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AGAINST MI
12 SPORTS



Pak wants Rahul as PM to weaken Govt: Modi



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

was there before 2014. But Modi's strong Government neither bows down nor does it stop," Modi said in a rally in Anand in Gujarat. The PM came down more and said unlike in the past when Congress was in power, the "tyres of Pakistan's terror have got punctured" now. "A country which used to export terror in the past, is now struggling to import 'atta' (flour). The hands which used to hold bombs are now holding 'bheekh ka katora' (begging bowl)," he said. People across the world are now saying that India is a global bright spot. India is seen as a 'vishwa bandhu' (global friend) who can resolve conflicts between two countries, Modi said.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ AHMEDABAD/NEW DELHI

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

linking Congress with Pakistan came a day after Chaudhry Fawad Hussain, a former Minister in Imran Khan's Cabinet in Pakistan, reportedly shared a video featuring Rahul on his social media handle and praised him. "Pakistan is crying because Congress is dying here. You all must have learnt that Pakistani leaders are now praying for Congress. Pakistan is eager to make 'shehzada' (referring to

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



Not at home in Amethi, RaGa may try Rae Bareilly

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the suspense over Congress nominees from Amethi and Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh, party sources indicated that Rahul Gandhi is likely to contest from the seat he lost last time and face sitting BJP MP and Union Minister Smriti Irani. With Friday being the last date of filing of nominations, the party is expected to announce its candidates from the two prestigious constituencies late at night. Sources said the party has started making preparations for the nomination filing in both the seats in Uttar Pradesh, which have been traditionally held by members of the Gandhi-Nehru family and revealed that the entire Gandhi family, including sitting MP of Rae Bareilly Sonia Gandhi and party chief Mallikarjun

Kharge, is scheduled to travel in Uttar Pradesh in a chartered plane. They added that Rahul is the most likely choice of the party for Amethi which he lost to Irani in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. Sources also said since Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has declined to contest from Rae Bareilly, a grandson of former Congress leader and Indira Gandhi's aunt Sheila Kaul may be fielded from Rae Bareilly, earlier represented by Sonia. Sonia has called it a day for electoral politics and has been elected as a member of Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan. People and loyals associated with the Gandhi family are already in Amethi and neighbouring Rae Bareilly and are believed to have prepared the nomination documents for both Rahul as well as Priyanka.

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

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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



The BJP gives a party ticket to Karan Bhushan Singh, the son of former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Singh

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

seats are going to polls in the fifth phase, on May 20. Karan Bhushan is the youngest son of Brij Bhushan. Born in 1990, Karan is presently the president of the Uttar Pradesh Wrestling Association. Previously, Karan was the senior vice president of the UP wrestling association. Karan Bhushan is a national-level double-trap shooter. He holds a law degree besides doing a business management course in Australia. He will be making his debut in electoral politics this time.

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

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

With its topmost leader and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal still in Tihar, the AAP has received yet another blow as the Women and Child Development (WCD) Department of the Delhi Government has terminated the services of 52 "illegally" appointed contractual employees of Delhi Commission for Women (DCW). Earlier, Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on April 29, issued an order to discontinue the services of 223 contractual employees from the DCW, calling their appointment illegal. The termination has been carried out on the basis of a report submitted by a committee way back in June, 2017. Earlier, an order issued on April 29 said that the WCD Department had terminated the services of 223 contractual staff, but the department on Thursday issued a statement saying it had directed for the termination of 52 such employees.

Clandestine 'dole surveys' make poll panel see red



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Afraid controversy over freebies promised by the political parties in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission (EC) took "serious view of activities by political parties and candidates seeking details of voters under the guise of various surveys for their proposed beneficiary schemes" and termed such activities as "corrupt practice of bribery under Section 123(1) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951". In an advisory issued to all national and State level parties, the commission has asked them to immediately cease any

activities "that involve registering individuals for post-election beneficiary-oriented schemes through any advertisements/ survey/App." The advisory came ahead of the third phase of the Lok Sabha Elections 2024, slated for May 7. The commission has directed all District Election Officers to take appropriate actions against any such advertisements within the statutory provisions. The commission noted that during the ongoing elections has come across instances where some political parties and candidates have been engaging in activities that blur the lines between legitimate surveys and partisan efforts to register

individuals for beneficiary-oriented schemes and individual benefits under the guise of conducting surveys or creating awareness about the existing schemes of the Government or creating awareness about the party manifesto regarding prospective individual benefit schemes etc. Highlighting the possible "quid-pro-quo arrangement", the commission said the act of inviting or calling upon voters to register for post-election benefits "may create an impression of the requirement of one-to-one transactional relationship between the elector and the proposed benefit". This also has the potential to generate quid-pro-quo arrangements for voting in a particular way thereby leading to inducement, the poll body added. It added that the potential of quid pro quo for voting and inducements amounts to bribery/corrupt practice. In this regard, the Election Commission directed all District Election Officers to take appropriate actions against any such advertisements within the statutory provisions namely Section 127A of the Representation of People's Act, 1951, 123 (1) of the Representation of People's Act, 1951, and Section 171 (B) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Start training cops for new criminal laws' rollout: Centre



