandrakar was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on May 16. He was treasurer of the state rice millers association during the Kharif marketing season 2021-22. During this tenure, an organised system of collection of illegal kickbacks from the rice millers allegedly operated.

Cong willing to support battle against Naxalites

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Congress in Chhattisgarh on Monday expressed willingness to support the battle against Naxalites but conditionally.

In a letter to Home Minister Vijay Sharma, PCC chief Deepak Bajj said they were ready back efforts to eliminate Naxalism but it must be ensured that innocent tribals are not killed in the guise of fake encounters.

Sharma appealed to the Congress to support the government vis-a-vis Naxalites and sought to know the Congress leader's suggestions.

Alleging that innocent tribals were killed by security forces in Bastar's Pidia, the Congress chief also demanded a judicial probe into the deaths.

Bajj also asked the Minister to continue the previous Congress government's policy of winning the hearts of tribals in Naxalite-affected Bastar region.



HINDUJA HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED

Corporate Office: 167-169, 2nd floor, Near Little Mount Metro Station, Saipet, Chennai - 600015. Branch Office- 3rd Floor, Near Axis Bank, Pujari Chamber, Pachpedi Naka, Raipur, Chhattisgarh-492001. PUBLIC NOTICE FOR SYMBOLIC AUCTION SALE

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the Borrower(s) and Co-Borrower(s) that pursuant to taking physical possession of the secured asset mentioned hereunder by the Authorized Officer of Hinduja Housing Finance Ltd. under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 for the recovery of amount due from borrower/s, we hereby give you notice that the below mentioned secured asset shall be sold by the undersigned if you fail to pay within 30 days of this notice, the entire outstanding loan amount as per the terms and conditions contained in the Loan Agreement and other documents pertaining to the Loan availed by you. After expiry of Thirty days, no further notice whatsoever will be given to you and the below mentioned Secured Asset will be sold accordingly. Also offers are invited by the undersigned in sealed covers for purchase of immovable property, as described hereunder, to be sold on, as 'As Is Where Is Basis', 'As Is What Is Basis' and 'Whatever Is There Is Basis', Particulars of which are given below: -

Table with 6 columns: Borrower (s) / Co-Borrower (s) / Guarantor (s), Demand Notice Date and Amount Bid Increase Amount, Description of the Immovable property/ Secured Asset, Date of Symbolic Possession, Reserved Price (in Rs.) Earnest Money Deposit (EMD), and Date of Inspection of Property. It lists multiple loan entries with details on borrowers, amounts, property descriptions, and auction dates.

1. Date of Inspection of the Immovable Property is on 15.05.2024 to 25.05.2024 between 11 AM to 1PM. 2. Last Date of Submission of Sealed Bid/Offer in the prescribed tender forms along with EMD and KYC is 29.05.2024 between 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. at the Branch Office: Hinduja Housing Finance Limited- 3rd Floor Near Axis Bank, Pujari Chamber, Pachpedi Naka, Raipur, Chhattisgarh-492001. Tenders that are not filled up or tenders received beyond last date will be considered as invalid tender and shall accordingly be rejected. No interest shall be paid on the EMD. 3. Date of Opening of the Bid/Offer (Auction Date) for Property is 30.05.2024 at the above-mentioned branch office address at 11 AM. The tender will be opened in the presence of the Authorized Officer. 4. Further interest will be charged as applicable, as per the Loan Agreement on the amount outstanding in the notice and incidental expenses, costs, etc., is due and payable till its realization. 5. The notice is hereby given to the Borrower/s and Co-Borrower/s to remain present personally at the time of sale and they can bring the intending buyers/purchasers for purchasing the immovable property as described herein above, as per the particulars of Terms and Conditions of Sale. 6. The detail terms and conditions of the auction sale are incorporated in the prescribed tender form. Tender forms are available at the above-mentioned Branch Office. 7. The immovable property will be sold to the highest bidder. However, the Authorized Officer reserves the absolute discretion to allow inter se bidding, if deemed necessary. The Property as mentioned will not be sold below Reserve Price. 8. HHFL (HINDUJA HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED) is not responsible for any liabilities whatsoever pending upon the property as mentioned above. The Property shall be auctioned on 'As Is Where Is Basis', 'As Is What Is Basis' and 'Whatever Is There Is Basis'. 9. The Total Loan Outstanding amount is not the loan foreclosure amount. All other charges (if any) shall be calculated at the time of closure of the loan. 10. The Demand Draft should be made in favor of "HINDUJA HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED" payable at Raipur. For further details, contact the Authorized Officer Vaibhav Shrivastava - 7987969803, Rajesh Chaokitya - 8435571111, Shivendra Mishra - 8839287191, Manoj Rathore - 8819945373

Place- Bilaspur / Raipur Date- 28.05.2024 Authorised Officer



# Alternative to electoral bond scheme should be found: Shah

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Home Minister Amit Shah believes the influence of black money will increase during the ongoing Lok Sabha elections following the Supreme Court's decision to scrap the electoral bond scheme, and suggested all stakeholders will have to deliberate and decide on an alternative.

If the impact of black money rises, then an alternative should be found, he said, adding that it is for Parliament to debate and decide on any other mechanism for funding to political parties.

He told PTI in an interview on Saturday that the electoral bond scheme, which allowed donors to fund political parties anonymously by purchasing bonds from the SBI, was scrapped at a crucial time. The Supreme Court had struck down the scheme in February, a month before the Lok Sabha elections were announced.

Replying to a question on the issue, he said, "I believe and this is my guess that it will increase the influence of black money in elections and poli-



tics. When political parties submit their account for this fiscal year, then how much money is by cash donation and how much is through cheque will be known. The donation figure by cheques had reached 96 per cent at the time of the bond." He added, "Now you will know. If the impact of black money rises, then an alternative should be found. There should be a debate in Parliament."

Asked if he thought the influence of black money would increase in the ongoing elections due to the scrapping of the electoral bond scheme, Shah said, "I guess so." When asked what he considered an alternative to the bond scheme, he said the issue needed to be discussed with all stakeholders, including different political parties. He said, "This will have to be debated in Parliament. We will have to discuss this with

all parties. The Supreme Court's view since their judgment has come is also very important. The Attorney General and Solicitor General will also have to be consulted. So we will have to deliberate collectively and decide on a new alternative."

The apex court had struck down the electoral bond scheme, saying it violated the right to information and the freedom of speech and expression under the Constitution. The court had also made public the names of all donors and their beneficiaries.

The central government, has, however, insisted that the scheme was aimed at curbing the influence of black money in politics and that donors were allowed to remain anonymous so that they were not targeted by one political party or another for funding their rival parties.

Opposition parties have alleged that the scheme was used by the BJP to "legitimise" bribery by business interests, a charge rejected by the ruling party as it claimed that its rivals received more funding relative to their electoral strength.

# Centre effects Secretary level reshuffle

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Monday extended the tenure of Defence Research and Development Organisation chief Samir V Kamat by one year while senior bureaucrat Pradip Kumar Tripathi appointed as the Lokpal Secretary as part of a secretary-level reshuffle effected on Monday.

Distinguished scientist Kamat was on August 25, 2022, appointed as secretary of the Department of Defence Research and Development (DDR&D) and the DRDO chairman, it said. The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved an extension in service of Kamat as secretary, DDR&D and chairman, DRDO for one year from June 1, 2024, till May 31, 2025, or until further orders, it said. Tripathi, a 1987-batch Indian Administrative Service officer (IAS), is currently Secretary (Coordination) in the Cabinet Secretariat. He has been appointed as Secretary to the Lokpal till the date of his superannuation (June 30) and thereafter on contract basis for a period of two years beyond the date of his superannuation on usual terms and conditions applicable to re-employed central government officers, said an order issued by

the Personnel Ministry. Border Management Secretary Raj Kumar Goyal has been appointed as Secretary, Department of Justice under the Ministry of Law & Justice. Rajendra Kumar, Director General of Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), will be the Border Management Secretary in place of Goyal. New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) chairperson Amit Yadav has been named as Officer on Special Duty in the Department of Social Justice & Empowerment. "The officer will take over as Secretary, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment vice Saurabh Garg, IAS (OR-91) upon his superannuation on 31.07.2024," the order said. Rakesh Ranjan, Special Secretary in the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, has been appointed as Chairman of the Staff Selection Commission (SSC). West Bengal chief secretary Bhagwati Prasad Gopalika has been granted a three-month extension until August. Gopalika, a 1989-batch IAS officer, was originally scheduled to retire this Friday. However, with the approval from the Union Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), he will now continue as the state's chief secretary until August 31.

# Plea in SC seeks exemption for lawyers from wearing black coats during summer



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking directions to exempt lawyers from wearing black coats and gowns in the apex court as well as the high courts across the country during summer. The petition filed by advocate Shaileendra Mani Tripathi also sought direction to the state bar councils to determine the "months of prevailing summer" for each state in order to exempt the wearing of the black coat and gown for those months. It has sought a direction to the state bar councils to amend their rules and decide the time period when the lawyers would be exempted from wearing black coats and gowns depending upon the summer peaks in the particular state. The plea has requested the top court to consider relaxing the traditional dress code for

the advocates across the states considering that the same may cause hardships and health issues in the extremity of the growing summer heat.

Wearing coats during torrid summer makes it difficult for the lawyers to move from one court to another, it said. The top court in 2022 had refused to entertain a plea seeking exemption for lawyers from wearing black coats and gowns in the apex court as well as the high courts across the country during summer. The apex court had said it cannot entertain the plea under Article 32 and asked the petitioner to approach the Bar Council of India (BCI) with his grievance. The lawyers' dress code is governed by the BCI Rules under the Advocates Act, 1961, and they make it mandatory for an advocate to wear a black coat with a white shirt and a white neckband.

# Spiritual empowerment is real empowerment: President Murmu

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Asserting that spiritual empowerment is the real empowerment, President Droupadi Murmu on Monday said when the followers of any religion or sect deviate from the path of spirituality, they become victims of fanaticism and suffer from an unhealthy mentality.

"Spiritual values connect people of all religions to each other," she said, addressing the national launch of 'Spiritual Empowerment for a Clean and Healthy Society' organised by Brahma Kumaris. The president said the forces promoting fear, terror, and war are very active in many parts of the world.

"In such an environment, Brahma Kumari Institution has provided an effective platform for the empowerment of humanity through many cen-



tres in more than 100 countries. This is an invaluable effort to strengthen universal brotherhood by promoting

spiritual values," Murmu said. The president said the golden chapters of world history and the history of nations

have always been based on spiritual values.

"World history is witness to the fact that disregarding spiritual values and adopting only the path of material progress has ultimately proved disastrous. Holistic well-being is possible only on the basis of a healthy mentality," she said.

Murmu said a truly healthy person meets all three dimensions -- physical, mental and spiritual. Such individuals create a healthy society, nation and world community, she added. The president said spiritual empowerment is real empowerment.

"When the followers of any religion or sect deviate from the path of spirituality, they become victims of fanaticism and suffer from unhealthy mentality," Murmu was quoted as having said in a statement issued by the

Rashtrapati Bhavan. The president said working with the spirit of public welfare while rising above selfishness is a social expression of inner spirituality. "Doing charity for the public good is one of the most important spiritual values," she said.

The president was happy to note that the Brahma Kumaris Institution is probably the world's largest spiritual institute run by women, the statement said. She said in this organisation, "Brahma Kumaris remain in the front and their associates Brahma Kumars work in the background."

"With such a unique harmony, this institution is continuously moving forward. By doing so, it has presented a unique example of spiritual progress and women empowerment to the world community," Murmu said.

# Modi leads nation in paying tribute to Nehru on death anniversary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday led the nation to pay tributes to Jawaharlal Nehru on his death anniversary, India's first prime minister and a stalwart of the freedom movement, Nehru died in 1964 at the age of 74. Congress too paid rich tributes to India's first prime minister Nehru with party chief Mallikarjun Kharge saying the country's history is incomplete without the incomparable contribution of "the architect of modern India".

Kharge and former Congress president Sonia Gandhi also paid floral tributes to the former prime minister at his memorial 'Shantivan' here.



In a social media post Kharge said the history of India is incomplete without the incomparable contribution of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the architect of modern India, who took India forward in scientific, economic, industrial and various fields. Nehru was a dedicated guardian of democracy and our source of

inspiration, he said. The Congress president quoted Nehru as saying that the protection of the country, progress of the country, and unity of the country is the national religion of all of us. Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi also paid tributes to his great grandfather. "Respectful tributes to the architect of modern India and the first Prime Minister of the country, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on his death anniversary. As a visionary, he dedicated his entire life to building India through the freedom movement, establishing democracy, secularism and laying the foundation of the Constitution. His values will always guide us," Rahul Gandhi said in a social media post.

# Experts stress need for separate registry for AYUSH hospitals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Professor Bejon Kumar Misra, chairman of the Core Group of Experts for Insurance, Union Ministry of Ayush, on Monday stressed the need for a separate registry for Ayush hospitals even as he recommended promoting Ayush Healthcare Organisation (HCO) empanelment and adopting Ministry of Ayush-approved Standard Treatment Guidelines (STGs) and ICD-TM2 codes.

He was sharing his views at the sensitisation programme at the All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA) in the national capital, aiming to integrate Ayush treatments into mainstream health insurance schemes effectively. The initiative was prompted by the recent directives from the Insurance Regulatory



Development Authority (IRDAI) to include Ayush treatments under health insurance cover starting from April 1, 2024. The aim was to foster a deeper understanding and collaboration between Ayush hospitals, healthcare providers, and insurance sector stakeholders, ultimately ensuring affordable and accessible Ayush healthcare for all citizens.

However, intriguingly while the government and private insurers are being encouraged to integrate ayurveda in their plans, the Centre is yet to

include Ayush interventions in its flagship Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY). Sources said that efforts by the Ministry of Ayush and the National Health Authority (NHA) are still on.

Deputy Director General (Ayush) Dr. A. Raghu emphasized the need for a flat rate design for Ayush treatments, considering longer stays and categorization based on disease and patient strength, as well as the establishment of three levels of medical management for each disease.

Rajiv Vasudevan, MD and CEO of Apollo Ayurvedic Hospitals, highlighted the importance of Ayush treatments in addressing long-term and chronic diseases, advocating for a shift towards identifying and addressing the root cause of diseases.

# Army forges partnership with IOCL for Hydrogen Fuel cell buses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In keeping with the need to combat climate change threats, the Indian Army has taken yet another green step as on Monday it embraced eco-friendly transport solutions by forging a pioneering partnership with the Indian Oil Corporation Limited (IOCL) to conduct trial runs of Hydrogen Fuel Cell Bus technology.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Indian Army and the IOCL in presence of General Manoj Pande, Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) and Mr Shrikant Madhav Vaidya, Chairman of Indian Oil. During the event, one Hydrogen Fuel Cell Bus was received by the Indian Army. This marks the commencement of mutually beneficial partnership between Indian Army and IOCL. Last year, the Indian Army



became the first government entity to ink an MoU with National Thermal Power Corporation Renewable Energy Limited for installation of Green Hydrogen based Microgrid Power Plants along the Northern Borders. The MoU for Hydrogen Fuel Cell Bus technology emphasised the commitment to fos-

tering innovation and advancing sustainable transport solutions for the future. Hydrogen Fuel Cell technology offers a clean and efficient alternative by converting Hydrogen gas into electricity through an electro-chemical process. The process leaves water vapour as the only by-product, thus ensuring zero

emission. The Hydrogen Fuel Cell Bus has a seating capacity of 37 passengers. It promises an impressive mileage of 250-300 km on a full 30 kg onboard tank of Hydrogen fuel. Last year on March 21, in line with the 'National Green Hydrogen Mission', the Indian Army had put in motion the

process for installation of a Green Hydrogen based Micro Grid Power Plant project in the forward areas along the Northern borders which are not connected by National / State Grid. Indian Army is providing requisite land on lease for 25 years with a commitment to purchase generated power through a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA). The proposed projects will be installed by NTPC on Build, Own and Operate (BOO) Models at a jointly identified location in Eastern Ladakh. The project entails setting up a Solar Power Plant for hydrolysis of water to produce Hydrogen, which, during non-solar hours will provide power through fuel cells. This will set the stage for similar projects in the future and contribute towards reducing dependence on fossil fuel-based generator sets with concomitant abatement of green-house gas emissions.

# Commitments made by political parties in election manifesto not corrupt practice: SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has said that commitments made by political parties in their election manifestos will not amount to "corrupt practice" under the election laws.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and K V Viswanathan made the observation while dismissing a plea by a voter hailing from the Chamrajpet Assembly Constituency challenging the election of a candidate belonging to the Congress.

The plea alleged that commitments by the Congress in its election manifesto for the 2023 Karnataka assembly polls were direct and indirect financial help to the public which amounted to corrupt electoral



practice. "The contention of the learned counsel that the commitments by a political party in its manifesto, which eventually lead to direct or indirect financial help to the public at large, will also amount to corrupt practice by a candidate of that party, is too far-fetched and cannot be

accepted. "In any case, in the facts and circumstances of these cases, we need not to go into such question elaborately. The appeals are, accordingly, dismissed," the bench said. The petitioner, Shashanka J Sreedhara, a voter from the Chamrajpet Assembly constituency, had filed an election petition against the winning candidate B Z Zameer Ahmed Khan.

He submitted that the five guarantees made by the Indian National Congress (INC) party in its manifesto amounts to corrupt practice. The Karnataka High Court had held that a party's announcement about the policies they plan to put into place

cannot be regarded as corrupt behaviour under Section 123 of the Representation of Peoples Act.

"The five guarantees of the Indian National Congress have to be considered as social welfare policies. Whether they are financially viable or not is altogether a different aspect."

"It is for the other parties to show as to how implementation of the said schemes amounts to bankruptcy of the State Treasury and it can only lead to mal governance of the State. It is possible that they can be termed as wrong policies under the given facts and circumstances of the case, but cannot be termed as corrupt practices," the high court had said.