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry has said the three new criminal laws, which will be rolled out across India from July 1, are a transition from the colonial legacies towards a system of justice based on the principle of access to justice by all, and has sought the help of all States to train the policemen for their effective implementation. In a communication to all the States and Union Territories (UTs), the Home Ministry also said many new provisions, synchronised with modern-day times and contemporary technologies, were incorporated in the new criminal laws and their aim is to bring an era of ease of policing and ease of

justice. The new laws are the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Act. The laws will replace the colonial-era Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872 respectively. The new laws aim at providing speedy justice to the citizens of the country and will strengthen the judicial and court management system. "The new laws are a transition from the colonial legacies towards a system of justice, based on the principle of access to justice by all... It is the endeavour of the government of India to reach out to all ranks of police and prison officers in the country and make them aware of the positive and advanced changes so as to equip them with the basic knowledge and understanding of various new provisions, which will help them in implementing the same in right earnest and with confidence," the Home Ministry said in its communication. To fulfil this objective, the Home Ministry said it has been striving to educate the police and prison officers about the new laws. The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) has developed the training of trainers' module and various other training programmes for different levels of police and prison personnel on the new criminal laws.

Biden brands India 'xenophobic' along with China, Japan

PTI ■ WASHINGTON



US President Joe Biden has called two of his QUAD partners — India and Japan — and two of his adversaries — Russia and China — "xenophobic" nations, asserting that none of these countries, unlike the United States, welcome immigrants. "This election is about freedom, America and democracy. That's why I badly need you. You know, one of the reasons why our economy is growing is because of you and many others. Why? Because we welcome immigrants," Biden told his supporters at a fundraiser here on Wednesday evening. "We look to — the reason — look, think about it. Why is China stalling so badly economically? Why is Japan having trouble? Why is Russia? Why is India? Because they're xenophobic. They don't want immigrants," Biden, the presumptive candidate of the Democratic Party, said. "Immigrants are what make us strong. Not a joke. That's not hyperbole, because we have an influx of workers who want to be here and want to contribute," the president said at the Democratic Party fundraiser. India and Japan are members of QUAD — a four-member strategic security dialogue that also includes the US and Australia. Biden hosted Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a State Visit last year while Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited the White House last month for an official visit.

Tiny feet waltz back to school with innocent confidence

ABHI SINGHAL/ADITI SHARMA/ SAMAR PANDEY/RISHABH MALIK ■ NEW DELHI

It was just another start of the day for the school going toddlers and young children on Thursday who a day earlier had been evacuated from their classrooms following a bomb scare across over 100 schools of the Delhi NCR. In the schools which resumed, children appeared to be more confident than their parents when they exchanged the routine 'tata; bye-bye' greetings. Several schools, however, decided to remain closed as part of security measures and a few of them observed a low attendance. The Pioneer reporters visited more than a dozen schools across the

national Capital and observed that students were back to school in their school buses, private vans or parents' pick drop facility. Principal of Kendriya Vidyalaya in Sadiq Nagar, Mamta Singh said, "Our attendance today has not dropped and students are also feeling safe and secure and it is our responsibility to ensure the security of the students". School management had assured parents on Wednesday itself that there is no need to worry. We didn't get anything on our official email ID," she added. The parents came to drop students off at school just like on a normal day without any fears. On Wednesday, 131 schools received bomb threats via email, which led to mass evacuation and panic in the schools of Delhi and Noida.



Photo: Samar Pandey/Pioneer

Ajit Singh, who came to drop his children at Sarvodaya Vidyalaya in Keshav Puram in north Delhi area said, "It is just like any other day, and he as a parent was not scared at all." He further added that this was only a way to create panic. Sadina Khatoun, a mother of two children, came to drop her

Hoax aimed at mass panic: FIR

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police Special Cell in its FIR registered revealed that the perpetrators of the hoax bomb threat letters received by nearly 200 Delhi schools wanted to "create mass panic and disturb public order. FIR states that the movement of these units to the schools "resulted in massive inconvenience," according to the source. The FIR has been registered at Special Cell Police Station under IPC sections 505 (2) (statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes),

507 (criminal intimidation by an anonymous communication), and 120 (B) (punishment of criminal conspiracy). According to police sources, the investigation will be done by the Counter Intelligence Team Special Cell. The IFSO unit is also trying to find out the origin from where the mail was sent, till now the connection to Russia (IP address) has been revealed as the domain of the email is "mail.ru". The investigating agency is also probing the angle of joint conspiracy between China and ISI to ascertain if there is a larger conspiracy at work in the matter.