# Indian software professionals become catalysts of technological innovation in US

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Known for their exceptional technical skills and strong academic backgrounds, Indian software professionals have become the catalysts of technological innovation in the United States and the Indian software engineers have become integral to the technological landscape of the US, driving significant strides in innovation and development. Excelling in fields such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and software engineering, Indians' influence is evident in major technology companies, startups, and leading academic institutions, where they spearhead pio-



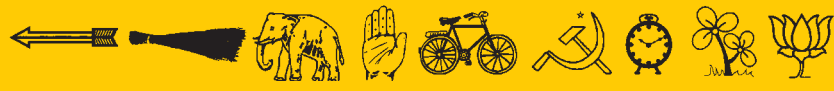
neering projects, drive research, and shape the future of technological advancement. A prime example of this impact is Himanshu Jain, a distinguished computer science graduate from Duke University, North Carolina. Himanshu's journey began far from the tech hubs of the United States. Growing up in India, he was always fascinated by computers

and the limitless possibilities they offered. Currently based in the Bay Area, Himanshu's role involves not just coding and developing software but also collaborating with diverse teams, solving complex problems, and continually pushing the boundaries of technology.

Jain's career is marked by significant contributions to multiple open-source projects and practical experience in startup environments and mobile application development. His scholarly contributions include articles published in esteemed scientific journals and co-authoring a book inspired by his experiences. Yet, beyond his technical achievements, what stands out

is Himanshu's dedication to giving back. He is an active mentor, regularly delivering tech talks and serving as a judge and reviewer for hackathons, fostering the growth of aspiring professionals. He believes in the power of community and the importance of nurturing the next generation of tech innovators. In his personal life, born and brought up to a top Indian bureaucrat, Himanshu is known for his love of learning and curiosity about the world while he spends his free time exploring new technologies, reading about the latest advancements in AI and machine learning, and experimenting with new coding techniques.





# Religion based reservation will not be allowed till Modi, BJP in power: Nadda

PTI ■ VARANASI (UP)

BJP president J P Nadda on Monday said there will be no reservation based on religion as long as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the party are in power. Accusing the opposition of planning to give reservation based on religion, he said, "It is clearly written in the Constitution that there will be no religion-based reservation. "As long as PM Modi and BJP are in power, there will be no such reservation," he told reporters. He was in the city to campaign for Modi who is contesting the Lok Sabha election from Varanasi for the third time. "We will not allow anyone to encroach on the reservation of our Dalit, tribal, backward and extremely backward classes. You will see what will happen to the opposition on June 4 (the vote counting day)," Nadda said while talking to reporters in Varanasi. Addressing an intellectuals' meeting here, he said, "For a long time politics meant 'divide and rule' but now the 'politics of development' is going on." "What was the political situation 10 years ago," Nadda asked and said, India was being counted among the corrupt countries but the biggest problem was that the common man had become indifferent towards politics



and his faith had been broken. "This becomes a threat to democracy but in the last 10 years, PM Modi created trust among the common man about the country's development," the BJP chief said. Earlier, the opposition spreading casteism used 'divide and rule' policy to create divisions on the basis of religion and region, he said. "Prime Minister Modi has also given a jolt to this culture. Today, a politics of development is going on and in this, 'sabka saath sabka prayas aur sabke vishwas' (everyone's support, effort

and trust) is the basis." He said, "On June 1, when you all vote to the BJP, the foundation of development India will be laid." Be it BRICS, G-7 or G-20, no international forum is left where India was not represented. Now, we are special invitees in places where we were not members earlier," he said. Within just nine months, two Covid vaccines were made in the country. During the pandemic, double dose of vaccine was given by the government and after that 140 crore people were protected by giving booster doses, he

said. Nadda said, "When former PM Manmohan Singh used to go to Washington, he used to talk about terrorists saying we have threats from terrorists and Pakistan. PM Modi said that there is no threat. We know how to manage-surgical strikes, air strikes, we will enter their territory and kill." The BJP President also talked about the benefits people are getting from various Central government schemes, including Ayushman Yojana, Ujjwala Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana. Nadda reached Varanasi for PM Modi's election campaign and offered prayers at the Kaal Bhairav temple. "Whenever I come to Varanasi I pay obeisance to Kal Bhairav temple, Sankat Mochan and Kashi Vishwanath temple. As we all know Kashi is a religious city and the city which takes forward Sanatan Dharma, I get new energy from here," he said. Varanasi, where PM Modi is in the fray, will be going to the polls on June 1. Congress has fielded its state president Ajay Rai from the seat. "I have prayed for the well-being of the society, peace and happiness and to give strength to the development works initiated in the Narendra Modi government. Modi will become PM for the third time with '400 paar' seats," he added.

# Mukhtar's shadow looms over election discourse in Ghazipur

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ GHAZIPUR

In the run-up to the elections, Samajwadi Party candidate Afzal Ansari has been engaging with voters through nakkad (street corner) meetings, delivering speeches that resonate deeply with local issues and personal emotions. His campaign is markedly devoid of grandiosity, focusing instead on the everyday problems faced by the people. He consistently ends his speeches on an emotional note. "Have you heard the name of my younger brother Mukhtar Ansari?" he asks, drawing affirmative nods from the crowd. Accusing authorities of poisoning Mukhtar to fracture their family, Ansari leaves a poignant pause for his words to resonate deeply. Rasool Bhai, a tea shop owner, lends credence to Afzal's allegations, deeming Mukhtar's demise as "unnatural." He recalls Mukhtar's revelation to a court about being poisoned in jail just days before his death, raising questions about the lack of adequate medical care. This narrative of suspected foul play has become central to the Ghazipur election discourse, with many rally attendees expressing skepticism towards the official version of events surrounding Mukhtar's demise. The Ansari camp is pinning its hopes on a wave of

sympathy, aiming to overshadow Mukhtar's controversial reputation and rally support across diverse voter demographics. "You simply can't overlook Mukhtar in Eastern UP," remarks Ramesh K Singh, a seasoned journalist based in Varanasi. "His prominence reverberates widely, and his demise has only galvanized Muslim communities further." However, the electoral landscape in Ghazipur extends beyond Mukhtar's legacy. The formidable political clout of the Ansari family faces a significant challenge from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), represented by Parasnath Rai. Rai, known more for his association with the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) than for grassroots politics, enjoys backing from Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, a prominent BJP figure. Despite the BJP's emphasis on law and order, attributed to the governance of Yogi Adityanath, many locals acknowledge Sinha's contributions to local development. Ranjeet Singh, a resident, credits the end of the "mafia raj" to Adityanath's tenure, dismissing Mukhtar Ansari's influence as confined to the Muslim community. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), led by Umesh Singh, and the SP-Congress alliance are also vying for electoral

supremacy. The BJP leverages its alliance with the Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP), led by Om Prakash Rajbhar, to consolidate support among the OBC Rajbhar community. The election dynamics are further shaped by the "MY" (Muslim-Yadav) factor, historically advantageous for the SP. The alliance with Congress is poised to bolster the minority vote bank, critical in a constituency where Muslims and Yadavs constitute approximately 15% of the electorate. Contentious issues such as the Agnipath recruitment scheme for the armed forces add complexity to the electoral landscape. Rajesh Kumar reports a significant decline in army recruitment applicants, attributing it to the scheme's implementation. As the campaign intensifies, divergent opinions among the youth in market areas highlight a split in support between Afzal Ansari and Parasnath Rai. While development initiatives under Sinha remain uncontested, the pervasive sentiment in Ghazipur underscores Mukhtar Ansari's enduring influence on voter sentiment. "Hindu-Muslim discourse is not a factor here, but Mukhtar is," observes local resident Shailash Yadav, encapsulating the intricate interplay of personal legacy and political strategy in this pivotal election.

# Lok Sabha polls: Former CM, three turncoats hot up Jalandhar contest

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Punjab's Jalandhar parliamentary constituency is likely to witness an interesting political bout as a former chief minister and three turncoats are vying to win the seat reserved for Scheduled Castes. Considered a Congress citadel, the Jalandhar seat was once represented by Inder Kumar Gujral who served as the country's 12th prime minister. To ensure no political rival could breach its fortress, the Congress has placed its bet on Dalit leader and former Punjab CM Charanjit Singh Channi, who had an MLA from Chamkaur Sahib seat in Rupnagar district. The Aam Aadmi Party has fielded two-time former Akali MLA Pawan Kumar Tinu who joined the state's ruling party in April. The BJP has placed its trust on sitting MP Sushil Rinku, who was first announced as the candidate by the AAP. However, Rinku left the AAP and joined the saffron party to fight from the Jalandhar seat. Rinku had last year quit the Congress and joined the AAP. The Sukhbir Singh Badal-led Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) has fielded former Punjab Congress chief and former MP Mohinder Singh Kaypee from the seat. Kaypee jumped the ship from the Congress to the SAD last month.

# INDIA Bloc parties intend to implement Talibani rule in country, alleges Yogi

PTI ■ MAU (UP)

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday alleged the INDIA bloc parties have indicated that they intend to implement Talibani rule in the country and confine women to their homes. At a poll rally in the Ghosi Assembly constituency in favour of BJP ally and Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party candidate Arvind Rajbhar, he alleged that the Congress and Samajwadi Party have a negative mindset. "They stand against Lord Ram and the nation, denying Dalits and backward communities their rights. Now, they have set their sights on reservations for OBC castes," Adityanath said. "There is talk of taking away reservations meant for the OBCs and allocating them to Muslims. But we will not allow this to happen. These rights belong to the OBC caste and we will not permit them to be usurped," he said. Bhimrao Ambedkar had asserted that religion cannot be the basis of reservation, he said adding the opposition parties have once again have the objective of dividing the country along the lines of religion but people have discerned their intentions. "We must be wary of the INDI alliance, as they proclaim that if they come to power, they will impose inheritance tax. "This tax is akin to Aurangzeb's 'Jizya tax'. Moreover, they declare that if they assume power, they will enforce personal laws, indicating their desire to implement Talibani and Sharia law in the country," the



Uttar Pradesh chief minister said. "However, they fail to recognise that this nation operates under the Constitution of Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar. We will not tolerate the revival of the deplorable practice of triple talaq in our country," he said, adding that the INDIA bloc parties intend to confine women to their homes. He said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the nation's stature and the dignity of every Indian have risen globally over the past decade. Consequently, the slogan of 'Fir ek bar Modi Sarkar' and 'Abki bar 400 paar' reverberates throughout the country, Adityanath said. The nation now has better security and major development projects are underway. The rights of the poor are being upheld and free ration is being provided to 80 crore people in the country, the Uttar Pradesh chief minister said. "Additionally, 60 crore people are benefiting from health insurance coverage of Rs 5 lakh under Ayushman Bharat. As many as, 12 crore farmers benefit from the Kisan Samman Nidhi, and toilets have been constructed in 12 crore households. All this has been achieved due to Prime Minister Modi's visionary leadership," he said.

# High stakes battle in Sujapur Assembly

PTI ■ HAMIRPUR (HP)

The Sujapur assembly by-election in Himachal Pradesh is seeing a repeat of the 2022 election with two old rivals Rajinder Singh Rana and Ranjit Singh up against each other, except that they have swapped their parties this time. While Rana is a Congress rebel who recently switched to the BJP, Singh, a retired captain, joined the Congress after Rana was given a BJP ticket for the Sujapur bypoll. Rana, who contested the 2022 election on a Congress ticket and defeated Singh by a slender margin of 399 votes, had raised the banner of revolt against Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu. He was among the six Congress MLAs who voted in favour of the BJP nominee in the Rajya Sabha polls and had

to face disqualification. Three Independents had also voted for the BJP candidate Harsh Mahajan in the Rajya Sabha polls held on February 27. Of the six assembly constituencies where by-elections are being held due to disqualification of the Congress rebels, Sujapur has become a hot seat as it would decide if the three-month long slander campaign unleashed by the chief minister against Rana and the five ex-MLAs dubbing them as "bikau" (sold out) impacted the electorate or they still trust Rana and other rebels. As both Congress and the BJP are locked in a no holds barred battle to win the Sujapur assembly seat, the victory of Rana would serve as a boost for the Congress rebels while his defeat would be a requiem for the BJP.

Rana, once a confidant of former chief minister Prem Kumar Dhumal, revolted after denial of BJP ticket in 2012. He later joined the Congress and won the assembly polls in 2017, scripting history by defeating Dhumal, BJP's chief ministerial candidate, and retained the seat in 2022 but was disqualified after fifteen months and now is back with the BJP. Sujapur falls under the Hamirpur Lok Sabha seat from where Union Information and Broadcasting minister Anurag Thakur, son of Dhumal, is seeking a fifth term. Under the dramatically changed circumstances, Dhumal family and their supporters have no option other than supporting Rajinder Rana. Sukhu, who is intensively campaigning for BJP turncoat Singh, has accused Rana of

"selling his soul for money" as he has urged voters to defeat "Dhanbal with Janbal" (defeat the power of money with power of people) and punish the rebels for betrayal. During a rally in Himachal's Una district last week, Sukhu had Thursday alleged that the Congress rebels are corrupt and will go behind bars. He even claimed the six Congress rebels and three Independents were sold for Rs 15 crore each. However, former chief minister P K Dhumal and Anurag Thakur are openly canvassing for Rana, sending the right message to party cadres. Confident of victory, Rana said, "the Congress cadre is with me and the BJP is also supporting me" as our fight is for development and meeting the aspiration of the voters. Singh, who was also considered close to Dhumal

and his son joined the Congress party at the eleventh hour and is now banking upon the support and clout of the current chief minister and his team. Before being ousted from the assembly recently, Rana had been causing embarrassment to chief minister Sukhu by indirectly raking up the issues like jobs to youth as promised in the manifesto. In a bid to stir people's sentiments against Rana, Sukhu has been repeating that Rana never wanted anyone to become or remain chief minister from Hamirpur. He said the ex-MLA's first victim was Dhumal and now he was trying to oust him but the gimmick will not work this time. On other hand, Rana has accused Sukhu of ignoring the elected representatives and giving preference to "friends",

saying it compelled the six Congress MLAs to revolt and vote for the BJP candidate in the Rajya Sabha polls. He has claimed that his victory is certain as he enjoys full support of the people of the constituency and the Dhumal family and their supporters. He said that he has already toured most parts of the constituency twice and his third round is on the anvil. His rival Singh, on the other hand, has claimed that he is getting full support of the ex-servicemen and their families and said that Rana had ditched the people of the area, due to which developmental activities were hit in the Sujapur constituency. Ex-servicemen, their families and women voters hold the key in this constituency and majority of women voters have always been supporting the BJP, according to Rana.

# Rahul, Priyanka will not be blamed for LS poll defeat: Shah

PTI ■ KUSHINAGAR (UP)

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge will lose his job after the Lok Sabha poll results are announced on June 4 but Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi will not be blamed for the defeat, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Monday. Shah said Rahul Gandhi's people will also do a press conference post polls, saying they lost due to EVMs. "I have the details of the first five phases. In five phases of the Lok Sabha polls, PM Modi has crossed 310 seats. Rahul will not cross 40 and Akhilesh Yadav will not get even 4 seats on June 4," he said at an election rally here.



Shah said Kharge is going to lose his job as 'bhai behen' (Rahul, Priyanka) will not be blamed for the defeat. Slamming the SP and Congress, he said while PM Narendra Modi was born in the house of a backward, both Rahul and Akhilesh were

born with a silver spoon and don't know about the problems being faced by people of Purvanchal (eastern UP). "They did not like the weather of the country. Rahul used to go to Thailand on leave every six months. They did not tolerate the heat of Purvanchal. While PM Modi has not taken a single leave in his tenure," he said. While accusing Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav of being involved in corruption, the senior BJP leader said PM Modi has never faced any such allegation. "As chief minister and prime minister, no allegation of corruption of even 25 paise was raised against Modi while the two 'shehzade' (Rahul-

Akhilesh) were involved in corruption worth Rs 12 lakh crore," he alleged without elaborating. Referring to the Sahara group, Shah claimed "Akhilesh's party used to run from Sahara's fund. The scam was done in their (SP) regime. We have ensured a refund of people's money and the process has started." Sahara group firms were accused of circumventing regulations with Ponzi schemes. The group has denied the charges. Further attacking the Samajwadi Party, he claimed in the previous regime there was "one district one mafia" but now we have "one district one product" scheme to benefit people.

# Voters first, then party: Himachal Congress former MLAs contesting Assembly bypolls on BJP ticket

PTI ■ SHIMLA

Facing a barrage of criticism, dubbed "bike hue (sold out mafia)" by Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, the six disqualified Congress MLAs contesting the assembly bypolls on a BJP ticket have resolved to fight fire with fire. Not apologetic and in a mood to retaliate, they say it is the public who voted for them that comes first and not the party they belong to. Rajinder Rana (Sujanpur), Sudhir Sharma (Dharamshala), Ravi Thakur (Lahaul & Spiti), Inder Dutt Lakhnupal (Barsar), Chaitanya Sharma (Gagret) and Devinder Kumar Bhutto (Kutlehar), along with three Independent

lawmakers, voted for Harsh Mahajan — the BJP's nominee in the Rajya Sabha election on February 27. Two days later, the six Congress MLAs were disqualified from the assembly for defying a party whip to be present in the House and vote in favour of the government. They later joined the BJP and were fielded from their respective constituencies on a saffron party ticket. Ever since the cross-voting incident, the former Congress lawmakers have faced a barrage of criticism from Sukhu — from being called "kale naag (black snakes)" who tried to destabilise the Congress to allegations that they were hungry for "briefcases" and not "samman (respect)".

# 412 crorepati candidates contesting Odisha Assembly polls

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

As many as 412 'crorepati' candidates are contesting the Odisha Assembly elections which are being held from May 13 to June 1. The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and Odisha Election Watch have analysed the self-sworn affidavits of 1,283 out of 1,285 candidates, who are contesting for the 147 MLA seats in Odisha. Assembly elections in Odisha are being held simultaneously with the Lok Sabha elections. Out of the 1,283 candidates

analysed, 412 (32 per cent) are crorepaties. In the 2019 Odisha Assembly elections, out of 1,121 candidates, 304 (27 per cent) were crorepaties, the ADR said in its report. "... 128 BJD candidates, 96 BJP nominees, 88 Congress candidates and 11 AAP candidates have declared assets valued more than Rs 1 crore," it said. The average assets per candidate contesting in the Odisha Assembly elections 2024 is Rs 2.89 crore. In 2019, the average assets per MLA candidate were Rs 1.69 crore. Former Coal Minister Dilip



Ray has emerged as the richest candidate in the fray for the Assembly election in Odisha.