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

AGM, ECR visits NTPC coal mining project

PNS : RANCHI

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



who welcomed them with planters. After that a brief meeting

took place at the siding premises, during which senior officials from NTPC provided a comprehensive overview of the RLS construction and yard augmentation work. Emphasizing the importance of meeting project deadlines, NTPC officials sought wholehearted support from the Railways for timely completion. Subsequently, the team toured the Banadag Siding Area, RLS area, and the under-construction railway yard, observing various operations including rake loading, boundary construction, RLS construction, earth filling, construction of Bridge 4, and track laying.

Dignitaries accompanying Tarun Prakash, AGM (ECR), included Manoj Singh, PCOM (ECR), Kamal Kishore Sinha, DRM (Dhanbad Div), Ramashray Pandey, CAO (Construction), and senior NTPC officials Faiz Taiyab (HOP PB-CMP), Sanjay Dubey (GM, Infrastructure), Amudala Prathap (AGM, Dispatch), and Basant Behera (AGM, Electrical Engineering). The visit concluded with lunch at the NTPC Transit Camp at Julu Park Hazaribagh. Before departing, AGM (ECR) and PCOM (ECR) commended the collaborative efforts of NTPC and Railways, affirming the Railway's commitment to fully support the timely completion of yard augmentation work.

Adani Power announces Q4 FY24 results

PNS : AHMEDABAD

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

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

affordable, and reliable power supply and serving it by building capacities in a timely and cost-effective manner." The operating performance for Q4 FY 2023-24 includes the 1600 MW Godda Ultra-supercritical Thermal Power Plant ("USCTPP") of APL's subsidiary Adani Power (Jharkhand) Limited (APJL), which was commissioned in Q1 FY 2023-24. During the fourth quarter as well as the Financial Year 2023-24, higher volumes were contributed by almost all plants led by Mundra, the newly commissioned Godda plant, Udupi, and Mahan. Domestic power sales volumes continued to be driven by growing power demand across India, and off-take under Power Purchase Agreements ("PPAs") was further supported by falling prices of imported coal and alternate fuel.

Manoj Bajpayee joins the Nand Ghar Movement

MUMBAI : Nand Ghar, a transformative initiative targeting 14 lakh anganwadis nationwide, launched the #KhaanaKhaayaKya movement with renowned actor Manoj Bajpayee. Aimed at nourishing India's future, the movement emphasizes holistic healthcare, quality nutrition, and preschool education for children. Chairman Anil Agarwal expressed gratitude for Bajpayee's support, citing his personal resonance with Nand Ghar's mission. Bajpayee shared his own journey, underlining the pivotal role of proper nutrition in pursuing dreams. Nand Ghar, spearheaded by Anil Agarwal Foundation, has made significant strides in combating child malnutrition, exemplified by the distribution of multi-millet nutri bars to 50,000 children daily. With the #KhaanaKhaayaKya movement gaining momentum,

Bokaro Steel Plant bids farewell to retiring employees

PNS : BOKARO

In a heartfelt ceremony held at the Main Auditorium of the Human Resource Development Department, Bokaro Steel Plant, retiring employees who bid adieu in April 2024 were honored. The event, graced by Chief Guest Harsh Nigam, Chief General Manager (Materials Management), commenced with a warm welcome by Assistant General Manager (Personnel) Dr. Nanda Priyadarshini. Dr. Priyadarshini provided insights into post-retirement benefits and presented each retiring employee's biodata. Harsh Nigam, in his address, congratulated the retiring employees for their dedicated service and wished them a fulfilling retired life. He also presented them with service certificates and tokens of appreciation. A total of 61 employees, comprising 6



executives and 55 non-executives, bid farewell in April 2024. The program was conducted under the guidance of Dr. Nanda Priyadarshini, Assistant General Manager (Personnel). Additionally, a separate farewell ceremony was organized for Ved Prakash Upadhyay, Chief General Manager (Refraactories), in the Director's Conference Hall. Executive Director C.R. Mahapatra, along with other dignitaries including Suresh Rangani (Executive Director - Finance & Accounts) and Rajan Prasad (Executive Director - Personnel & Administration and Additional Charge), graced the occasion. C.R. Mahapatra presented him with a memento as a token of remembrance. All attendees extended their best wishes to Ved Prakash Upadhyay for his future endeavours.