As per a report, Ray, a BJP nominee from the Rourkela Assembly segment is the richest nominee with a total

asset of Rs 313.53 crore, followed by BJD candidate from Champa segment Sanatan Mahakud (Rs 227.67 crore). The third place is occupied by the BJD candidate from Basta Assembly segment, Subasini Jena, who declared both movable and immovable assets of Rs 135.17 crore. Similarly, five candidates in the fray for the Assembly elections in Odisha have declared zero or nil assets in their affidavits, as per a report. The zero asset candidates are— independent candidates

Ramesh Kumar Mahanand (Bhawanipatna), Sohan Sipka (Kantabanji) and Sanjay Kumar Das (Dhamnagar), BSP candidate from Rayagada Purna Chandra Majhi, and Ambedkarite Party of India's Gopal Krushna Mohanty, who is contesting from Korei. A total of 103 MLAs are re-contesting in 2024 Assembly polls, of which 74 are from BJD, 21 from BJP, five from Congress, two independents and one from CPI (M). Out of the 1,283 candidates analysed, 348 (27 per cent) candidates have declared criminal cases against

themselves. In the 2019 Odisha Assembly elections, out of 1,121 candidates analysed, 332 (30 per cent) had declared criminal cases against themselves. In this Assembly election, 292 candidates are facing serious criminal cases. Similarly, 566 MLA candidates have declared their educational qualifications to be between class 5 and 12 while 652 candidates have an educational qualification of graduate or above. Besides, 51 candidates are diploma holders, 12 candidates are just literate and two candidates

are illiterates, the report said. Among the total candidates in the fray for the assembly polls, the highest 760 candidates are of the 41 to 60 years age group, 333 candidates are of the 25-40 age group, 188 candidates in the age between 61 to 80 years and 2 candidates have declared their age as more than 80 years old. Only 178 (14 per cent) women candidates are contesting in the Assembly elections in the state in 2024 while 112 (10 per cent) women candidates have contested in 2019 polls.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Up in flames

Ten fatalities in overnight Delhi fires reflect poorly on CM Kejriwal, who is busy campaigning

A tragedy of the highest order and an act of unpardonable negligence by civic authorities: Two blazes in Delhi have claimed 10 lives in separate incidents. A fire broke out late on Saturday at a children's hospital in East Delhi, resulting in the death of seven babies. The other incident, in the same district, occurred in the early hours of Sunday when three persons were killed in a fire that engulfed a residential building. The hospital fire which burnt seven infants alive is a horrible incident. The Capital, grappling with these tragedies, finds itself in grief and introspection. The Delhi incidents come on the heels of another inferno in Gujarat, where 27 children were charred to death in a gaming arcade. It is summer when, understandably, Delhi is more prone to fire incidents. Before the blame game starts and accountability fixed, someone in the Delhi Government must own moral responsibility and strict action should be taken against those who played with human lives. Prima facie it is a case of utter negligence as oxygen cylinders stored on the ground floor burst open, though the fire may have been triggered by a short circuit incident. Safety protocols exist only on paper and the authorities concerned look the other way when it comes to complying with the norms. Often, fire protocols that mandate safety measures are flouted at will, including fire drills which never happen. In a particularly devastating case, an entire family perished due to a fire caused by an electrical short circuit. Firefighters, despite their best efforts, face significant challenges due to narrow approach lanes and inadequate water supply in certain areas.



These tragic incidents have sparked a public outcry for improved fire safety regulations and more robust enforcement of existing laws. Amidst this sorrow and anger, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's absence has not gone unnoticed. Currently out on interim bail and engrossed in election campaigns in Punjab, his stance that he can manage Delhi's affairs from within jail has become a contentious issue. This claim, though technically plausible with today's technology, seems detached from ground realities that demand immediate and hands-on governance. The Chief Minister's current focus on electioneering in another State raises legitimate concerns about where his priorities lie and whether he can adequately address the urgent needs of Delhi while physically away from home and office. Indeed, the responsibility for these tragic incidents is multifaceted. On the one hand, the immediate causes point to systemic issues; on the other, the wider accountability lies with the city's administration and leadership. But whether it is the Ghatkopar tragedy, the gaming arcade fire or the Delhi blaze, we learn nothing from these incidents. After the initial hue and cry, everything is normalised and life goes on. It is time we at least ensure proper fire audits of at least hospitals and schools and do not put children's lives at risk. Hope our activist Chief Minister will take action and things will improve in the Capital before it is too late.

### PICTALK



A man feeds pigeons and crows on a hot summer day, in New Delhi

The relevance of Buddha's teachings in the contemporary world is profound. His principles of non-violence and compassion offer a path toward greater harmony in a world often plagued by conflict. The Buddha's teachings also emphasise respect for all forms of life and interdependence, principles crucial for addressing today's environmental challenges. Embracing these values fosters sustainable practices and a deeper connection with nature. Ethical living, as outlined in the Buddha's Eightfold Path, remains pertinent in personal, professional and societal contexts, promoting integrity and cooperation. Practitioners of this philosophy such as the Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, alias Thich Xuan Hiep, have advanced the principles of non-violence, compassion and mindfulness to promote global peace. Their "Engaged Buddhism" encourages integrating mindfulness into everyday life and social activism, advocating for peaceful conflict resolution and environmental care. His teachings on deep listening and loving speech, help bridge divides and heal communities. Similarly, the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama promotes interfaith dialogue, compassion and ethical responsibility, inspiring global movements for human rights and sustainability. These leaders illustrate how ancient Buddhist principles can address modern challenges, fostering a culture of peace and understanding worldwide. Nobel Laureate Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore drew inspiration from Buddhism, which can be seen in his work. His vision of universal humanism aligns with the Buddha's teachings of compassion and loving-kindness. Tagore's works often reflect themes of inner peace and self-realization, akin to Buddhist concepts. His holistic approach to education also emphasised the development of the whole person and mirrored the Buddhist focus on the cultivation of wisdom. Buddha's teachings emphasise inclusivity, compassion and the inherent potential for enlightenment in everyone, regardless of

# Buddhist influence on Tagore's work

Gurudev drew heavily from Buddha's teachings on non-violence and respect for all life, which resonate deeply in a world starved for peace, offering tranquillity



RAJDEEP PATHAK



BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS EMPHASISE INCLUSIVITY, COMPASSION AND THE INHERENT POTENTIAL FOR ENLIGHTENMENT IN EVERYONE. HE REJECTED THE CASTE SYSTEM, ASSERTING THE IMPORTANCE OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR OVER BIRTHRIGHT

social status. He rejected the caste system, asserting the importance of ethical behaviour over birthright. British Historian and author Karen Armstrong notes that Buddha challenged the social and religious norms of his time by not endorsing the caste system. Even Buddha's monastic community, the 'Sangha', welcomed individuals from all backgrounds, promoting spiritual equality and inclusiveness. In one of his plays "Chandalika," Tagore articulates the notion of oneness through the character of Prakriti, a woman from the untouchable caste and Ananda, a revered Buddhist monk. Drawing inspiration from Buddhist scriptures, Tagore reimagines the narrative to explore the enduring struggle against societal divisions, particularly the historical plight of untouchables in ancient India. Ananda's humble acceptance of water from Prakriti poignantly rejects caste prejudice and acknowledges her intrinsic dignity. Despite Prakriti's attempt to ensnare Ananda with a spell in a desperate bid for affection, his unwavering faith in Buddha's teachings serves as a beacon of purity. Divine intervention ultimately frees Ananda from the enchantment, symbolising the triumph of spiritual integrity over worldly desires - which is one of the characteristics of

meditation in Buddhism. Through Tagore's lyrical prose, the story transcends its narrative framework, evolving into a profound meditation on the enduring power of love, redemption and the unity that connects all souls. This legacy, left by Buddha, urges his followers to break free from societal constraints, form a 'Sangha', and become messengers of peace. Further, Tagore uses Prakriti's character elevating her to question societal norms restricting the freedom of women and thereby restoring her own identity. In his bid, Ananda's compassionate attitude — a specific characteristic of the Buddhist philosophy — rekindles Prakriti's sense of self-worth, asserting that all humans are fundamentally equal. The water she pours on Ananda's hands symbolises her purity and love, as well as his boundless benevolence and humanity. Tagore explores the themes of spirituality and untouchability through the symbolic union (read elevation) of Prakriti through the medium of Ananda. This (union) represents the harmony between man and woman, purity and impurity and spirituality and passion. Tagore uses this synthesis to depict a balanced and civilised society. Similarly, the Buddha emphasised the importance of compassion (karuna) and loving-kindness (metta) towards all

beings, advocating for empathy and support within the community, especially towards those who are suffering or marginalised. His First Noble Truth, addressing 'dukkha' (suffering), underscored the universal human experience of suffering, fostering a shared commitment to alleviating it for everyone. To this, Thich Nhat Hanh reflects, "Understanding suffering gives rise to compassion and from compassion, understanding deepens" (The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching). Buddha's teachings on right livelihood and ethical behaviour promoted social justice and fairness, contributing to a more inclusive and compassionate society. In Buddhist philosophy, the 'Middle Way' focuses on avoiding extremes and finding balance, a principle reflected in Rabindranath Tagore's works. For example, in his play "The King of the Dark Chamber," ('Raja' in Bengali), Tagore explores the themes of light and darkness and ignorance and enlightenment, mirroring the Buddhist search for harmony. The main character's journey to understand and accept both the light and dark aspects of life represents the Middle Way's emphasis on balance. (The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### GUIDELINES FOR A HEALTHY LIFE

Madam — Apropos the news story "Key takeaways from ICMR's new dietary guidelines," published on May 27, this is my response. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) have released new dietary guidelines to address the significant burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in India. With 56.4 per cent of diseases linked to poor dietary habits, these guidelines aim to promote healthier eating and lifestyle choices. The recommendations emphasise a balanced diet incorporating a variety of food groups, with a focus on whole grains, millets and natural protein sources. Limiting fat intake to 30 per cent of daily calories and including fresh vegetables and fruits in every meal are also crucial. In addition to dietary changes, the guidelines highlight the importance of regular physical activity—at least 30-45 minutes for adults and 60 minutes for children. Special advice for pregnant and lactating women includes exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months. For cooking and storage, using air fryers, granite-coated utensils and earthen pots is recommended to maintain nutritional quality and safety.

Aman Kumar | Dhanbad

### LIVE HAPPILY ANONYMOUSLY

Madam — Apropos the news story "Embracing silence in the age of social media," published on May 27, this is my response. Recently, I came across a famous quote by Khalil Gibran: "Travel and tell no one; live a true love story and tell no one; live happily and tell no one; people ruin beautiful things." This reminded me of the cautionary advice from our elders to avoid flaunting good fortune to ward off the evil eye. Back then, we cherished and shared our joys within close circles. The times have changed. The shift from letters to emails marked a significant transition in communication, though Government and corporate sectors still

## Chabahar's strategic masterstroke



Apropos the news story "India-Iran revitalise Chabahar Port," published on May 27, this is my response. The recent 10-year, \$370 million agreement between India and Iran to develop the Chabahar Port marks a significant milestone in regional connectivity and economic collaboration. As an avid newspaper reader, I see this project as a testament to

India's strategic foresight. Chabahar not only offers India a crucial gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia but also provides an alternative route that bypasses Pakistan, mitigating geopolitical roadblocks. The port's strategic location on Iran's southeastern coast enhances India's regional influence, countering China's dominance with its Belt and Road Initiative. Moreover, Chabahar offers Afghanistan a viable alternative to the Karachi Port, potentially fostering greater economic stability in the region. Despite the hurdles posed by US sanctions and regional instability, India's commitment to Chabahar underscores its readiness to navigate complex diplomatic landscapes. This port symbolises India's assertive global stance, promoting regional stability and economic growth through enhanced connectivity.

Roshan Daa | Rourkela

cling to physical signatures for validation. Despite technological advances, the reluctance to embrace complete digital transformation persists, often due to the sender's unfamiliarity with digital tools. Reflecting on the past, I recall the anticipation of waiting for responses to my manuscript submissions. Today, a quick rejection email highlights the impersonal nature of modern communication. Social media's omnipresence underscores this shift, contrasting starkly with Gibran's timeless wisdom. In an age where oversharing is the norm, his advice feels both radical and refreshing, challenging our constant urge to broadcast every aspect of our lives.

Riya Aggarwal | Jind

### INNER STRENGTH HELPS ENJOY LIFE

Madam — Apropos the news story "Strategies for Inner Peace and Empowerment," published on May 27, this is my response. Are we pursuing an illusion, like the golden deer of the Ramayana? This chase often feels like a self-destructive mission, driven by a mind over-

whelmed with 70,000 thoughts a day. Our lack of focus and the influence of negative environments and unhealthy habits cloud our judgment. I understand this deeply, having battled alcoholism myself. Recovery through Sudarshan Kriya and Pranayama showed me the importance of a strong mind and healthy surroundings. Effective time management is crucial. Techniques like the POSEC method help us prioritise, while a SWOT analysis and delegation aid efficiency. Tackling tough tasks first and maintaining flexibility prevent burnout. Developing hobbies and practicing gratitude can transform our outlook. To quiet our minds, we should embrace activities like walking, talking through problems and pursuing passions. Exercise and cold baths can invigorate our spirits. Ultimately, we must accept our inner strength, declutter our minds and cultivate positivity to truly celebrate life.

Priyanka Singh | Lucknow

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Science archives preserve our scientific legacy

Establishing a National Science Archives Centre in India is crucial to safeguarding our scientific heritage for future generations



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

As an ever-evolving discipline, science continually shapes our understanding of the world and our place within it. Each discovery, innovation and technological advancement contributes to the present and builds the foundation for future generations. Most scientific activity in our laboratories may become part of tomorrow's history. People who have seen and overcome the COVID-19 pandemic may understand the hardships people faced during the pandemic. The innovations and discoveries developed to combat the global pandemic are now part of scientific history. Similar is the case with most of our scientific discoveries and inventions. Scientific knowledge is inherently cumulative. Each generation of scientists builds upon the work of their predecessors, advancing our understanding of complex phenomena. For instance, the development of quantum mechanics in the early 20th century paved the way for modern advancements in quantum computing. Scientific developments also



help in driving the economy and civilisations. We can see the imprint of the scientific strength of our pre-historic period through archaeological pieces of evidence. Science is a critical component of our cultural and intellectual heritage. It reflects our collective curiosity, ingenuity and drive to understand the world around us. Historical scientific documents, such as Darwin's notes on evolution or Einstein's manuscripts on relativity, are valuable for their scientific content and cultural artefacts that highlight the intellectual milestones of humanity. Preserved scientific materials handled by great scientists serve as invaluable research and educational resources. Original research papers, laboratory notebooks, communications with contemporary researchers and policymakers, email communications and prototype instruments can

highlight the pain the researchers undertook during that time. It can act as an inspiration for future researchers to move forward. Unfortunately, we dig into the past of a scientist only when their work gets global recognition. By this time, we might have lost all resources related to the discovery except for the research publications available on the public database. Science archives are essential for preserving human knowledge's vast and intricate tapestry. They store various materials, including research notes, correspondence between scientists, experimental data, publications and even artefacts such as laboratory equipment and specimens. This preservation is critical because it ensures that valuable scientific information is not lost over time. For example, the archives of the Royal Society in London contain records dating back to the 17th century, chronicling the early days of modern science. These documents provide insights into the time's experimental techniques and intellectual debates, allowing historians and scientists to trace the evolution of scientific

thought and practice. In India, the Archives at NCBS (https://archives.ncbs.res.in/) serve as a novel initiative to preserve the scientific history of modern India. The centre has over 250,000 processed objects across 30+ collections in various forms, ranging from paper-based manuscripts to negatives to photographs, books, fine art, audio recordings, scientific equipment, letters and field and lab notes. The documents stored in volatile electronic or digital storage are susceptible to being permanently erased by a single button press or the malfunction of a hard drive. If these artefacts are not systematically conserved, they will be permanently lost, leading to what has been referred to as the Digital Dark Age. The Government should also make it mandatory for every researcher to periodically submit the documents to archives so that age and memory don't fade the significance of their research work.

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





## FIRST COLUMN

## MITIGATING THE E-WASTE CRISIS

It can be tackled with innovations, regulations and corporate responsibility



SHAINY SHARMA

Today with the advancements in the field of science and technology, computers and other mobile devices have become such an integral part of everyone's work and personal lives that it is hard to imagine life without them. Not only that, but along with that the problem of e-waste continues to grow every year as consumers frequently upgrade their gadgets leading to the high turnover of electronic devices. E-waste or electronic waste refers to discarded electronic devices and appliances that have reached the end of their useful life or are no longer wanted by their owners. It is one of the significant problems due to its complex composition, rapid generation and the challenges it poses to human health and the environment. Due to the presence of various toxic substances such as lead, mercury and cadmium present in batteries and semiconductors can cause neurological damage and can even damage the kidneys and bones. Not only this the toxic chemicals released from such wastes can leach into soil, making it infertile and unsafe for agriculture.

Not only will the soil get contaminated but the other sources of the environment that is water and air will also be affected badly as improper disposition of e-wastes can contaminate the waterbodies thereby affecting the water supplies and aquatic life and; toxic fumes released for extracting valuable metals will contribute to respiratory problems. It is believed that airborne toxins can travel long distances, affecting air quality and human health. Quite often in many developing countries, informal e-waste recycling activity is a significant source of income. Such activities are often unregulated and the workers are exposed to high levels of toxic substances without adequate protection.



This exposure can lead to respiratory problems, skin disorders and other severe health issues. The improper disposal and recycling of e-waste contribute to greenhouse gas emissions thereby contributing to environmental degradation and increased carbon footprints. According to the Global E-waste Monitor 2020, the world generated 53.6 million metric tons of e-waste in 2019 and this figure is expected to grow to 74.7 million metric tons by 2030. Only a fraction of this waste is properly recycled, with much ending up in landfills posing significant environmental and health risks.

Proper recycling of such wastes is the only solution that can help recover valuable materials and reduce the need for new resource extraction and the same is possible only and only when the Government enacts and enforces stringent regulations for e-waste management, including proper collection, recycling and disposal practices such as e-waste collection drives and recycling centres to facilitate proper disposal. Manufacturers should also be held responsible for the entire lifecycle of their products, including take-back programs and recycling initiatives. Investing in advanced recycling technologies can help improve the efficiency and safety of extracting valuable materials from e-waste. Encouraging the manufacturers to design such products that are easier to recycle, repair and upgrade can reduce e-waste generation. Educating consumers at the same time about the importance of proper e-waste disposal and the available recycling options can reduce improper disposal practices. Establishing international standards for e-waste management can help ensure safe and efficient recycling practices worldwide. Strengthening international regulations to prevent the illegal export of e-waste to developing countries where it is often processed unsafely. Remember, from gadgets to green initiatives, every individual living on this planet should recycle their e-waste and pave the way for a cleaner greener tomorrow.