Skoda Auto India comes up with MY24 updates

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

Adani Enterprises Ltd announces Q4 and FY24 results

PNS : RANCHI

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

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

Maoists put off posters for poll boycott in Palamu

PNS : DALTONGANJ

Haidernagar police in Palamu today retrieved 3 hand written leaflets purported to be from the Maoists parroting to the same old tune of boycott election which the Maoists had launched first in 1995 then in Balumath police station limits which was a part of Palamu district then. SDPO Hussainabad Mukesh Kumar Mahto has confirmed the retrieval of the 3 hand written leaflets of the Maoists to boycott polls. He said the handwriting of the three looks quite identical to each other while 2 different pen strokes have been used. One such poll boycott stuff

was found pinned in the stem of the banana, added Mukesh Kumar Mahto. Two other hand written leaflets were found pasted on the government buildings. The locations of the hand written leaflets have been found at two areas Imamganj and Barewa under the Haidernagar police station limits in Palamu. The Maoists' poll boycott call hardly cuts any ice with the masses as the common voters have rejected it in the wholesale fashion for more than 29 years or so. This tokenism to boycott is more to suggest that Maoists are down, lesser in numbers but not out in Palamu.

Axis Nifty Bank Index Fund unveiled

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

Congress leader JP Dwivedi joins BJP with supporters



R SHARMA : BOKARO

In a significant political development, Jyoti Prakash Dwivedi, the District Vice President of the Congress Party and Secretary of the City Center Traders Association, along with his supporters, joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The event took place on at the residential office of MLA Biranchi Narayan in Bokaro. Inspired by the policies and principles of the BJP and the transformative work of

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Jyoti Prakash Dwivedi, along with prominent figures like MP candidate Dhullu Mahato, BJP District President Jaydev Rai, welcomed the new members into the party fold, presenting them with party insignia, clothing, and flowers. Among those who joined the BJP were Anit Singh Dangi, Nikesh Upadhyay, Binod Pandey, Monu Kumar, Prashant Dwivedi, Anish Kumar, Shankar Marandi, Madan Hansda, Anand Lal

Mahato, Sourav Rastogi, Bipin Agrawal, Umesh Singh, Ritesh Singh, Amar Kumar, Anand Soren, Sanjay Kumar, and many others. The event witnessed a large gathering, with notable personalities such as Mihir Singh, Shashi Bhushan Ojha, Mukul, Dilip Srivastava, Kamlesh Rai, Sanjay Tyagi, Birabhadra Prasad Singh, Anil Singh, Devendra Singh, Braj Dubey, Amar Swarnakar, Abhay Kumar Golu, among others, gracing the occasion.

Substantial increase in assets of MLA Dhulu Mahato in 5 years

PANKAJ : DHANBAD

There has been a substantial increase in the wealth of MLA Dhulu Mahato and his wife Savitri Devi in the last five years. This has been shown in the affidavit filed by him as a Lok Sabha candidate on Tuesday. According to the information given by the MLA in the affidavit, he has a total of movable and immovable assets worth Rs 3 crore 82 lakh 26 thousand 944, which includes land, vehicles, jewellery, bank deposits and fixed deposits, bonds and debentures, national savings certificates and others. This is approximately Rs 50 lakh more than the details given in the affidavit given in the 2019 MLA elections.

Whereas his wife Savitri Devi, as per the details given in the affidavit, is an employee of Bharat Coking Coal Limited (BCCL), has assets worth approximately Rs 65 lakh, 24 thousand, 867. Dhulu as karta of a Hindu undivided family has assets worth Rs 37 lakh, 24 thousand 305. He has also shown some assets in the name of his minor children. He has shown real estate in Dhanbad and Ranchi. The MLA and his wife have a total of six weapons. Both of them also have one pistol, one rifle and one gun each. All together three licenses issued in the name of the MLA's wife have been issued by the Ranchi district administration whereas three in the name of Dhulu.

The MLA and his wife also have 13 LIC policies, the total value of which is around Rs 37 lakh. Total 20 cases against MLA: According to the affidavit, a total of 20 cases are registered against the MLA in different police stations. He has said that he has been punished by the court in two cases and he has appealed against it in the High Court. Cases are registered under sections 307, 323, 378, 594, 120B, 507 and other sections of the IPC. According to the affidavit, the MLA is also a shareholder of Munden Ore Management Services Private Limited. This company is currently working on four contracts in BCCL and one in Indian Oil Limited.

Legal Awareness camp held in Garhwa

NITYANAND DUBEY : GARHWA

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



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

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

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

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

from the District Legal Services Authority, and the provision of compensation in case of accidents of laborers. LADC Advocate Sudhir Tiwari expressed his views on legal points. Institute Director Indu Bhushan talked in detail about the self-employment training of laborers. Secretary of Janak Vikas Dhara Ramashankar Choubey made the laborers aware through song. PLV Umashankar Dwivedi, Sangeeta Sinha were also present in this program. About 50 people attended the programme.