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)

# Raisi's legacy endures in Iran, despite West

Over three million mourners gather in Mashhad to honour the late President Raisi. The hold of hardliners in the country is much stronger than the West might think



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

Over three million Iranians have gathered in Mashhad, Iran's second-largest city, to honour the late President Raisi, who tragically perished in a helicopter crash along with eight others. The massive turnout, which filled the streets to capacity, reflects the deep respect and admiration many citizens held for Raisi, contradicting assertions by Washington that he was widely despised. Raisi's interment at the holy shrine of Imam Reza, a significant and unprecedented honour for a political leader, accentuates his esteemed status in the country. This unprecedented event defies the distorted and often misunderstood sentiments of the Iranian populace towards their leaders. Often, those who are demarcating the enemies, forcing others to accept their version of the story as gospel truth, are met with a ground reality that tells us the exact opposite.

The circumstances of the incident, however, have fuelled a wave of conspiracy theories. Moments after the crash, US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer declared there was no evidence of foul play, citing intelligence officials, despite Iran's rescue teams not yet having reached the crash site. Subsequently, some blame the secret organisation of Iran's arch-enemy State, Israel's Mossad. Others speculate that the death was the result of an inside job. However, this tragedy marked a significant event not only in Iranian politics but in the constantly growing West versus Rest dynamic, which is now more strongly questioning the partiality of international organisations while strengthening the established strong alternatives such as BRICS and the New Development Bank. Iran is playing a pivotal role in this.

Meanwhile, a segment of Western media recently published a series of stories about the helicopter crash suggesting that American sanctions have severely hindered Iran's ability to maintain its fleet of American-manufactured helicopters. It was suggested that a technical failure caused the crash, but so far there's no evidence to support this. The helicopter was one of three Bell 214 models; the other two returned safely, but President Raisi's did not. An Iranian defence firm, under the Iranian Aviation Industries Organisation (IAIO), specialises in maintaining and reverse-engineering US-model helicopters for Iran's military and the IRGC. Added to the US Department of the Treasury's SDN list in January 2018, its assets under US jurisdiction are frozen and transactions with US parties are prohibited under Executive Order 13382, targeting WMD proliferators. However, contrary to suggestions that Raisi's helicopter was overloaded and that this put undue strain on its engines, the aircraft was not operating beyond its capacity. The helicopter was carrying nine passengers and crew combined, well within its maximum capacity of 15 persons. The notion that the helicopter's age contributed significantly to the crash is also questionable. While the media has painted the Bell 214 as ancient, in reality, it was built in 1994 by Bell Helicopter Textron in Canada. With a global average age for commercial helicopters at around 23 years, Raisi's helicopter, though slightly older, was not exceptionally outdated. Moreover, helicopters used for presidential transport typically receive meticulous maintenance.

As Stephen D. Bryen, a leading expert on technology security who led the Pentagon's technology policy efforts during the Reagan



PRESIDENT RAISI WAS FOCUSED ON COOLING DOWN BORDER TENSIONS AND EXTENDING HIS DIPLOMATIC OUTREACH TO NEIGHBOURING ARAB COUNTRIES. HIS CHOSEN FOREIGN MINISTER, AMIR ABDOLLAHIAN, WHO ALSO PASSED AWAY WITH HIM, WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN REENGINEERING IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY

administration, pointed out, the engines of Raisi's helicopter, Pratt and Whitney PT6Ts, are also Canadian-made and widely regarded for their reliability. The implication that the helicopter's maintenance was compromised due to sanctions lacks substantiation, especially considering the high-profile nature of the passengers. The critical question of whether Canada currently supplies spare parts to Iran remains unclear, adding another layer of complexity to the narrative. Nonetheless, the assertions of technical failure due to sanctions remain speculative without concrete evidence and the focus should be on a thorough and unbiased investigation into the actual causes of the crash.

President Raisi was focused on cooling down border tensions and extending his diplomatic outreach to neighbouring Arab countries. His chosen Foreign Minister, Amir-Abdollahian, who also passed away with him, was instrumental in reengineering Iranian foreign policy. A notable example of this effort was the steps taken to normalise Iran-Saudi Arabia diplomatic relations. This Chinese-backed diplomatic initiative is crucial for reshaping the West Asian diplomatic terrain. Similarly, the recent irrigation project constructed across the Aras River, which Raisi jointly inaugurated with his counterpart in Baku, is a demonstration of this new diplomatic approach.

The Aras River, spanning 1,072 km, originates in Eastern Turkey and flows along several borders: Turkey and Armenia, Turkey and Azerbaijan, Iran and Azerbaijan and through Azerbaijan into the Kura River. This region, a small riverine area in the Caucasus between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, has witnessed numerous tragedies, including the often-overlooked Armenian Genocide, which claimed around 1.5 million lives. The 689 km Iran-Azerbaijan border, demarcated by the Aras River, highlights the geopolitical sensitivity and strategic importance of this area. After the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, Azerbaijan gained independence and assumed control of part of the Iran-Soviet border, leading to

escalating disputes. The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War saw Azerbaijan seize full control of the western border with Iran, heightening tensions. Relations between Iran and Azerbaijan slightly improved under President Hassan Rouhani, but Baku never hesitated to provide Israel with a strategic opportunity. Israel strengthened its alliance with Azerbaijan, turning it into a significant market for advanced weaponry. The 2020 conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh resulted in approximately 5,700 deaths, with Israel supplying a significant portion of Azerbaijan's arms, highlighting the deepening strategic ties between the two nations. As a result, Azerbaijan was able to absorb the Artsakh Republic, also known as Nagorno-Karabakh, a self-proclaimed republic dissolved in January this year.

In exchange for Israeli weapons, Azerbaijan provided oil. Ilham Aliyev, president since 2003, was re-elected for a fifth term on February 7 with over 92 per cent of the vote. Aliyev, who succeeded his father, Heydar Aliyev, a former Soviet KGB officer, has strengthened Azerbaijan's ties with Israel. Aliyev amended the constitution in 2009 to permit unlimited presidential terms and, in 2016, extended the presidential term from five to seven years. Azerbaijan can be seen as a family-run State prioritising clan interests, yet Aliyev has skillfully navigated relations with Eastern and Western powers to serve his political aims. It is not hyperbole to say Aliyev is a skilled Machiavellian politician in contemporary politics. An investigation by Israeli media outlet Haaretz published recently detailed the strategic relationship between Israel and Azerbaijan, through which Tel Aviv has supplied Baku with billions of dollars worth of weapons in exchange for "oil and access to Iran."

This extensive military cooperation underscores the depth of the strategic alliance between the two nations. Azerbaijan has reportedly permitted Israel's Mossad intelligence agency to establish a presence in the country to monitor Iran, its southern neighbour. Additionally,

Azerbaijan has facilitated the setup of an airfield for Israel to potentially strike Iranian nuclear facilities from its territory. In exchange, Azerbaijan receives the most advanced weapons, including ballistic missiles, air defence systems and kamikaze drones. However, as Yossi Melman, a noted Israeli writer and journalist who is an expert on intelligence and strategic affairs, affirmed, it is unlikely for Israel, particularly Mossad, to be involved in such an assassination as it never targets such individuals. But one should not forget that it was under President Raisi that Iran launched its first-ever direct attack on Israel, the single largest drone attack ever carried out by any country.

President Raisi and his top diplomat left a legacy far greater than what they achieved while in power. Their deaths are more impactful than the assassination of President Mohammad Ali Rajaei and Prime Minister Mohammad Javad Bahonar, who were cut short in an explosion set by the Mojahedin-e Khalq Organisation, in August 1981. Despite expectations of seclusion and controversy, Raisi navigated international relations adeptly, maintaining uranium enrichment and escalating tensions with the West, but also restoring ties with Saudi Arabia, which advanced peace talks in Yemen and prevented military escalation.

This diplomatic success, seen as strategic pragmatism, opened dialogue with other regional powers and reduced tensions. Raisi revived the Chabahar port deal with India, defying US sanctions and facilitated a major prisoner exchange with the US, demonstrating diplomatic flexibility. Though Iran was blamed for supporting Hamas in the October 2023 attacks on Israel, no concrete evidence linked Iran directly, yet its backing of such groups has increased its regional influence and garnered support for Palestinians from other Arab countries. Iran lost two great politicians, but it is hard to assume it will change the Iranian political structure rather it will be strengthened.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist and author. Views are personal)

# The crisis in Kerala's State-run hospitals runs deep

The alarming frequency of medical mishaps in Kerala's Government hospitals paints a dire picture of the State's healthcare system

The day is not far off when all the Government-run hospitals in Kerala will spot the hoarding "Patients, enter at your own risk". This is not an exaggerated Statement as botched-up surgeries and wrong diagnoses have become the hallmarks of State-run hospitals.

Recently, a four-year-old girl was admitted to Government Medical College Hospital in Kozhikode for the removal of her sixth finger. However, the doctor who performed the surgery operated on her tongue while leaving the finger untouched. Though her parents alerted the hospital authorities, the initial reaction was denial of the faux pas by the latter. Remember, the Kozhikode Medical College



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

and Hospital is a most sought-after institution by prospective medical students! The police have filed a FIR against Bejohn Johnson, the doctor who performed the surgery and has slapped charges on him under IPC Sections 336 (endangering the life or personal safety of others) and 337 (causing hurt by an act endangering the life or personal safety of others). In all probability, the general public

would forget this incident as more and more cases like this come up daily from the Government hospitals.

Controversies are not new to the GMCH Kozhikode. In 2023 July, it was reported that a woman who underwent a caesarian in the hospital in 2017 developed severe pain in her abdomen. It was found that a pair of forceps was accidentally left in her stomach after the 2017 surgery and she was living with the same till acute pain made her approach the hospital in 2023. The hospital authorities found to their surprise that Harshinia, the patient, had a pair of mosquito to artery forceps in her stomach post the caesarian which was caused by medical negligence. The police as well as the investigating doctors con-

firmed the finding and sent their reports to the minister for health Veena George. The minister, a former newsreader in a private TV channel who made a lateral entry into the CPI(M) is yet to take any action on the incident while Harshinia is staging a sit-in in front of the medical college hospital demanding solatium. The standard reply given by the Department of Health is that it was an isolated incident that is being blown out of proportion by vested interests.

In yet another shocking incident, a patient admitted to the ICU post-surgery was raped and molested by a hospital employee who is a trade union leader affiliated with the CPI(M). The nursing officer who reported the matter to the

higher authorities was shunted out to a far-off hospital while the rapist is walking free in search of his next victim. Even doctors and nurses are not free from attacks by patients and their relations. In May 2023, Vandana Das, a 22-year-old doctor working as an intern in Kottarakkara Government Hospital was stabbed to death by a drug addict suffering from withdrawal paranoia while the police and her colleagues remained mute spectators. Even as this article is written, here comes a report from GMCH Kozhikode about a complaint from a patient. The implant meant for another patient was wrongly inserted into the complainant's hand. These events are sufficient to prove the CPI(M)'s claim that

Kerala is the State with the best healthcare facilities is a blatant lie. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan exhorts people from other States and countries to visit Kerala for world-class health care. The authenticity of the Kerala Model of Development and Health Care has come down like a pack of cards. According to senior doctors who have been in Government service for more than three decades, the ruling CPI(M) itself is behind the collapse of Kerala's health sector. "The CPI(M) owns super speciality hospitals across the State named after its late leaders. Since the State-run hospitals have collapsed, the party can make a giant kill by forcing the patients to these party-run hospitals which are no different from corporate

hospitals. The CPI(M) is the leader of the hospital mafia in Kerala," said a veteran doctor. There are not enough specialist doctors to meet the requirements of patients. The trust deficit between doctors and the Government has reached a point of no return. Kerala is one of the States that saw maximum casualties during the COVID-19 pandemic though the Government managed to cover up the details with its carrot-and-stick policy. The claims by both the ministers K K Shylaja (2016-2021) and Veena George (2021-till date) were found to be stranger than fiction as nearly one lakh deaths have been reported from the State since the pandemic was detected for the first time in 2020. Though the Kerala

Government declared time and again that the State would develop its vaccine, K-Vaccine, the announcement remains on paper. The State of health in Kerala is such that whenever he is afflicted with a common cold, Pinarayi Vijayan takes the first available flight to the USA where Mayo Clinic is his favourite destination. The same is the case with ministers as well as CPI(M) leaders who have an inherent weakness for anything associated with the imperialists. While the chief minister himself asks people from other countries to come to Kerala for medical treatment, he is not sure about the quality of treatment in the State-run hospitals.

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



# 'Israeli airstrikes kill 35 in Rafah'

**AP ■ DEIR-AL-BALAH**  
Palestinian health workers said Israeli airstrikes have killed at least 35 people and hit tents for displaced people in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, and "numerous" others were trapped in flaming debris. Gaza's Health Ministry said women and children made up most of the dead and dozens of wounded. The attacks came on Sunday, two days after the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to end its military offensive in Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's population had sought shelter before Israel's incursion earlier this month. Tens of thousands of people remain in the area while many others have fled. Footage from the scene of the largest airstrike showed heavy destruction. Israel's army confirmed the strike and said it hit a Hamas installation and killed two senior Hamas militants. It said it was investigating reports that civilians were harmed. Defence Minister Yoav Gallant was in Rafah on Sunday and was briefed on the "deepening of operations" there, his office said. A spokesperson with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society said the death toll was likely to rise as search and rescue efforts continued in Rafah's Tal al-Sultan neighbourhood about two kilometres northwest of the city centre. The society asserted that the location had been designated by Israel as a "humanitarian area". The neighbourhood is not included in areas that Israel's military ordered evacuated earlier this month. The airstrike was reported hours after Hamas fired a barrage of rockets from Gaza that set off air raid sirens as far away as Tel Aviv for the first time in months in a show of resilience more than seven months into Israel's massive air, sea and ground offensive. There were no reports of casualties in what appeared to be the first long-range rocket attack from Gaza since January. Hamas' military wing claimed

responsibility. Israel's military said eight projectiles crossed into Israel after being launched from Rafah and "a number" were intercepted, and the launcher was destroyed. Earlier Sunday, dozens of aid trucks entered Gaza from southern Israel under a new agreement to bypass the Rafah crossing with Egypt after Israeli forces seized the Palestinian side of it earlier this month. Israel's military said 126 aid trucks entered via the nearby Kerem Shalom crossing. But it was not immediately clear if humanitarian groups could access the aid — including medical supplies — because of fighting. The crossing has been largely inaccessible because of Israel's offensive in Rafah. United Nations agencies say it is usually too dangerous to retrieve the aid. The World Health Organization last week said an expanded Israeli incursion in Rafah would have "disastrous" impact. "With the humanitarian operation near collapse, the secretary-general emphasizes that the Israeli authorities must facilitate the safe pickup and delivery of humanitarian supplies from Egypt entering Kerem Shalom," the spokesperson for UN chief Antonio Guterres said in a statement. Egypt refuses to reopen its side of the Rafah crossing until control of the Gaza side is handed back to Palestinians. It agreed to temporarily divert traffic through Kerem Shalom, Gaza's main cargo terminal, after a call between US President Joe Biden and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. The war between Israel and Hamas has killed nearly 36,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and fighters in its count. Israel blames civilian deaths on Hamas because the militants operate in dense, residential areas. Around 80% of Gaza's 2.3 million people have fled their homes, severe hunger is widespread and U.N. officials say parts of the territory are experiencing famine.

# Israeli strike in Lebanon hurts several

**Bint Jbeil (Lebanon) (AP):** An Israeli strike targeting a motorcycle in southern Lebanon on Monday hit next to a hospital entrance, killing at least one person and wounding several civilians who were gathered outside, local health officials said. The strike killed the motorcycle driver in the town of Bint Jbeil. It was not immediately clear who the driver was. The Israeli army did not immediately give a statement on the strike but said it had targeted other areas of southern Lebanon in response to "terrorist launches." The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah has been exchanging strikes with Israeli forces in the border area almost daily since Oct 8, a day after the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza began. Mohammed Suleiman, director of the Salah Ghandour Hospital in Bint Jbeil, said they had received one person killed and nine wounded in the strike, most of whom were "civilians who were in front of the hospital, where family members and people accompanying the patients usually gather". Two of the wounded were in "highly sensitive" condition, he said. The strike also caused minor damage to the hospital, an Associated Press photographer at the scene said. Israeli strikes have killed more than 400 people in Lebanon since the war in Gaza began, most of them militants with Hezbollah and allied groups but also including more than 70 civilians and non-combatants. On the Israeli side, strikes from Lebanon have killed 15 soldiers and 10 civilians. The clashes have displaced tens of thousands on each side of the border. Western countries, in particular the US and France, have come forward with a series of proposals for a cessation of hostilities on the Lebanon-Israel border. Hezbollah has refused to enter into an agreement until a ceasefire is implemented in Gaza. Initially, the proposals stipulated that Hezbollah would move its forces several kilometers away from the border, but a French diplomatic official said the latest proposal has abandoned this idea as Hezbollah would not agree to it unless Israel also halted its overflights in Lebanese airspace.

# EU-Israel relations take nosedive

## Spain, Ireland set to formally recognise Palestinian state

**AP ■ BRUSSELS**  
Relations between the European Union and Israel took a nosedive on the eve of the diplomatic recognition of a Palestinian state by EU members Ireland and Spain, with Madrid suggesting sanctions should be considered against Israel for its continued attacks in the southern Gaza city of Rafah. Israeli Foreign Minister Katz told Spain that its consulate in Jerusalem will not be allowed to help Palestinians. At the same time, the EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, a Spaniard, threw his full weight to support the International Criminal Court, whose prosecutor is seeking an arrest warrant against

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and others, including the leaders of Hamas. "The prosecutor of the court has been strongly intimidated and accused of antisemitism," Borrell said. "The word antisemitic, it's too heavy. It's too important." Angry words abounded Monday, with Katz accusing Spain of "rewarding terror" by recognising a Palestinian state, and saying that "the days of the Inquisition are over." He referred to the infamous Spanish institution started in the 15th century to maintain Roman Catholic orthodoxy that forced Jews and Muslims to flee, convert to Catholicism or, in some instances, face death. "No

one will force us to convert our religion or threaten our existence - those who harm us, we will harm in return," said Katz. Even though the EU and its member nations have been steadfast in condemning the Oct 7 Hamas-led attack in which militants stormed across the Gaza border into Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 hostage, the bloc has been equally critical of Israel's ensuing offensive that has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. The latest attacks have centred on Rafah, where Palestinian health workers said Israeli airstrikes killed at least 35 people Sunday, hit

tents for displaced people and left "numerous" others trapped in flaming debris. The UN's top court, the International Court of Justice, on Friday demanded that Israel immediately halt its offensive on Rafah, even if it stopped short of ordering a cease-fire for the Gaza enclave. "Israel has to stop its offensive in Rafah," Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Abares said. Spain, Ireland and non-EU member Norway plan to make official their recognition of a Palestinian state on Tuesday. Their joint announcement last week triggered an angry response from Israeli authorities, which summoned the countries'

ambassadors in Tel Aviv to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, where they were filmed while being shown videos of the Oct 7 Hamas attack and kidnapping. Abares criticised the treatment of the ambassadors. "We reject something that is not within diplomatic courtesy and the customs of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations," he said. "But at the same time we have also agreed that we are not going to fall into any provocation that distances us from our goal," he added. "Our aim is to recognise the state of Palestine tomorrow, make all possible efforts to achieve a permanent ceasefire as soon as possible and also, in the end, to achieve that definitive peace."