Tata Steel UISL promises water and electricity connections in underserved areas

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR:

Tata Steel Utilities and Infrastructure Services Limited (Tata Steel UISL), formerly known as Jusco, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Tata Steel, has unveiled plans for an extensive expansion of its services in Jamshepur. Managing Director Ritu Raj Sinha revealed this information during a press conference held on Tuesday, outlining the company's commitment to providing water and electricity connections to areas currently lacking such essential amenities. In a bid to address the pressing need for water infrastructure, Tata Steel UISL is set to extend water connections to various localities in both East and West Jamshepur. Sinha specified

that areas such as Jemco Azad Basti, Jemco Basti, Laxmi Nagar, Namda Basti, Maha Nand Basti, Harijan Basti, and Cable Town in Jamshepur East will receive water connections. Similarly, in Jamshepur West, Shiva Nagar, Kapali Basti, Balram Basti, Kanhu Basti Jon, and Ramjanam Nagar are slated to benefit from this initiative. Despite distributing a total of 3,266 forms for water connections in East Jamshepur and 2,916 forms in West Jamshepur, the response has been relatively low, with only 1,595 and 1,320 forms filled and submitted, respectively. However, Tata Steel UISL has managed to provide 1,301 water connections in East Jamshepur and 965 in West Jamshepur, with plans to fulfill the remaining

demand as it arises. Tata Steel UISL is also actively working towards providing electricity connections in various areas. While efforts are being made to collaborate with JBVNL for supplying electricity in government electricity areas, challenges remain in achieving this objective. Additionally, the company is focusing on enhancing cleanliness in several parts of Jamshepur, with a special emphasis on reaching underserved areas that have been neglected in the past. Tata Steel UISL's expansion of services reflects its commitment to improving the quality of life for residents of Jamshepur. By addressing the critical need for water and electricity connections in underserved areas and prior-

itizing cleanliness initiatives, the company aims to contribute positively to the development and well-being of the community. Meanwhile the company also inaugurated the 500 KLD Sewage Pumping Stations in Bistupur today, marking a significant leap forward in urban infrastructure development. The ceremony, led by Capt. Dhananjay Mishra, Senior General Manager of Town Operations & Maintenance and Real Estate, showcased the commitment of Tata Steel UISL to enhance community well-being and environmental sustainability. The inauguration ceremony, graced by esteemed dignitaries, witnessed Capt. Dhananjay Mishra leading the ceremony in the presence of Mr. Chanakya

Chaudhary, Chairman, Tata Steel UISL, Mr. Ritu Raj Sinha, Managing Director, Tata Steel UISL and Mr. Pranay Sinha, Chief, Corporate Services, Tata Steel. Their collective vision and dedication symbolize a collaborative effort towards addressing environmental challenges and enhancing community welfare. The newly inaugurated 500 KLD Sewage Pumping Stations signify a substantial leap forward in sewage management capabilities, reflecting a blend of innovation and efficiency. Designed to accommodate 500,000 liters per day, these stations epitomize technological excellence and operational reliability, ensuring optimal performance in wastewater handling.

Sameer Oraon inaugurates BJP election office



PNS : LOHARDAGA

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

Yadav, Sanjay Yadav, Kuldeep Yadav, Aneshwar Munda, Mahendra Singh, Umesh Yadav, Jaggu Turi, Nandkishore Pandit, Siva Yadav etc. were mainly present. After the inauguration of the office, the workers expressed happiness by feeding each other sweets and under the leadership of Block President Bharat Kisan, BJP workers and villagers raised more than 400 slogans this time. While addressing the workers and villagers present on this occasion, Sameer Oraon said that PM Modi has given guarantees for the all-

round development of the country and making India a world leader. BJP will achieve historic victory in Lohardaga Lok Sabha constituency. All workers should work at the grassroots level to get votes for the Bharatiya Janata Party. We will win the elections on the basis of the hard work of the workers, booth presidents and chiefs. Addressing the villagers, Shri Oraon said that this time I have got the opportunity to serve you all. I am very fortunate and with the blessings of all of you, I will complete all the work after winning the election.

BJP displays show of strength in Sanjay Seth's nomination
Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhama, LoP Bauri, AJSU chief Sudesh participates in rally

PNS : RANCHI

Sanjay Seth, BJP candidate for the Ranchi Lok Sabha constituency in the upcoming 2024 general elections, filed his nomination with the backing of Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama.

Accompanied by CM Dhama during the nomination filing process, Seth expressed confidence in securing victory for the BJP in Ranchi. CM Dhama, in turn, voiced his optimism about the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) winning all 14 seats in Jharkhand.