# UK Labour leader Starmer woos voters with vow to safeguard national security

**AP ■ LONDON**  
British opposition leader Keir Starmer made his first major speech of the UK election campaign Monday, telling undecided voters that they can trust his Labour Party to safeguard the country's economy, borders and security. Starmer is the favourite to win the July 4 election, with polls giving Labour a double-digit lead over the governing Conservatives under Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. But many electors remain undecided, and Starmer sought to address a perception that the left-of-centre Labour Party is weaker on defence and security than the centre-right Conservatives. "The very foundation of any good government is economic security, border security, national security," Starmer said during a speech in the seaside town of Lancing on England's south coast. "This is the foundation, the bedrock that our manifesto and our first steps, will be built upon." Starmer accused the



Conservatives of presiding over "desperate chaos." Britain's first election since 2019 follows several turbulent years that saw a global pandemic and a cost-of-living crisis triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Those international crises were exacerbated by problems of the Conservatives' own making: a slew of ethics scandals that topped Prime Minister Boris Johnson in 2022, and the disastrous economic policies of his successor Liz Truss, who lasted only 49 days in office. Sunak had until December to call

an election and took most people — including those in his own party — by surprise when he announced last week that the vote would be held on July 4. Voters will elect lawmakers to fill all 650 seats in the House of Commons. The leader of the party that can command a Commons majority — either alone or in coalition — will become prime minister. The Conservatives, who have been in office for 14 years, are trying to overcome a widespread sense that voters want change, and Sunak's campaign got off to a faltering start. His announcement outside 10 Downing Street saw him drenched with rain and drowned out by protesters blasting a Labour campaign song. Sunak grabbed weekend headlines with an announcement that all 18-year-olds in Britain will have to perform a year of mandatory military or civilian national service if the Conservatives are reelected. The prime minister said the program would help "create a shared sense of purpose among our

young people and a renewed sense of pride in our country." The party faced questions about how the program would work and whether it could be made compulsory. Starmer said the announcement reflected the Conservatives' "desperation" to shore up its vote. Labour has lost four consecutive elections, in 2010, 2015, 2017 and 2019, and party leaders are wary of taking their poll lead for granted. Starmer, a lawyer and former chief prosecutor for England and Wales, remains an unknown quantity to many voters. In his speech he stressed his working-class roots as the son of a toolmaker and a nurse who was the first in his family to go to university. He said he had transformed Labour, moving it to the centre ground after taking over as leader in 2020 from staunch socialist Jeremy Corbyn. "Whatever the polls say, I know there are countless people who haven't decided how they'll vote in this election," Starmer said. "They're fed up with the failure,

# France to lift state of emergency

**Paris (AP):** French President Emmanuel Macron decided Monday to lift the state of emergency in the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia in a move meant to allow political dialogue following the unrest that left seven people dead and a trail of destruction, his office said. The president's office said in a statement the state of emergency won't be extended "for the moment" and will therefore end Monday at 8 pm in Paris, which is 5 am Tuesday in New Caledonia. The decision aims at "enabling meetings of the various components" of pro-independence movement FLNKS, the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front, and allow elected officials and other local leaders "in a position to call" for lifting the barricades to go there and meet with protesters, the statement said. Macron repeatedly pushed for the removal of protesters' barricades with leaders on both sides of New Caledonia's bitter divide — Indigenous Kanaks, who want independence, and the pro-Paris leaders, who do not

# N Korea plans to launch rocket soon

**AP ■ SEOUL**  
North Korea announced plans to launch a rocket apparently carrying its second military spy satellite during an eight-day period starting Monday, drawing quick, strong rebukes from neighbours South Korea and Japan. The notification of the planned launch, banned under UN resolutions, came as South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida met Chinese Premier Li Qiang in Seoul for their first trilateral meeting in more than four years. Japan's coast guard said it was notified by North Korea about its planned launch of a "satellite rocket", with a warning of caution in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and China and east of the main Philippine island of Luzon beginning Monday through midnight June 3. North Korea provides Japan with its launch information because Japan's coast guard coordinates and distributes

maritime safety information in East Asia. North Korea's planned launch is thought to be an attempt to put its second military spy satellite into orbit. South Korea's military said Friday it detected signs of suspected preparations to launch a spy satellite at North Korea's main Tongchangri launch facility in the northwest. The UN bans North Korea from conducting any satellite launches, viewing them as covers for testing long-range missile technology. North Korea has steadfastly maintained it has the right to launch satellites and test missiles. It says spy satellites will allow it to better monitor the US and South Korea's moves and enhance the precision strike capability of its nuclear-capable missiles. "Any launch (by North Korea) using ballistic missile technology would directly violate UN Security Council resolutions and undermine peace and security of the region and the world," Yoon said at the start of the meeting with Kishida and Li. "If North

Korea presses ahead with its launch despite the international warning, I think the international community must sternly deal with it." Kishida said he strongly urges North Korea to cancel the launch. China is a North Korean ally, and Li didn't mention the North Korean satellite. In phone talks earlier Monday, senior diplomats from Japan, South Korea and the United States agreed to call on North Korea to abandon the launch. South Korea's Unification Ministry, which deals with North Korea, separately called a satellite launch by the North "a provocation that seriously threatens our and regional security." Later Monday, South Korea mobilised 20 fighter jets for a drill meant to demonstrate its resolve to punish North Korea in the event of provocation, according to South Korea's military. Japanese officials said their missile interceptors remain ready to shoot down any debris from a North Korean rocket if it falls on

Japanese territory. Last November, North Korea sent its first military reconnaissance satellite into orbit as part of efforts to build a space-based surveillance network to cope with what it calls increasing US-led military threats. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un later told a governing party meeting that the country would launch three additional military spy satellites in 2024. Whether the North Korean satellites can produce militarily meaningful imagery is widely doubted, but some civilian experts say operating several satellites could help North Korea continuously monitor big enemy targets. The latest launch notification to Japan identifies the same danger zones for potential rocket debris as those identified prior to North Korea's last launch. That suggests North Korea would use the same first and second rocket stages as before, said Chang Young-keun, a missile expert at the Seoul-based Korea Research Institute for National Strategy.

# Hungary's five-time PM Orbán facing new contender in upcoming EU polls

**AP ■ BUDAPEST**  
About three months ago, a scandal rocked five-time nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party which prides itself on upholding family values and Christian conservatism. As party leaders attempted damage control after close Orbán allies, President Katalin Novák and Justice Minister Judit Varga, were forced to resign over a presidential pardon for a man convicted of covering up a string of child sexual abuses, Péter Magyar saw a chance and broke ranks with the party in February. In a matter of weeks, Magyar — a 43-year-old lawyer — built a political movement, now poised to become Hungary's largest opposition force and challenge Orbán's party in the June 9 European Parliament and municipal elections.



Magyar said in a recent interview with The Associated Press that the upcoming vote was a "prelude" to his planned run in the 2026 Hungarian national elections. Whether he can score a win remains to be seen. Orbán has delivered his Fidesz party four straight wins in

Hungary's parliament since 2010 and secured more than half the vote in the last two elections for the European Parliament. Polls show his party is still expected to outperform opponents despite a dip in popularity and a deep economic slump that have cost the premier thousands of supporters. Still, Magyar seized on the growing disenchantment with the populist Orbán and breathed life into the existing but inactive Tisztelet és Szabadság, or Respect and Freedom, party. In a series of widely followed interviews and public rallies, he accused Orbán's government of overseeing deep corruption and a pervasive government-controlled propaganda network while presenting himself as a more moderate conservative alternative. "Our offer is very simple: We

must do something completely different in Hungary," he said in the interview, adding that Hungarians were "fed up with the fact that there is an economic, political, moral, legal, and subsistence crisis here in 2024." Polls in May showed that Magyar's party had the support of around a quarter of likely voters for the June elections. However, voters have been disappointed before. Two years ago, around 2 million Hungarians pinned their hopes for change on a coalition of six opposition parties that had put aside political differences to form a united front against Fidesz in national elections. But when Orbán's party once again won in a landslide, infighting followed, leading to the de facto dissolution of the coalition and a crisis of credibility for the opposition.

# Tornadoes rip through Texas, Oklahoma at least 15 dead

**PTI ■ HOUSTON**  
At least 15 people, including two kids, have died as powerful storms ravaged the states of Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas in the central US, destroying homes and plunging thousands into darkness amid rising temperatures over the Memorial Day weekend. Seven fatalities were reported in Cooke County, Texas, near the Oklahoma border, where a tornado Saturday night ripped through a rural area near a mobile home park, officials said. Storms also caused damage in Oklahoma, where guests at an outdoor wedding were injured. "It's just a trail of debris left. The devastation is pretty severe," Cooke County Sheriff Ray Sappington said. The dead included two children, aged 2 and 5, and three members of a family, the sheriff said. A tornado tore apart houses and businesses, flipped

mobile homes and knocked down trees and power lines. Areas near the community of Valley View were especially hard-hit. Sappington said 60 to 80 people were injured at a truck stop called the AP Travel Center on Interstate 35. Many had rushed there to take shelter. Semitrailers were overturned further to the south in the neighbouring Denton County, closer to Dallas. Multiple people were taken to hospitals, some by helicopter, but the full extent of their injuries was not immediately known. More than 4,70,000 people were without power in states stretching from Texas to Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, Tennessee and Kentucky, according to a power outage website. Hugo Parra, who lives in Farmers Branch, north of Dallas, said he rode out the storm with about 40 to 50 people in the bathroom of a gas station. "A firefighter came to

check on us and he said, 'You're very lucky,'" Mr Parra told the Associated Press. "The best way to describe this is the wind tried to rip us out of the bathrooms." At least five people were reported killed in Arkansas, including a 26-year-old woman who was found dead outside a destroyed home in Olvey, a small community in Boone County, according to Daniel Bolen of the county's emergency management office. Two people died in Oklahoma, Michael Dunham, deputy director of the Mayes County Emergency Management, confirmed to weather.com. Dunham said search and rescue efforts were continuing, with teams going house to house. Widespread damage was reported in Claremore, where 23 people were injured. Nineteen of those victims were transported to local hospitals, three with life-threatening injuries.

# Georgian parl rejects veto of 'foreign agents' law

**AP ■ TBILISI**  
A Georgian parliament committee on Monday rejected the president's veto of the "foreign agents" legislation that has sparked massive protests for weeks. The move by the parliament's judiciary committee sets up the possibility of a vote of the full legislature on Tuesday to override President Salome Zourabichvili's veto of the measure, which she and other critics say will restrict media freedom and obstruct Georgia's chances of joining the European Union. The law would require news media and non-governmental organisations that get more than 20 per cent of their budget from abroad to register as "carrying out the interests of a foreign power." Opponents denounce it as "the Russian law" because it resembles measures pushed through by the Kremlin. Zourabichvili vetoed the law on May 18 after it was passed in parliament by deputies from the governing Georgian Dream party and its allies. That bloc



has sufficient votes in parliament to override the veto. Large protests have repeatedly gripped the capital, Tbilisi, as the measure made its way through parliament. On Sunday, Zourabichvili and Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze decried each other

in speeches at a ceremony marking Georgia's Independence Day. "As the spectre of Russia looms over us, partnership and rapprochement with Europe are the true path to preserving and strengthening our independence and peace. Those who

sabotage and undermine this path trample upon and damage the peaceful and secure future of our country, hindering the path towards becoming a full member of the free and democratic world," Zourabichvili said. But Kobakhidze sharply criticised

Zourabichvili. "It was the unity and reasonable steps of the people and their elected government that gave us the opportunity to maintain peace in the country for the past two years despite existential threats and multiple betrayals, including the betrayal of the president of Georgia," he said. The European Union's foreign policy arm has said adoption of the law "negatively impacts Georgia's progress on the EU path". Critics say it may have been driven by Russia to thwart Georgia's chances of further integrating with the West. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Thursday announced that travel sanctions would be imposed on Georgian officials "who are responsible for or complicit in undermining democracy in Georgia." He added that "it remains our hope that Georgia's leaders will reconsider the draft law and take steps to move forward with their nation's democratic and Euro-Atlantic aspirations."



# Ukrainian President visits Spain

AP ■ MADRID

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy arrived in Madrid on Monday where he was expected to sign a bilateral security agreement with Spain that will help his country fight its more than two-year war with Russia amid a recent offensive by the Kremlin's forces.

Spain's King Felipe VI met Zelenskyy at the capital's Barajas airport. The Ukrainian leader was due to hold talks with Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez about what local media reported as a planned 1.1 billion euros (\$1.2 billion) agreement for Spain to supply Ukraine with more weapons. Zelenskyy had been due to visit Spain earlier this month but he postponed all his foreign trips after the Kremlin's forces launched a cross-border offensive in the northeastern Kharkiv region and left Ukrainian troops reeling. That push has further strained Ukraine's already depleted army, which in recent months has been fighting Russia's intense drive deeper into the partially occupied eastern



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, left, is welcomed by Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez at the Moncloa palace in Madrid on Monday. AP/PTI

Donetsk region. Zelenskyy said on Sunday that the Kremlin's army is mustering at another point in Russia, farther north but close to the approximately 1,000-km (600-mile) front line, presumably to try and

crack Ukrainian resistance in the area. A Western intelligence assessment suggested that Russia's Kharkiv offensive has subsided. "The northern Kharkiv front has likely stabilised with

Russian territorial control fragmented and not joined up," the UK defence ministry said Sunday. "Russia's gains in this axis will be limited in the coming week, as Russia's initial momentum has been con-

tained by Ukrainian resistance."

That is in line with Zelenskyy's claim last Friday that Ukrainian forces have secured "combat control" of areas where Russian troops entered the Kharkiv region.

The onslaught unfolding as the weather improves has brought Ukraine's biggest military test since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Slow deliveries of support by its Western partners, especially a lengthy delay in US military aid, have left Ukraine at the mercy of Russia's bigger army and air force. Spanish newspaper El País, citing unidentified sources familiar with the bilateral deal, said it would include another batch of US-made Patriot air defence systems that Ukraine has long pleaded for to help it fend off Russian missile attacks. Other items include more Leopard tanks for Ukraine and 155mm artillery shells that are the most used by Ukraine on the battlefield, El País said. Spain will also continue training Ukrainian troops and treating its wounded soldiers.

# Poland plans to fortify its borders with Russia, Belarus

AP ■ WARSAW

Defence officials in NATO member Poland on Monday presented a plan to strengthen anti-drone surveillance and on-ground military defence through a system of fortifications and barriers along about 700 kilometres (430 miles) of its eastern border with Russia and Russian ally Belarus. The government says Poland, which supports neighbouring Ukraine in its defence against Russia's aggression, is being targeted by hostile actions from Russia and Belarus. They include cyberattacks, attempted arson and migrants being pushed illegally across the border, which officials describe as intended to destabilise the European Union, of which Poland is a member. The government is also making preparations in the case of a military attack, while stressing the primary role of deterrence. The government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk has planned a range of security measures including in cyberspace, as

well as a more than USD 2.5 billion investment in strengthening surveillance, deterrence and defence along the eastern border, a system known as Shield-East that is to be completed in 2028. Work on it has started, officials said. "The goal of the shield is to protect the territory of Poland, hamper the mobility of our adversary's troops while making such mobility easier for our own troops and to protect civilians," Defence Minister Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz said at a news conference, adding that local communities understand the need for such steps. The shield will include "all kinds of fortifications, barriers, monitoring of the air space on every level and upgrading the existing systems," and will be integrated with the defence system across the country, Kosiniak-Kamysz said. He stressed it was the biggest program to strengthen NATO's eastern flank since 1945, when World War II ended.

Chief of Staff Gen. Wiesław Kukula said it will

include a network of state-of-the-art anti-drone monitoring and defence towers, anti-tank barriers and ditches, bunkers and shelters, as well as space for potential mine fields. He stressed their primary role is to deter any potential aggressor. The officials said the system will be part of a regional defence infrastructure built jointly with the Baltic states — Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia — that are also on NATO's eastern flank. The funding will come from the government, as Poland spends over 4 per cent of its GDP on defence, but help will also be sought from the EU because the system will also strengthen the eastern border of the 27-member bloc, they said. Some observers noted that the much-publicised presentation came two weeks ahead of elections to the European Parliament, where Poland, a nation of some 38 million, holds 52 seats, and could be partly seen as a campaign element for the government that took office in December.

# PML-N and PPP invite Imran Khan's party to 'meaningful' talks

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Lahore (PTI): The ruling coalition of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has invited jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party to abandon its street protests and engage in "meaningful" dialogue with the government, a media report said on Monday.

Senate Chairman Yousuf Raza Gilani and Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal emphasised the government's openness to talks but stressed that the beleaguered party of Khan must decide with whom it wants to negotiate. The Express Tribune newspaper reported. Gilani, speaking to the media in Lahore, reiterated the government's willingness to negotiate. However, the former prime minister said Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) "seems intent on negotiating with someone else".

The 71-year-old veteran PPP politician said Imran Khan's party wants to carve its path by confronting the establishment and the government in court.

"(Our) doors are open for meaningful talks but the PTI will have to decide with whom they want to negotiate," Gilani said. The acting president of Pakistan said the country currently suffers from instability and therefore all political leaders must come on the same page.

Gilani said during their time in opposition under the PTI-led government, they were willing to engage in political talks, despite the PTI's reluctance to do so, the newspaper quoted him as saying. Replying to another question, Gilani emphasised that the PPP remains committed to supporting the current government.

"The PPP has never indicated that it is not part of the government; we are aligned with the government in all matters," Gilani said. The former prime minister said consultations within the party are underway regarding joining the cabinet at both the Centre and in Punjab. Meanwhile, Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal said that the government's doors were open to all parties for purposeful and meaningful negotiations.

Iqbal said the PTI was the ruling party in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province and they should serve the people there. "I advise the PTI leadership to shun streets (protests) and enter the (parliamentary) houses," he added.

# 23 militants, 7 soldiers killed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa clashes

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

At least 23 militants affiliated with the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) were killed and seven Pakistani soldiers died in three separate clashes since Sunday in the troubled north-western province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the army said on Monday. According to a statement issued by the media wing of the Pakistan Army, the fighting took place on Sunday and Monday as the security forces increased pressure on the rebels affiliated with the TTP, which has been allegedly operating out of Afghanistan. "Twenty-three terrorists were sent to hell by the security forces in three separate operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province," the army said.

The army stated that an intelligence-based operation was conducted on Sunday in the Hassan Khel area near Peshawar in which six terrorists were successfully neutralised by the security forces and multiple hideouts were busted. However, an officer and a soldier were killed in the



A scene of destruction in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, showing damaged vehicles and debris. PTI

clash, it said. In another operation conducted in the Tank district of the province on Monday, Pakistan troops effectively engaged the terrorists' location, as a result of which ten terrorists were killed. The third clash occurred in the Bagh area of Khyber district, wherein the security forces killed seven terrorists while two were injured. However, during the intense exchange of fire, five soldiers were killed. "A large quantity of weapons, ammunition and explosives was also recovered from the killed terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous

terrorist activities against the security forces as well as the innocent civilians," according to the army. It said that sanitisation operations are being carried out to eliminate any of their terrorists found in the area. The army said that the country's forces were determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism. Pakistan has been facing a resurgent TTP which allegedly has a strong presence in Afghanistan and uses its territory to hide and train and also launch cross-border attacks. Pakistan has been pushing Kabul to take action against them but so far it has been of no avail.

# China backs Pak probe into militant attacks on its workers; silent on Af Taliban involvement

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Monday voiced its support for Pakistan's investigation into the recent suicide attack targeting Chinese personnel at a hydroelectric dam in that country but refrained from holding Afghanistan's Taliban interim government responsible for sheltering the militants, as alleged by Islamabad. Five Chinese engineers and their Pakistani driver were killed when an explosives-packed vehicle rammed into their bus in the troubled province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in March, in the second suicide attack on the personnel working on the China-backed hydropower project since 2021. The Chinese were working on the Dasu hydropower project, which is about 300 km to the north of Islamabad. The 4,320 MW project is being constructed by China Gezhouba with funding from the World Bank. "China attaches great importance to the important progress made by the Pakistani side on the investigation of the terrorist attack," Foreign Ministry spokesper-

son Mao Ning told a media briefing here. She was responding to a question about Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi press conference on Sunday during which he asked Afghanistan's Taliban government to hand over the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorists allegedly involved in the attack on Chinese workers. Naqvi alleged that the attack was planned in Afghanistan and executed with the help of handlers and facilitators based in Pakistan.

"Whether Afghanistan tries the terrorists (in the court of law) or not, it should hand over the militants to Pakistan," he had said. Reacting to Naqvi's allegations, Mao said China supports Pakistan in continuing to get to the full bottom of what happened, and hunting down and bringing to justice all the perpetrators. "China will continue to work with Pakistan to strengthen security cooperation and ensure the safety and security of Chinese personnel, projects, and institutions in Pakistan," she said, adding that

terrorism is a common enemy of humanity and a scourge against regional development and stability.

Without naming Afghanistan, Mao said, "China calls on countries in the region to strengthen counter-terrorism cooperation, root out all terrorist organisations, remove their breeding ground, and protect the common security and development interests of all countries." China is in a quandary about the allegations and counter allegations by Pakistan and Afghan Taliban, previously close allies, accusing each other of harbouring terrorists. Beijing also shares close ties with the Taliban government in Afghanistan and has extended diplomatic recognition to the regime. While Pakistan accuses the Taliban government of harbouring TTP militants, Kabul charged Islamabad of sheltering Daesh (IS) terrorists.

The Taliban government has already rejected Pakistan's allegations. In a statement on May 8, the Afghan Defence Ministry rejected Pakistan's claim that the

plot to kill five Chinese engineers was hatched in Afghanistan. The Afghan defence ministry spokesperson Enayatullah Khwarazmi in a statement termed the claims "irresponsible and far from the reality".

He said blaming Afghanistan for such incidents was a "failed attempt to divert attention from the truth", adding that the killing of Chinese citizens in an area which was "under tight security cover of the Pakistani army shows the weakness of the Pakistani security agencies". Khwarazmi had said the Taliban government has "assured China on this matter and the country has also understood the fact that Afghans are not involved in such issues".

He alleged that members of the militant Islamic State group were "entering Afghanistan from Pakistan". "We have much evidence of Daesh (IS) who came to Afghanistan from the territory of Pakistan, and Pakistan's territory being used against us for which Pakistan should answer," Khwarazmi said.

# Offered hassle-free re-election for allowing airbase in B'desh: Hasina

PTI ■ DHAKA

Dhaka (PTI): Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said that she was offered a hassle-free re-election in the January 7 polls if she allowed a foreign country to build an airbase inside Bangladeshi territory. Hasina, 76, ruling the strategically located South Asian nation since 2009, secured a fifth overall term in the one-sided election in January, which was boycotted by the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by former prime minister Khalida Zia.

"If I allowed a certain country to build an airbase in Bangladesh, then I would have had no problem," The Daily Star Bangladesh quoted Hasina as saying on Sunday. She, however, did not name the country that had made the offer to her but emphasised that the offer came from a White man. "The offer came from a White man," Hasina, the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father and first presi-

dent of Bangladesh. "It may appear that it is aimed at only one country, but it is not. I know where else they intend to go," she said, adding that this is why her Awami League party-led government is always in trouble. "There will be more trouble. But don't worry about it," she said. When asked about her response to the "White man" who put forward the offer, the prime minister said she made the same reply as she did in 2001 when the US offered to sell the country's gas to India.

"I've clearly said that I'm the daughter of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. . . we won our Liberation War, I don't want to come to power by renting part of the country or handing it over to some other country and I don't need power," she said. The premier said she would only come to power if the people wanted, and wouldn't if they did not want her to see as prime minister.

# Leaders of S Korea, China and Japan to resume trilateral meeting

AP ■ SEOUL

Leaders of South Korea, China and Japan were set to meet Monday for their first trilateral meeting in more than four years as they seek to improve long-complicated relations that are key to regional peace. No major breakthrough was expected during the gathering in Seoul. But experts said just restarting the countries' highest-level annual meeting was a positive sign for cooperation among the three Northeast Asian neighbours.

On the eve of the meeting, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, Chinese Premier Li Qiang and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida had rounds of bilateral meetings among themselves to discuss how to boost economic and other cooperation. But some thorny topics were also brought up, like North Korea, Taiwan and the South China Sea.

After meeting with Li, Kishida told reporters that he expressed serious concerns about the



South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, center, speaks as Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, left, and Chinese Premier Li Qiang listen during a joint news conference in Seoul, South Korea Monday. AP/PTI

situations in the South China Sea, Hong Kong and China's northwestern Xinjiang region. He said Japan was closely monitoring developments on self-governed Taiwan as well. Kishida referred to China's military assertiveness in the South China Sea, clampdowns on pro-democracy movements

in Hong Kong and human rights abuses against minorities in Xinjiang. Last week, China also launched a large military exercise around Taiwan to show its anger over the inauguration of the island's new president who refuses to accept its insistence that Taiwan is part of China. When

Yoon met with Li separately Sunday, he spoke about North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and its deepening military ties with Russia, and he asked China, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, to contribute to promoting peace on the Korean Peninsula, according to Yoon's office. South Korea, Japan and the US have long urged China — North Korea's major ally and economic pipeline — to use its leverage to persuade the North to abandon its nuclear ambitions. But China is suspected of avoiding fully implementing UN sanctions on North Korea and sending clandestine aid shipments to its impoverished, socially neighbor. In a development that could further raise tensions on the Korean Peninsula, Japan's coast guard said Monday that North Korea informed it of a plan to launch a satellite by early next week, a likely reference to the North's push to place its second military spy satellite. North Korea has said it needs spy satellites to better monitor South Korea

and the United States and improve the precision-striking capabilities of its missiles. The sensitive China-involving topics aren't on the official agendas at Monday's meeting. Officials in South Korea, the host of the meeting, said a joint statement after Monday's trilateral meeting would cover the leaders' discussion on cooperation in areas like people-to-people exchanges, climate change, trade, health issues, technology and disaster responses. The three Asian nations together represent about 25 per cent of global gross domestic product, and they are closely linked to one another economically and culturally.

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# 7 die, 15 mn without power as cyclone Remal batters B'desh

Dhaka (PTI): At least seven people were killed and millions were left without power as Severe Cyclone 'Remal' lashed the coasts of Bangladesh with devastating winds of up to 120 kph and storm surges, inundating hundreds of villages. 'Remal' weakened into a cyclonic storm on Monday morning, sustaining wind speeds of 80-90 kilometres per hour, following landfall around midnight of Sunday, the Met Department said. The department said that the weather system, which lay 150 km northeast of Sagar Island at 5.30 am, brought torrential rain and moved northeastwards to weaken further into a cyclonic storm. Remal is the first cyclone in the Bay of Bengal ahead of this year's

monsoon season, which runs from June to September. The cyclone was named Remal (meaning sand in Arabic) by Oman, according to a system of naming cyclones in the Indian Ocean region.

The cyclone has been accompanied by gusty winds and heavy rains, impacting areas including Barisal, Bhola, Patuakhali, Satkhira, and Chattogram. In Patuakhali, one person was washed away by a storm surge while returning home to bring his sister and aunt to a shelter. Another person died in Satkhira after falling as he ran for cover during the storm.

Five people were killed in Barishal, Bhola and Chattogram, Dhaka-based Somoy TV reported.

In Mongla, a trawler sank, leaving two people, including a child, missing.

The rural power authority has cut off electricity to 15 million people in coastal areas to minimise the damage from 'Remal', BD News reported. The power outages have lasted over 12 hours in some areas, but electricity workers are preparing to restore the connections once the storm subsides.

Biswanath Sikder, chief engineer (planning and operation) of the Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board, said the storm was still ongoing as of 9:45 am in the coastal areas. He estimated that a total of about 15 million people in the affected areas were without power.

According to the Met Office, Cyclone Remal has moved northward, crossing the coast and is currently positioned near Koira in Khulna.

The cyclone is expected to continue its northward trajectory, bringing increased rainfall and weakening to a lower intensity within the next 2-3 hours, the Met Department of Bangladesh said in a special bulletin at 3:30 am on Monday. 'Remal' sustained wind speeds of 80-90 kilometres per hour, following landfall around midnight of Sunday, the Indian Met Department said.

Heavy to very heavy rainfall with wind gusts on Monday morning braced most of Bangladesh under the influence of the storm. Despite accurate forecasts and

increased public awareness, weak embankments failed to withstand the cyclone's force, inundating many villages. Coastal areas experienced waves as high as 5 to 6 feet, exacerbating the destruction, according to the Met Office.

The storm on Sunday forced authorities to close the country's three seaports and the airport in the second-largest city Chattogram. BSS News reported. Maritime ports of Payra and Mongla have been advised to keep hoisted great danger signal no 10. As the cyclone progresses, the sea and coastal environments are predicted to gradually calm, although heavy rains and gusty winds persist in Dhaka and its surrounding areas. Fishing boats and trawlers oper-

ating in the North Bay of Bengal and the deep sea have been advised to remain in a safe harbour until further notice.

Payra and Mongla ports have been instructed to hoist danger signal number 10, indicating severe conditions.

The Meteorological Department has warned that due to the cyclone's intensity and the air pressure difference, coastal districts and their remote islands and chars could face wind-driven tides 8-12 feet above normal. Cyclone-prone Bangladesh designed most schools in coastal regions as cyclone shelters alongside dedicating structures to enable people to take refuge during surges and many of these multi-storey facilities have space for sheltering cattle as well.

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# Sensex scales 76,000 peak

## Nifty hits new high before closing lower; RIL, ITC biggest drag

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Sensex scaled the 76,000 level for the first time while Nifty hit a new lifetime peak before closing marginally down in highly volatile trade on Monday as investors booked profits in the last 30 minutes of trade. The 30-share BSE Sensex closed lower by 19.89 points or 0.03 per cent lower at 75,390.50. Intra-day, the barometer climbed 599.29 points or 0.79 per cent to an all-time peak of 76,009.68 following gains in select banking, financial and IT shares. However, investors preferred to book profits at record levels and the index declined around 835 points from the day's high to hit a low of 75,175.27. Broader Nifty of the NSE declined by 24.65 points or 0.11 per cent, to end at 22,932.45. The 50-issue barometer rose by 153.7 points or 0.66 per cent to hit a new lifetime high of 23,110.80 during the day. However, it tanked around 240 points at the fag-end due to selling in oil, energy and FMCG shares. Index heavyweight Reliance Industries declined nearly 1 per cent, dragging the benchmark indices into the negative. Selling in FMCG giant ITC also eroded gains. Equity benchmarks were on a record-breaking rally for the



third straight day ahead of the results of Lok Sabha polls and a rally in global markets. The results of the ongoing general elections will be declared on June 4. Sensex breached the historic 75,000-mark for the first time on April 9. It took 31 trading sessions for the benchmark to climb 1,000 points to reach the 76,000-mark on Monday. The BSE benchmark took 21 trading sessions to reach 75,000-mark on April 9 after hitting the 74,000-level on March 6. From the Sensex firms,

Wipro, NTPC, Sun Pharma, Mahindra & Mahindra, ITC and Reliance Industries were among the biggest laggards. IndusInd Bank, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank, Larsen & Toubro and State Bank of India were among the major gainers. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory. European markets were also quoting in the green. Wall Street ended with gains on Friday. Global oil benchmark Brent

crude climbed 0.38 per cent to USD 82.44 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 944.83 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. On Friday, the BSE benchmark dipped 7.65 points or 0.01 per cent to settle at 75,410.39. The Nifty breached the 23,000 mark for the first time on Friday. It, however, pared all the gains and ended with a marginal decline of 10.55 points or 0.05 per cent at 22,957.10.

# Record RBI dividend at 0.6 per cent of GDP may not be sustained: Fitch

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fitch Ratings on Monday said the RBI to the government is equivalent to 0.6 per cent of GDP, and such high level of dividends as a percentage of GDP is unlikely to be maintained. The board of India's central bank last week decided to transfer a record Rs 2.1 lakh crore dividend to the government out of the profits earned in fiscal 2023-24. This is more than double of Rs 1.02 lakh crore that was budgeted by the government. Fitch said an important driver of higher RBI profits appears to be higher interest revenue on foreign assets, though the central bank has not yet provided a detailed breakdown. "The RBI recently announced a record-high dividend transfer to the government equivalent to 0.6 per cent of GDP (Rs 2.1 trillion) from its operations in FY24. This is above the 0.3 per cent of GDP expected in the FY25 budget from February, so will aid the authorities in meeting near-term deficit reduction goals," the rating agency said in a statement. Fitch said transfers from the Reserve Bank of India to the government can be significant at the margin for fiscal performance but depend on various factors, including the size and performance of assets held on the central bank's balance sheet and India's exchange rate. Transfers may also be influenced by the RBI's views on what level of a buffer is appropriate to be maintained in balance sheet, it said. "The potential volatility of transfers means there is significant uncertainty about their medium-term path, and we do not anticipate that dividends as a share of GDP will be sustained at such a



high level," Fitch said. However, such windfall dividend transfer should help to ensure the 5.1 per cent of GDP deficit target for the fiscal year ending March 2025 (FY25) will be met and could be used to lower the deficit beyond the current target. The new government's budget, following the release of election results in June, is likely to be presented in July and will determine how the dividend will be used. The government has signalled it aims to narrow the deficit gradually to 4.5 per cent of GDP by FY26. Sustained deficit reduction, particularly if underpinned by durable revenue-raising reforms, would be positive for

India's sovereign rating fundamentals over the medium term, Fitch said. In its post-election budget, the new government will have two alternatives. First, the government could opt to keep the current deficit target for FY25, and the windfall could allow the authorities to further boost spending on infrastructure, or to offset upside spending surprises or lower-than-budgeted revenue, for example from divestment. Alternatively, all or part of the windfall could be saved, pushing the deficit to below 5.1 per cent of GDP. "The government's choice could give greater clarity around its medium-term fiscal priorities," Fitch said.

# Indya raises ₹50 crore from Sangita Jindal, others

PTI ■ MUMBAI

High Street Essentials, the makers of fashion brand Indya, on Monday announced a Rs 50-crore fundraise from JSW Group chairman Sajjan Jindal's wife Sangita Jindal and other investors. Three fourths of the funding is equity infusion for a minority stake, while the rest is debt, Indya's co-founder Shivani Poddar said. Other investors who have participated include family offices of SRF Group, Krishna Bodanapu of Cyient Technologies and Timmy Sarna from Pure Home + Living. Poddar said, while there are a lot of opportunities to benefit from the industrial or capital goods-focused JSW Group's businesses, the immediate driver is the synergies that are made possible courtesy the work done with village artisans by Sangita Jindal-headed JSW Foundation. Anurag Murali, also a co-founder of the company, said Indya can benefit from JSW's expertise in celebrity-led marketing and supply chain management in the future. It can be noted that a majority of big conglomerates have investments in fashion brands but nearly all such groups have retail ventures. The 2012-founded Indya, which delivered operational profit in April this year, will be utilising the newly raised



funds for business expansion, and plans to invest up to USD 3 million in FY25, which will include opening ten offline stores in the country, Murali said. At present, it has 12 exclusive brand outlets in eight cities, and 150 large-format retail outlets, including Lifestyle, Shoppers Stop, Centro and Ethnicity. Having been active in selling its wares online in the US, the brand is also aiming to open a physical presence either in the US or South Africa in FY25, he added. In a statement, Sangita Jindal said along with the global expansion, the investment will also help the brand widen its market share in the Indian wedding-wear opportunity. The company's core strength is in its unique designs, she said, appreciating the back-end capabilities created by the founders.