Dhama said that those who worked to govern the country after independence never researched tribal society. Prime Minister Narendra Modi worried about the development of every deprived section of the country. Jharkhand and Uttarakhand were formed at the same time. It is a matter of equality for us. The circumstances of both the states are also similar. Atal



Ranchi MP and BJP candidate Sanjay Seth, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama and others during a road show after filing his nomination papers in Ranchi on Thursday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

Bihari Vajpayee had created both these states. Droupadi Murmu, born in a tribal society, is today the first woman tribal President of the country. Earlier, people of a partic-

ular category were nominated. Tribal and deprived people of the society are getting opportunities today. This is possible only during the tenure of Bharatiya Janata

Party, NDA and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"The entire nation is eager to see Narendra Modi become Prime Minister for the third time. In Jharkhand, the over-

whelming support is evident, and people are enthusiastic. The NDA is poised to claim victory in all 14 seats in Jharkhand. Sanjay Seth ji's campaign will set new records, securing Ranchi's support to represent them in Parliament," CM Dhama remarked.

Highlighting the development initiatives under PM Modi's leadership, CM Dhama emphasized the government's efforts towards societal upliftment, particularly in integrating tribal communities into the mainstream. He expressed confidence in the people of Jharkhand contributing significantly to achieving the "Abki Baar 400 Paar" resolution in the Lok Sabha elections.

Dhama said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had taken a pledge to develop India by visiting Ulihatu, the birthplace of Lord Birsa Munda, paying obeisance to him and applying Tilak on this soil. Plans are being made keeping the people of tribal



Ranchi MP and BJP candidate Sanjay Seth files his nomination papers in presence of Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama and AJSU party Chief Sudesh Kumar Mahto for Lok Sabha election in Ranchi on Thursday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

and deprived communities at the center. Earlier schemes were made only for a few people. Today, under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, India's name is being celebrated across the world. Respect is increasing all over the world. India is now in strong hands, not in forced hands.

Polling for Ranchi is scheduled for May 25, part of the multi-phase elections in Jharkhand spanning May 13, 20, 25, and June 1. In the previous 2019 elections, the BJP-led NDA secured 12 seats in Jharkhand, with the BJP winning 11 seats. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and Congress each claimed one

seat.

Leader of Opposition Amar Kumar Bauri said that Jharkhand, Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh were created at the same time and the full credit for this goes to respected Atal Bihari Vajpayee ji who resolved the long pending issue of separate state for the common people on the basis of region, culture, language etc.

AJSU Party chief Sudesh Mahato said that every NDA worker is engaged to fulfill the target given by PM Modi for this state. This time Ranchi will give better results than last time, we all are preparing for it together. This election is to select the Prime Minister of the country. On one hand, there is a Prime Minister who has been engaged in the development of the country for the last 10 years, on the other hand, there is an alliance which has changed its name, but has not been able to decide till date who will be the leader in front of Modi ji.

State BJP gears up for 10 km road show of PM Modi



Senior police officials hold a meeting with security personnel in view of Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits in Ranchi on Thursday. PNS

ROSHAN KUMAR : RANCHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will embark on mega rallies in Jharkhand ahead of May 13 elections on three parliamentary seats from May 3 onwards. As per his itinerary, the PM will hold a rally in Chaibasa on May 3 afternoon for Singhbhum seat while he will address two rallies in Palamu and Lohardaga on May 4.

In between these three rallies, the Prime Minister is all likely to hold a 10 km road show from Birsa Munda International Airport to Raj Bhawan seeking support and votes for BJP candidate and sitting MP Sanjay Seth—who filed his nomination for Ranchi Lok Sabha seat today.

Within six months, this will be Modi's second road show in State Capital. The last time he held the road show was in November much before the election dates were announced. It is all likely that Prime Minister Narendra Modi might hold a road show in Ranchi on the evening of May 3. On May 3, the Prime Minister will return to Ranchi after the public meeting in support of BJP candidate Geeta Koda in Chaibasa.

While returning from Chaibasa to Raj Bhawan, a road show is being planned in support of BJP candidate Sanjay Seth from Airport to Ratu Road. State BJP is giving the final shape to the plan of the Prime Minister's program.

On May 4, the Prime Minister will attend a public meeting organized at Chianki from Airport in Palamu and address a meeting for BJP candidate Sameer Oraon from Lohardaga in Sisai, Gumla. After returning from

Sisai, the Prime Minister will leave for Delhi from Ranchi Airport. However, the state government has not yet received official information about the Prime Minister's program. The November last year road show was a big hit as thousands of people lined up on both sides of the stretch to greet PM Modi. The two day visit of PM Modi assumes importance as Prime Minister Narendra Modi will blow the poll bugle in Jharkhand from Chaibasa on May 3.

The PM on his two day visit will cover all four Lok Sabha seats will go to poll on phase four. The four seats which goes to poll on May 13 are, Lohardaga, Chaibasa, Khunti and Palamu. From Chaibasa the party has given ticket to former Congress MP Geeta Koda.

Ahead of the Lok Sabha election, the Congress has got a big jolt as its lone MP in Jharkhand Geeta Koda on February 26 joined Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Ranchi. Koda, wife of former Chief Minister of Jharkhand Madhu Koda, won the 2019 Lok Sabha seat from Chaibasa by defeating the BJP candidate Lakshman Giluwa. She joined the party in the presence of Jharkhand BJP State president Babul Marandi and Leader of Opposition in Jharkhand Assembly Amar Kumar Bauri. The JMM has fielded Joba Manjhi from the seat. From Lohardaga the party has given ticket to BJP former Rajya Sabha MP Samir Oroan, while from Khunti the party has given ticket to union agriculture minister Arjun Munda. From Palamu the party has reposed faith on sitting MP VD Ram.

Goods, cash worth Rs 72.37 Cr sized in State since MCC imposition
41 cases registered against breach of model code of conduct

PNS : RANCHI

Chief Electoral Officer K Ravi Kumar has said that since the implementation of the Model Code of Conduct, goods and cash worth Rs 72 crore 37 lakh have been seized in Jharkhand so far. In response to a question, he said that the Model Code of Conduct is not a hindrance in the distribution of study material in government and government-recognized schools, provided the study material does not have the picture of any political person.

He said that for the smooth study of children in government schools, the Election Commission of India has directed that there is no obstacle in the purchase of text books, notebooks, school bags, establishment of computer labs, purchase of tabs by the Education Department and tendering for its distribution. He was speaking at a press conference at Nirvachan Sadan, Dhurwa on Thursday.

Kumar said that till now 41 cases of violation of model code of conduct have been registered in Jharkhand. In this, maximum 6 cases each have been registered in Palamu, Hazaribagh and Ranchi. Five cases have been registered in Dhanbad, four in Seraikela Kharsawan, three each in Garhwa and Giridih, two in



CEO K Ravi Kumar addresses media persons at his office in Ranchi on Thursday. PNS

Simdega and one each in Sahebganj and Khunti. The Chief Electoral Officer was talking to the media in Dhurwa.

He said that so far 25 nomination papers have been filed for the fifth phase of elections. Among them, 12 nominations have been filed from Chatra Lok Sabha constituency, 7 from Koderma and 6 from Hazaribagh. So far 3 nomination papers have been filed for the Gandey Assembly by-election.

So far 14 nominations have been made for the sixth phase of elections. Among them, 3 people have filed nomination papers from Giridih Lok Sabha constituency, 5 from Dhanbad, 2 from

Ranchi and 4 for Jamshepur Lok Sabha constituency.

Kumar said that children from schools and colleges participated enthusiastically in the SVEEP program to make the voters understand the importance of voting. "They are playing an important role in the elections as our future and first time voters. Many sweep related activities are being conducted by children in schools and colleges. These children have spread awareness among their parents and nearby voters through many interesting and entertaining activities like quiz competition, poster making, slogan, letter writing and others," he added.

The Chief Electoral Officer said that so far seven candidates have filed nomination papers in the Gandey Assembly by-election. At the same time, a total of 42 candidates have filed nomination papers so far for the Lok Sabha election phase 5. Among them, 20 candidates from Chatra Lok Sabha constituency, 11 from Koderma and 11 from Hazaribagh have filed nomination papers. A total of 26 nomination papers have been filed so far for Lok Sabha election phase 6. Among them, 5 nomination papers have been filed from Giridih Lok Sabha constituency, 8 from Dhanbad, 6 from Ranchi and 7 from Jamshepur.

Maximum Temperature crosses 45 degrees in State

PNS : RANCHI

The heat wave is increasing rapidly in Jharkhand. The month of May has started and now the maximum temperature has crossed 45 degrees Celsius in the State on Thursday. Temperatures in many districts have exceeded 40 degrees in the State.

As per the information provided by Ranchi Indian Meteorological Center, there is no possibility of any change in the maximum temperature in the State in the next 24 hours. After this, it may drop by 2 to 3 degrees in the next 2 to 3 days. Generally, after the beginning of the day, people are eager to know about the



Girls use scarves to protect themselves from scorching sun on a hot afternoon in Ranchi on Thursday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

temperature of their district. They want to know what the temperature was at his place this morning. After this they generally assess the heat and cold throughout the day. The Center also informed that, the maximum temperature in the State has crossed 45 degrees Celsius at 10 am on Thursday. The highest temperature was recorded in Seraikela. The maximum temperature recorded here was 45.4 degrees Celsius.

According to the weather center, the maximum temperature of many districts including Jamshepur, Daltenganj, Bokaro, Chaibasa, Deoghar, Garhwa, Godda, Jamtara, Pakur, Palamu, Seraikela, West Singhbhum was recorded more than 41 degrees Celsius in the State.



State BJP President Babul Marandi, Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya, BJP candidate Annapurna Devi being garlanded by party workers during an election campaign in Giridih on Thursday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

#MainBhiElectionAmbassador social media campaign on May 7

PNS : RANCHI

Lok Sabha elections 2024 are being celebrated as the grand festival of democracy. Awareness campaigns are also going on at various levels regarding this. Everyone has equal rights in elections, we all have to contribute to it and also inspire people around us towards it. With the aim of increasing voter participation in the Lok Sabha elections 2024, all the school/college children of the state, influencers, celebrities and everyone must participate in the #MainBhiElectionAmbassador social media campaign from 6 pm to 8 pm on May 7.