# NSE reduces tick size for select stocks to boost liquidity

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) has decided to introduce one paisa tick size for all stocks priced below Rs 250 from June 10, in a bid to enhance liquidity and improve price discovery by allowing for more precise price adjustments. Presently, the tick size for these stocks is five paisa, which will

be reduced to one paisa. "All securities (excluding exchange-traded funds) available in EQ, BE, BZ, BO, RL and AF series with security price below Rs 250 will have a tick size of Rs 0.01 as against the current tick size Rs 0.05. The tick size determined for securities in T+1 settlement will also be applicable for T+0 settlement (series T0)," NSE said in a circular.

Tick size is the minimum price increment between consecutive bid (buy) and offer (sell) prices. A smaller tick size allows for finer price adjustments and potentially more precise price discovery. For instance, if a stock has a tick size of Rs 0.10 and the last traded price (LTP) was Rs 50, the next possible bid prices would be Rs 49.90, Rs 49.80, Rs 49.70 and so on. In this



case, bid prices like Rs 49.85 or Rs 49.92 are not allowed, as

they don't meet the Rs 0.10 tick size requirement. The exchange said that tick sizes will be subject to review and adjustments every month, based on the closing price of the last trading day of the month. In addition to changes in the Capital Market (CM) segment, the NSE has announced revisions in the Futures & Options (F&O) segment.

The exchange said that the stock futures will have the same tick size as applicable for securities in the cash market segment from July 8. Further, revisions in tick size will be applicable for all expiries — Near-Month, Middle Month and Far-Month. Last year, rival bourse BSE lowered the tick size for scrips trading below Rs 100 to 1 paisa from 5 paisa.

# Technology promises to enhance incomes of rice farmers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A groundbreaking technology promises to enhance the incomes of millions of rice farmers using Direct Seeded Rice (DSR), while significantly reducing labor costs and greenhouse gas emissions by about 25 per cent. This innovation will also conserve water, promote sustainable agriculture, enhance yields, and support the Government of India's vision for Net Zero Emission and the National Food Security Mission. Aja Rana, Chairman of the Federation of Seed Industry of India (FSII), emphasized the need for climate-smart agricultural practices due to the growing demand for rice and limited land and water resources. "By 2035, an extra 114 million tons of milled rice will be needed to ensure food security," Rana stated.

# Rupee falls 4 paise to close at 83.14 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee pared its initial gains and settled for the day lower by 4 paise at 83.14 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, mirroring the benchmark indices that erased their gains and ended the day off their record-high levels. Forex traders said the rupee settled in a narrow range as the weakness of the American currency in the overseas market supported the rupee, while elevated crude oil prices in the international market restricted the upmove. At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 83.08, then touched an intra-day high of 83.05 but soon pared the gains and settled for the day lower by 4 paise at 83.14 (provisional) against the American currency. On Friday, the rupee rallied for the fourth consecutive



trading session and settled with a sharp gain of 19 paise at 83.10 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 104.67, lower by 0.05 per cent. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, advanced 0.47 per cent to USD 82.51 per barrel. "We expect the rupee to trade with a positive bias on positive domestic equities and

expectations of fresh foreign inflows. However, a strong US dollar and a recovery in crude oil prices may cap sharp upside," Anuj Choudhary — Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas said. US markets will remain closed on Monday on Memorial Day holiday. Investors may remain cautious ahead of core PCE price index data later this week. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of

Rs 82.80 to Rs 83.30, Choudhary added. On the domestic macroeconomic front, India's forex reserves jumped USD 4.549 billion to a new all-time high of USD 648.7 billion for the week ended May 17, the Reserve Bank said on Friday. This is the third consecutive week of increase in the overall kitty, which had increased by USD 2.561 billion to USD 644.151 billion in the previous reporting week ended May 17. On the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 19.89 points, or 0.03 per cent, to close at 75,390.50 points. The broader NSE Nifty settled 24.65 points or 0.11 per cent lower at 22,932.45 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Friday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 944.83 crore, according to exchange data.

# Gold, silver prices rebound on strong global cues

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold and silver prices rebounded sharply on Monday after falling for three straight sessions, with the precious metal jumping Rs 220 to Rs 72,820 per 10 grams in the national capital, tracking a strong trend in the overseas market due to escalating tensions in the Middle East. Gold had closed at Rs 72,600 per 10 grams in the previous session on Friday, according to HDFC Securities. Silver prices also bounced Rs 1,050 to Rs 92,850 per kg. In the previous session, it had finished at Rs 91,800 per kg. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 72,820 per 10 grams, up by Rs 220 against the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst, Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

# KAL Airways, Kalanithi Maran to seek ₹1,323 crore in damages from SpiceJet

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

KAL Airways and Kalanithi Maran on Monday said they will seek more than Rs 1,323 crore in damages from SpiceJet and its chief Ajay Singh as well as challenge the recent Delhi High Court order in the ongoing dispute between the two sides. On May 17, a division bench of the court set aside a single judge bench order that had upheld an arbitral award asking SpiceJet and its promoter Ajay Singh to refund Rs 579 crore plus interest to Maran. The bench allowed the appeals filed by Singh and SpiceJet challenging the single judge's order, passed on July 31, 2023, and remanded the matter back to

the court concerned to consider the petitions challenging the arbitral award afresh. Against this backdrop, Maran and his firm KAL Airways have decided to challenge the ruling after consultation with their legal counsel. The decree holders — KAL Airways and Maran — "believe that the aforesaid judgement is deeply flawed and warrants further scrutiny." "In parallel, they are also seeking damages in excess of Rs 1,323 crore, as determined by FTI Consulting LLP, United Kingdom, a globally renowned firm that specialises in estimation of losses arising out of breach of contractual commitments," KAL Airways said in a



statement on Monday. Further, it said the claim for damages had originally been presented by KAL Airways and Maran before the arbitral

tribunal and "has always remained an integral part of their quest for justice." By pursuing both the challenge to the Delhi High

Court judgement and the claim for damages, the decree holders hope to secure a just and equitable resolution to the contentious dispute, the statement said. The dispute arose due to a breach of trust by SpiceJet and has caused "enormous hardship to both KAL Airways and Kalanithi Maran for more than a decade," it added. According to the statement, they will pursue the execution of the arbitral award, seeking a refund of the pending dues amounting to Rs 353.50 crore. "This action is also in full compliance with, and supported by, the orders dated February 13, 2023, and July 7, 2023, passed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court directing that the award in favour of the decree holders is executed in its entirety," it

said. On May 22, SpiceJet said it will seek a refund of Rs 450 crore out of the total Rs 730 crore paid to the airline's former promoter Maran and KAL Airways following the Delhi High Court ruling. The case dates back to early 2015, when Singh, who owned the airline earlier, bought it back from Maran after it was grounded for months due to resource crunch. As part of the agreement, Maran and KAL Airways had claimed to have paid SpiceJet Rs 679 crore for issuing warrants and preference shares. However, Maran approached the Delhi High Court in 2017, alleging SpiceJet had not issued convertible warrants and preference shares nor returned the money.

# Hyundai sets up EV charging station in Chennai, plans 100 facilities across Tamil Nadu

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Automaker Hyundai Motor India Limited (HMIL) on Monday announced the inauguration of its fast electric-powered vehicles (EV) charging station here, and said this was first of the company's target of installing 100 such facilities across Tamil Nadu. The 180 kW DC fast charging station, comprising of 150 kW and 30 kW connectors, has been set at Spencer Plaza here, and would cater to compatible four-wheelers irrespective of brand and model, a company release said. "As we celebrate 28 years of

HMIL in India, we are delighted to inaugurate our first ever 180 kW fast public charging station in Chennai. In line with Hyundai's vision of 'Progress for Humanity', we aim to enhance convenience of all EV users, and hence our charging stations can be utilised by any four-wheeler EV user. HMIL envisages to install 100 charging stations across Tamil Nadu, to enhance the EV ecosystem and motivate more customers towards EV adoption across the state," Jae Wan Ryu, Executive Director — Corporate Planning, HMIL, was quoted as saying in the release.



# Harmanpreet's hat-trick guides India to 5-4 win over Argentina

PTI ■ ANTWERP (BELGIUM)

Captain Harmanpreet Singh led from the front with a sensational hat-trick as the Indian men's hockey team recorded a thrilling 5-4 win over Argentina in the FIH Hockey Pro League here.

Besides Harmanpreet (29', 50' and 52'), Arajjeet Singh Hundal (7') and Gurjant Singh (18') also scored for India, while Federico Monja (3'), Nicolas Keenan (24'), Tadeo Marucci (54') and Lucas Martinez (57') were on target for Argentina on Sunday.

India made a good start, keeping the ball for most of the first quarter and came up with accurate passes to make their way into the Argentina striking circle. However, Argentina drew first blood when Federico found the back of the net from a close range to give them a 1-0 lead.

In response, India equalized quickly as Arajjeet scored a brilliant field goal. India also earned a penalty corner but failed to capitalize on it as the first quarter ended 1-1.

India started the second quarter on a high note. The fast counter-attacking aggressive approach helped India extend their lead after Gurjant scored an excellent field goal.

India were slightly dodgy the next few minutes after scoring the goal as they gave up possession and were punished when Argentina broke into a quick counter, making their way through the left flank. It was Nicolas Keenan who



drove into the Indian circle, beating the defenders to strike the ball into India's goal levelling the score at 2-2. However, India earned a PC with a minute remaining in the quarter and Harmanpreet made it 3-2 in India's favour.

The third quarter was entertaining with both teams displaying quick-fire hockey. India secured a penalty corner but couldn't convert it as Harmanpreet's shot was blocked well by the Argentina goalkeeper. With both teams

defence standing tall, the third quarter remained goalless. India came out in top gear in the fourth quarter as they pushed Argentina to make errors, leading to a PC being awarded with 10 minutes remaining. The decision was

changed to a penalty stroke and Harmanpreet's low powerful shot found the back of the net as India took a 4-2 lead. Two minutes later, India were awarded another penalty stroke, which was again successfully converted by

Harmanpreet. Argentina pulled two goals back in quick succession as Tadeo and Lucas found the back of the net to set up an exciting finish to the game. The match ended with India winning 5-4.



## Indian shuttlers eye productive outing at Singapore Open

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Top Indian shuttlers, including PV Sindhu, HS Prannoy and Lakshya Sen, will look to hit top gear at the USD 850,000 Singapore Open, beginning here on Tuesday, with an additional objective of fine-tuning their preparations for the Paris Olympics.

The Summer Games are just two months away and the Olympic-bound shuttlers will have three more tournaments -- Australian Open super 500, Indonesia Super 1000, Canada Open super 500 -- to hone their skills and shake off any cobwebs ahead of the quadrennial mega event. Recently-crowned Thailand Open champions Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty have looked in the best shape for the Olympics, while Sindhu too has geared up with a runner-up finish at the Malaysia Masters on Sunday.

Lakshya and Prannoy will also hope for a deep run into the event to receive the ideal boost in the build-up to the Paris Games. However, it will be a tough test of their temperament as some big guns stand in their way in the Super 750 tournament. Sindhu's first final appearance in a BWF World Tour event in more than a year will serve her well but the meltdown in the decider after leading 11-3 to eventually lose the final against China's Wang Zhi Yi is something which will worry her camp.

The two-time Olympic medallist will have to quickly recover from the gut-wrenching loss as bigger battles lie ahead for her this week. She opens her campaign against Denmark's Line Hojmark Kjaersfeldt. A win is likely to pit her against Rio Olympic champion Carolina Marin of Spain. Satwik and Chirag regained their world no. 1 status after

sailing through in Bangkok without dropping a game but the duo is likely to be tested this week. The Indian pair have been in the form of their lives with four final appearances so far this season and they will look to continue the good run when they open against Denmark's Daniel Lundgaard and Mads Vestergaard in men's doubles competition.

In men's singles, Lakshya had sneaked into the Olympic qualification with two back-to-back semifinal finishes at French Open and All England Championships. The youngster is coming off a break and will face the tall task of taming world no. 1 Viktor Axelsen, who won the Malaysia Masters on Sunday. Eighth seed Prannoy, who is recovering from a health issues, had a forgettable outing in his last tournament when he was ousted by compatriot Meiraba Luwang Maisnam in the opening round of Thailand Open.

Prannoy, a world championships and Asian Games bronze medallist, will have to find his best footing when he opens against Belgium's Julien Carraggi. Among others in fray, Kidambi Srikanth will square off against Japan's fifth seed Kodai Narooka, while Priyanshu Rajawat will meet Hong Kong's Lee Cheuk Yiu in men's singles.

In women's singles, Aakarshi Kashyap will face Thailand's Pornpicha Choeikewong in the opening round. Olympic-bound Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto also will hope for a good outing as they take on Polina Buhrova and Yevhenia Kantemyr of Ukraine in their opener. Treasa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand will clash with Chinese Taipei's Cheng Yu-Pei and Sun Yu-Hsing.

# Xavi wins his last game as Barcelona coach in final round of Spanish league

AP ■ MADRID

Xavi Hernández ended his stint as Barcelona coach with a 2-1 win at Sevilla in the final round of the Spanish league.

Robert Lewandowski and Fermin López scored for Barcelona, which announced Friday it was parting ways with the former midfielder with a year left on his contract.

"We didn't want this to end, but these are decisions made by the club," Xavi said. "We didn't win titles but we were on the right track. But soccer is like this, the directors will make their decisions. The response by the players was wonderful."

Barcelona players bid farewell to Xavi after the match. "We will always wish Xavi the best," goalkeeper Marc-André ter Stegen said. "He's been a friend for many years and it's not easy to let him go ... He deserves the best."

lucrative Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia next season. It finished with four consecutive victories.

Youssef En-Nesyri scored for Sevilla, which ended 14th place after four straight losses. En-Nesyri's goal came in the 31st minute, after Lewandowski had put Barcelona ahead in the 15th. López netted the winner for the Catalan club in the 59th.

Xavi's departure came a month after he had walked back a previous decision he made in January to leave the club this summer. In April, he said that he had changed his mind because the team was playing better and he believed it could bounce back from a trophy-less season.

Barcelona president Joan Laporta had publicly celebrated Xavi's commitment to stay at that time. But last week the president was reportedly unhappy when the head coach spoke openly about how the club's poor finances would impede it from competing with fierce rival Real



Madrid. "Those who made the decision need to explain it," said the 44-year-old Xavi, who plans to take a break from

coaching. There was little to be decided in the league's final round on Sunday. Champion Madrid, focused on the

upcoming Champions League final against Borussia Dortmund at Wembley, drew 0-0 with Real Betis on Saturday.

Barcelona, Girona and Atletico Madrid were the other three teams that qualified for the Champions League next season, while Basque Country rivals Athletic Bilbao and Real Sociedad will play in the Europa League. Betis earned the Conference League berth.

The three relegated clubs were Cadiz, Almeria and Granada. In other results Sunday, Mallorca won 2-1 at Getafe, Celta Vigo drew 2-2 with Valencia, and Alaves drew 1-1 at Las Palmas.

Girona striker Artem Dovbyk ended as the league's top scorer this season with 24 goals, one more than Villarreal's Alexander Sorloth. Lewandowski and Madrid's Jude Bellingham were third with 19 goals. Madrid finished with the best attack with 87 goals scored, and the best defense with 26 goals conceded.

# Stan Wawrinka, who is 39, beats Andy Murray, who is 37, at French Open

AP ■ PARIS

After Stan Wawrinka ended Andy Murray's stay at the French Open yet again - and this time, it was perhaps Murray's last singles appearance at Roland Garros - the two long-time opponents, both in their late 30s, met at the net for a handshake, an embrace and a lengthy chat. Wawrinka, whose trademark one-handed backhand helped him put together a 6-4, 6-4, 6-2 victory in the first-round contest Sunday night, then joined fans in applauding for Murray as he headed toward the locker room.

"It was emotional, for sure. We're getting closer to the end," said Wawrinka, who has won 10 of their 23 meetings since the first in 2005. "We have a lot of respect for each other." Wawrinka, at 39, is just the third man of at least that age to win a match at the clay-court Grand Slam tournament since 1980. Murray just turned 37, and this contest had the second-oldest combined age for two men in Paris since 2000.

"Obviously disappointed. ... He gave me very few opportunities," said Murray, who was broken early in each set while going 0 for 2 on his break chances. "Physically, tennis is not easy for me nowadays." By the end, his movement was not what it usually is, even after having hip replacement surgery several years ago. Murray recently returned after tearing ankle ligaments at the Miami Open in March and is 1-3 since coming back. "My body isn't what it was 10 years ago. I'm fully aware of that," he said.



Theirs was by far the most eagerly anticipated match of Day 1 at the clay-court Grand Slam tournament, featuring a pair of guys who each own a trio of major trophies.

It was not quite on the level of the Day 2 showcase — Rafael Nadal vs. Alexander Zverev — but it earned the high-profile spot in the night session at Court Philippe Chatrier and drew a crowd that loudly cheered when they stepped out under the lights. Before play began Sunday, tournament director Amélie Mauresmo said she was putting off a planned farewell ceremony for Nadal, for most everyone figured would be competing at the French Open for the final time but said this weekend he didn't want to close the door on a return. Similarly, Mauresmo said there wouldn't be that sort of adieu to Murray, who has indicated he might retire after this summer. As it is, he is not done in Paris, because he and Dan Evans received a wild-card entry for doubles. This was his fourth

consecutive appearance at the French Open that included a match against Wawrinka, who is 6-1 head-to-head on clay. Wawrinka won their 2015 semifinal in Paris, Murray won a five-set semifinal the next year, and Wawrinka won their first-round contest in 2020. Murray missed the event in 2021-23. Both men drew gasps with hard-hit groundstrokes and both tossed in a bit of guile, too, including an early serve-and-volley from Wawrinka and a half-dozen drop shots from Murray in the second set alone.

Wawrinka, who has dealt with his own series of health issues over the years, goes on to meet No. 32 Cam Norrie or Pavel Kotov in the second round. Other major titles champions who won Sunday included Carlos Alcaraz, Naomi Osaka, Sofia Kenin and Jelena Ostapenko. But 2021 French Open champion Barbora Krejčíková lost 7-6 (3), 6-4 to Viktorija Golubic - making the 24th-seeded Krejčíková 0-3 in Paris since going 7-0 three years ago to take the title.

# Ancelotti has really difficult decision to make in goal for Madrid ahead of Champions League final

AP ■ MADRID

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti knows he will have a tough decision to make in goal for the Champions League final against Borussia Dortmund on Saturday.

Will he pick Andriy Lunin, who has played in goal nearly the entire season, or Thibaut Courtois, the veteran who has won the Champions League before but has just returned from injury? "It's really difficult," Ancelotti said Monday. "Of course it's really difficult, because both of them deserve to play this final. Lunin because he did a fantastic season, and Courtois because he is back from his injury and everyone knows the quality of Courtois. It's a difficult decision but I think I'm going to take into the game this decision, no doubt."

Lunin was nursing a fever and was the only Madrid player who didn't train on Monday as Madrid began its final week of preparations. But Ancelotti said the 25-year-old Ukrainian was expected to be



available for Saturday's final in London. The illness surely doesn't help Lunin's chances, though, and many had already expected Ancelotti to go with the more experienced Courtois despite his lack of minutes this season. Courtois ruptured a left-knee ligament in August, just two days before the start of the season. The 32-year-old Belgian then also ruptured the meniscus in his right knee in March, when he was close to making a comeback. He was sidelined until the beginning of this month, when he started in a 3-0 win

over Cadiz, a victory that secured Madrid's 36th Spanish league title.

Lunin was back in goal as Madrid beat Bayern Munich in the Champions League semifinals. He had saved two penalties in the decisive shootout win over Manchester City in the quarterfinals.

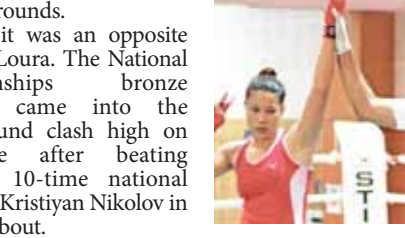
Lunin had earned the starting position over Kepa Arrizabalaga, the former Chelsea player who is Madrid's other reserve goalkeeper. Ancelotti said Lunin was the best goalkeeper in the world right now.

Courtois has proven experience in finals, though, having won the 2022 Champions League with Madrid, the FA Cup with Chelsea, the Europa League with Atletico Madrid, and two Copa del Rey titles (one for Madrid, one for Atletico), among several other titles. "Both deserve to play for various reasons," Ancelotti said. Ancelotti joked that he will wait as long as possible to announce the starting goalkeeper because otherwise the debate would be over, and "I like the debate."

# Boxing World Qualifiers: Boro wins opening round bout, Laura loses

PTI ■ BANGKOK

Former world youth champion Ankushita Boro defeated Namun Monkhor of Mongolia in 60kg category but Abhimanyu Laura lost against Ireland's Kelyn Cassidy in 80kg division in the second Boxing World qualifiers for Paris Olympics here on Monday. Boro started strongly against her young Mongolian opponent. She effectively blunted Monkhor's speedy movements by tactically shifting gears to carve out a 4-1 win after three keenly-



contested rounds. However, it was an opposite result for Laura. The National Championships bronze medallist came into the second-round clash high on confidence after beating Bulgaria's 10-time national champion Kristiyan Nikolov in a thrilling bout. But Cassidy was well prepared for the long reach of his opponent and went on to win 0-5 despite Laura giving his all in the final round. On Tuesday, Sachin Siwach (57kg), Abhinash Jamwal (63.5kg) and Nishant Dev

Jose Manuel Viafara Fory and Nishant Dev will be up against Otgonbaatar Byamba-Erdene of Mongolia.

India have already secured three quotas for the Paris Games. Nikhat Zareen (women's 50kg), Preeti (54kg) and Tokyo Olympics bronze medallist Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) have confirmed their Paris berths by winning bronze medals at the Hangzhou Asian Games last year. India fielded seven men and three women boxers in the second World Qualifiers and five of them received opening round byes.

# India name squad for women friendly matches against Uzbekistan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Monday announced a 23-member senior women's squad for the two international friendly matches against Uzbekistan to be played in Tashkent on May 31 and June 4.

Starting off with 30 probables, the Blue Tigresses trained at Sreenidi Deccan FC's home ground in Hyderabad for two weeks, before head coach Langam Chaoba Devi pruned down the squad to 23.

The Indian squad will travel to the Uzbek capital on Wednesday. Earlier this year, India had finished runners-up in the Turkish Women's Cup, behind Kosovo, in a quadrangular tournament that also featured Estonia and Hong Kong.

- INDIA WOMEN'S SQUAD:**  
**Goalkeepers:** Shreya Hooda, Maibam Linthoingambi Devi, Moirangthem Monalisha Devi.  
**Defenders:** Loitongbam Ashalata Devi, Sanju, Hemam Shilky Devi, Juli Kishan, Astam Oraon, Aruna Bag, Sorokhaibam Ranjana Chanu, Wangkhem Linthoingambi Devi.  
**Midfielders:** Karthika Angamuthu, Kaviya, Naorem Priyangka Devi, Neha, Sandhya Ranganathan, Sangita Basfore, Soumya Guguloth, Anju Tamang.  
**Forwards:** Kajol D'Souza, Karishma Shirvoikar, Pyari Xaxa, Serto Lynda Kom.



# FROM SETBACKS TO SUCCESS: SHREYAS IYER'S JOURNEY TO IPL VICTORY

**PTI ■ KOLKATA**  
When Shreyas Iyer recreated Lionel Messi's famous World Cup celebration after lifting the IPL Trophy as Kolkata Knight Riders captain in Chennai, it was nothing short of an Argentina moment for the embattled Indian cricketer at an individual level. His central contract torn up a few weeks before the IPL besides a recurring back injury threatening to derail him, Iyer faced numerous challenges at the start of the year. He finally found a deep sense of triumph and vindication in this victory, much like Messi did after exorcising the ghosts of losing the 2014 final and winning the trophy for his country after a 36-year wait. For the two-time IPL champions, the wait lasted 10 years as Iyer sang a redemption song following a topsy-turvy start to the year. Little wonder then that he chose to imitate the man who knows all about rising from setbacks. So, Iyer, with the trophy in his hands, took a playful walk towards his teammates, quite

similar to what Messi did after the final against France in Doha, and handed the big prize to them. "I am hearing a lot about Gautam Gambhir, who has created a magnificent culture in the KKR team. But this guy (Iyer), I don't think he is getting enough credit. Shreyas Iyer needs some credit," said the legendary Ian Bishop on Sunday as KKR defeated Sunrisers Hyderabad by eight wickets in a completely one-sided final to win their third IPL title. KKR may have got most of their runs from openers Sunil Narine and Phil Salt, but they played as a team and managed to come out winners in a dominant season, topping the table with two rounds to spare, and enduring just three losses in between. "It is hard to express how we are feeling right now. The wait was so long. We played like invincibles throughout the season. There is so much to cherish right now," said Iyer. It was a special feeling for his childhood and Mumbai coach Pravin Amre, who first tested his character by promoting Iyer to No.3 from No.7 in his



maiden Ranji season in 2014-15. Iyer returned with 153, his maiden first-class hundred in their match against Bengal at Eden Gardens in December 2014. "I challenged him in his entire

career (in Mumbai)...I knew how strong-willed he's and it was my job as a coach to challenge him. He always liked to take the challenge in a good stride. He is a good team man. In the last world cup, he scored 530 runs," Amre said.

"I always told him you just do whatever is in your hands, let the other people do their job, you just remain focus on what's in your hands," added Amre who first took him under his wings at the Shivaji Park Gymkhana.

By leading KKR into final, Iyer achieved the rare of feat of playing the summit clash as captain of two different franchises in the IPL. The KKR skipper missed the last season because of a back injury that required a surgery

in London last year. He made a comeback in the Asia Cup and went on to become India's third leading run-getter after Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma in the last year's ODI World Cup. The year didn't start well for him though as he had a difficult outing in the home Test series against England and looked patchy scoring 140 runs in the first two matches before being left out for the final three Tests. It was learnt that he developed the recurring back problem, even though he was cleared by the Board medical staff. Iyer then became the centre of a controversy when he missed the Ranji Trophy for his home state Mumbai and went on to attend KKR's pre-season camp. Iyer, however, returned to play for Mumbai in the semifinal and final against Vidarbha where he scored a resolute 95 in the second innings of their 42nd Ranji triumph. The Board omitted him from the Grade B contract and BCCI secretary Jay Shah issued a stern warning asking players not to prioritise IPL over domestic cricket.

Under intense scrutiny, Iyer looked rusty at the start of the IPL and got out for a two-ball duck in their opener against SRH. He had some significant contributions later on but his efforts were all overshadowed by Narine and Salt's explosive batting. **CAPTAIN COOL:** However, Iyer personified "Captain Cool" and held the team's cause ahead of his individual milestones. He went on to become the fourth leading run-getter for KKR this season with 351 runs and two fifties. His best came against the crucial first qualifier against SRH when he anchored their tricky chase of 160 with an unbeaten 58. "The way he handled the team as a player is commendable. More than that, he is improving as a leader and the experts in the game are also appreciating his leadership qualities," Amre said. "I personally believe success is not an accident he has worked hard for this, handling the team. Yes, he had a good team under him but bringing the best out of everyone is important," he added.

## Starc produced ball of the IPL, Narine best player for KKR: Hayden

**PTI ■ CHENNAI**  
Former Australia batter Matthew Hayden has termed Mitchell Starc's outstanding away-swing to Abhishek Sharma in the IPL final as the "ball of the IPL" while describing Sunil Narine as the "best player" for triumphant Kolkata Knight Riders. Shreyas Iyer's rampant KKR, who were unstoppable throughout the 17th edition of the IPL, crushed Sunrisers Hyderabad in the summit clash by eight wickets to add a third trophy to their cabinet on Sunday.



"The moment that ball bowled to Abhishek Sharma came out of Mitchell Starc's hands, it was game over. It was destined to be the best ball of the IPL - an absolute peach at a time when it was so important," Hayden told Star Sports Cricket Live. Former England batter Kevin Pietersen said Starc's ability to get his wrist position right towards the end of IPL and cranking up extra pace along with Narine's all-round ability bolstered KKR. "Mitchell Starc was averaging around 136-137 kmph during the majority of the season. But in the last two weeks he has gone above 140 kmph and that is his average. He is bowling fast," Pietersen said. "We never saw him swing the ball for the first seven, (or) maybe even eight weeks of this tournament. (But) in the last few weeks, he has got his wrist in a good place and started to swing the ball back," he added. Pietersen was lavish in praise of Narine, saying that the KKR veteran gave his critics a perfect reply. "I was one of the most vocal

critics at the start of the tournament saying I didn't like Sunil Narine at the top of the order, due to his inconsistency. He would typically hit a six and then get out, disrupting the momentum," Pietersen said. "However, this season he has been consistent. He has thought like a batter, batted like a batter and got the runs of a batter. He has averaged more than many batters and his strike rate has been phenomenal. He has played both sides of the wicket exceptionally well." "We don't need to say much about his bowling - he is an out-and-out superstar. His ability to change his action and still produce such impressive numbers is quite something. He is the heart and soul of this outfit," Pietersen said. Former India batter Ambati

**PTI ■ CHENNAI**  
After resisting the lure of lucrative private leagues for almost a decade because of his commitment towards the 'Baggy Green', Australian pacer Mitchell Starc has hinted that he might quit one format to make room for more franchise cricket in his schedule. While the 34-year-old didn't specify the format he intends to give up, it is likely to be ODIs considering that the next 50-over World Cup is in 2027. Starc, who was bought for a record 24.75 crore by Kolkata Knight Riders, was magnificent in the business end of the tournament. He ended up with 17 wickets, including five in the two knock-out games, to engineer a dominant title triumph for the Shah Rukh Khan-owned team. "To a query from PTI as to how he would take it up from here after his best year in franchise cricket, Starc hinted that T20s could gain prominence in his roster. "For the last nine years, I

## Starc hints at quitting one format to open doors for more franchise cricket

certainly prioritised Australian cricket. I have pulled out often to have a chance to give my body a break and spend some time away from cricket with my wife as well, so that's certainly been where my head has been for last nine years," Starc said after his match-winning 2/14 in the IPL final against Sunrisers Hyderabad. "Moving forward, I am certainly close to the end of my career than the start. One format may be dropped off as there is long time till next World Cup and whether that format drops off or not, that will open doors for a lot of franchise cricket," the 'King of Swing' said. He mentioned that this year's IPL will help him in preparing for the T20 World Cup in West Indies starting June 1. "...That's the other side of



benefit of being here, some amazing players in an amazing tournament and great lead up to WT20 and success has been fantastic. It is great that a lot of players are in good position heading into the World Cup," he said. He is hopeful of turning up for KKR even next year. "I don't know the schedule exactly but I have thoroughly

out tracks. "T20 is not as physically demanding as Test cricket and it's been warm, humid, so that plays a part but that's fine. It would be cooler there in the West Indies than here," he said when asked how his body is holding up after two months of IPL. "There's the Impact Player Rule here and that's not the case in the World Cup and after that you have to put a team that's more balanced and you rely more on all-rounders. You can't have your batting all-rounder coming in at No. 9, like they do in IPL. "I don't think the runs would be that much, I don't think 270 can be scored... Wickets may play a part as we have seen high-scoring matches here and wickets won't be same in West Indies.

## Australia facing player shortage for T20 World Cup Warm up games: Marsh

**PTI ■ MELBOURNE**  
Australia is facing shortage of players and might be forced to use support staff as substitute fielders in the warm-up games of next month's T20 World Cup due to the low turnaround time between the IPL and the global showpiece. Australia are set to play two warm-up games against Namibia on Wednesday and the West Indies on Friday in Trinidad but they might have as few as eight players available for the two matches since most of them will take a break following their stint in the IPL playoffs. "We're going to be undermanned. But it

is a practice game. The guys who need to play will play as much as they can and we'll figure it out from there," captain Mitchell Marsh, who himself is not certain to play against Namibia as he is recovering from a hamstring injury, told cricket.com.au. The IPL finals between Kolkata Knight Riders and Sunrisers Hyderabad concluded on Sunday night and three players — Travis Head, Pat Cummins and player of the match Mitchell Starc — were part of the two teams. Besides the trio, Cameron Green and Glenn Maxwell, who were part of the Royal Challengers Bengaluru, will only link up with the World Cup squad by the end of the week in Barbados, while

Marcus Stoinis, who played for Lucknow Super Giants, is expected to arrive in Trinidad only after the Namibia practice match. Travelling reserves Jake Fraser-McGurk and Matt Short too are set to join after

Australia's first match of the tournament proper which is against Oman on June 5. "It's important to be flexible. Guys who have been at the IPL have been playing a lot of cricket. We prioritised giving them a couple of days at home to see their families, refresh, and play the long game for this tournament," Marsh said. "We will get our 15 (all together) eventually, but really important that we give them a break, even if it's just a couple of days at home, that's really important." According to ICC rules, players taking to the field in the warm-up games must be from the country they are representing.

Travelling reserves Jake Fraser-McGurk and Matt Short too are set to join after



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## Can cricket make inroads in baseball loving America?

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Cricket, a popular pastime in the United States in the mid 1800s, makes a big-ticket return to North American shores through the T20 World Cup but will it be able to leave an impression on the local audience that knows little to nothing about the gentleman's game? Cricket globally is driven by India but the International Cricket Council sees huge potential in the American market and claims there are already 30 million fans that follow the game in the massive country. The T20 showpiece is also seen as a major stepping stone to the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, where cricket will make a comeback after 128 years when the big event kicks off on June 1. A total of 16 games will be played across three venues — New York, Dallas and Lauderhill — with a majority of 55 matches scheduled in the Caribbean including the knock-outs. Day three of the competition will have South Africa and Sri Lanka battling it out in New York, where the first ever international cricket game was held between USA and Canada back in 1844. It was a phase when the sport was played widely across America

before a much faster alternative in Baseball gained prominence during the Civil War in the 1860s. "...(T20) it's entertainment and that's what people look for. That's what Americans look for, you know, they want entertainment," says legendary West Indian Brian Lara, one of the most recognisable cricketers in the world but someone who admits that he could walk around Miami without getting a second look. "You know, you speak to an American and I've done that many times and they'd say 'you play a game for five days and then you end up in a draw? What's that all about?' So it's, it is difficult," he explains the challenge of selling Test cricket to an American, who might just warm up to the shortest format though. A couple of weeks of international cricket in an alien land will not be enough to evoke long-lasting interest from the local audience and to ensure the game grows beyond the South Asian and Caribbean expat community, the stakeholders will need more time. For a beginner, cricket can be rather complex to understand especially when one is introduced to "third man", "fine leg" or "deep mid-wicket", some of the terms used for the many field placements in the game.



The ICC is pulling out all stops to engage with the American audience, whether it is getting eight-time Olympic gold-winning sprinter Usain Bolt on board as

the World Cup ambassador or promoting the event at the recent Formula 1 race in Miami. To distract the average American household from the world of

baseball, NFL and NBA, cricket will need to grow at the grassroots level. "I surely think the game can grow in the USA. When you have

presence in a country people start gravitating towards it and want to know more about," Bolt, who belongs to the cricket-loving Caribbean, told PTI in a recent interview. The Americans have surely one reason to follow the event. Their team, mainly made up of players from South Asian and Caribbean heritage, will be making its World Cup debut. Venu Pisike, head of USA Cricket, reckons the ICC event will bring much-needed awareness around the game but eventually, it is the lure of taking part in the 2028 Olympics that will draw masses to the sport. "So far, cricket is predominantly an expats' game, but with the marketing and promotion activities during the World Cup, there is some momentum and the World Cup will definitely boost the opportunities to expand the game in the USA," said Pisike. "Definitely, the World Cup is bringing a lot of awareness and then the opportunity for cricket to be in the Olympics, that will definitely attract the community because the US is a huge sports country. "Olympics is the prime area where all the sports bodies are focusing on since cricket is going to Olympics, that will actually

give more opportunities to expand the sport between the World Cup and the Olympics," added Pisike. The USA squad picked for the tournament makes up for a bunch of semi-professionals who rely on full-time jobs to run their families. That will have to change if the sport is to appeal to a broader audience in America, believes India-born USA squad member Nisarg Patel. "Ultimately what needs to change in the USA is that an American kid in a high school needs to see a future in the game. There are so many sports in America, the country is built on Olympic medals. "For cricket to succeed, we need to show them there is a career out of playing cricket," said the spinner, who works full-time with a medical research company in Los Angeles. The start of Major League Cricket last year, the sport's first professional league in the country, was a big step in that direction. However, to capture the imagination of people in a country with an already crowded and developed sporting landscape, would be a gargantuan challenge for the ICC and other stakeholders.