Meanwhile, every citizen must upload digital content of their work on social media to make voters aware about voting and celebrate the grand festival of elections in an enthusiastic manner, said Chief Electoral Officer, Jharkhand, K. Ravi Kumar in a meeting held at the Election House through Google Meet with the principals of all CBSE and ICSE schools of the state.

He said that the children of schools and colleges participated enthusiastically in the SVEEP program to tell the importance of voting among the voters. They are playing an important role in the elections as our future and first



time voters. Many activities related to SVEEP are being conducted by children in schools and colleges. These children have worked to spread awareness among

their parents and nearby voters through many interesting and entertaining activities like quiz competition, poster making, slogan, letter writing etc. He said that in the social

media campaign to be held on May 7, the school management should upload the digital content of all these activities on their social media handles with the hashtag #MainBhiElectionAmbassador. Also, tag the social media accounts of the Chief Electoral Officer Jharkhand and the Election Commission of India.

Chief Electoral Officer K. Ravi Kumar said that it is the priority of the Election Commission to motivate voters to participate in the voting by telling them the importance of elections. Along with this, making voters aware of ethical voting is also an important task. By connecting

school children with programs like 'Main Bhi Election Ambassador', we will be able to prepare them as an aware voter of democracy. Along with this, we will also be able to ensure their participation in future elections.

In the meeting held through online medium, Additional Chief Electoral Officer Dr. Neha Arora, Joint Chief Electoral Officer Subodh Kumar, Assistant Chief Electoral Officer Dev Das Dutta, Deputy Electoral Officer Sanjay Kumar from Election House along with the Principals of all CBSE and ICSE schools of the state were present.

Salima Tete becomes Women Hockey India team Captain

PNS : RANCHI



Hockey India on Thursday announced the 24-member Indian Women's Hockey Team that will participate in the Belgium and England legs of the FIH Pro League 2023-24. Hockey India announced Salima Tete will lead Indian Women Hockey Team as Captain. The Belgium leg will begin on May 22 and end on May 26 while the England leg will commence on June 1 and conclude on June 9.

India will play against Argentina, Belgium, Spain, Great Britain and Germany twice each across both legs, beginning their campaign against Argentina on 22nd May. India are currently placed at 6th position, having eight points from eight matches. Taking charge of the team will be Captain Tete, who was recently honoured with the prestigious Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr. Award for Player of The Year 2023 in the Women's category at the 6th Hockey India Annual Awards 2023. Meanwhile, midfielder Navneet Kaur has been named her deputy.

The goalkeeping responsibilities will rest with Savita and Bichu Devi Kharibam, while the defensive line-up includes Nikki Pradhan, Udita, Ishika Chaudhary, Monika, Jyoti Chhatrari and Mahima Chaudhary.

The midfield section will be marshalled by dynamic players such as Salima Tete, Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Navneet Kaur, Neha, Jyoti, Baljeet Kaur, Manisha Chauhan and Lalremsiami. The forward line boasts of Mumtaz Khan, Sangita Kumari, Deepika, Sharmila

ILCC organizes extempore competition



The International Library & Cultural Centre conducted an Inter School Extempore Competition for Classes 9-12 on Wednesday. Each school was invited to send two entries each. The library received 26 entries from 15 schools. Topics ranged from waste management, cycling as the best mode of transport, healthy food habits, time management, corporal punishment, right to franchise, corporate social responsibility and addition to freedom of expression and status of women. The program was conducted by Cultural Secretary of ILCC Rekha Mishra & Librarian Nivedita Sharma. The Judges were Dr. Manisha Budhia, Prakriti Jerath & Vandana Sahu Cultural Committee member Smita Khemka was also present. Darshit Pandit (Delhi Public School, Ranchi) bagged the first prize, while Ishanvi Mathur (Sharda Global School) and Bhavya Singh (St. Francis School) bagged the second and third prizes respectively.

DPS Ranchi students Shine in ISSO 2023-24

DPS Ranchi students clinched top spots in the International Social Studies Olympiad 2023-24. Leading the pack, Neel Goswami of Class V emerged as the global frontrunner, securing International Rank 01 and claiming the coveted Cash Prize of Rs. 25,000, showcasing unparalleled academic prowess at a young age. Neel will be felicitated by Science Olympiad Foundation (SOF) at Delhi on 02nd June 2024. Adding to the glory, Ameya Devarshi (Class VI) showcased exceptional talent, clinching a notable cash prize of Rs. 5,000. Advaita A (Class III) and Saket Singh (Class III) also demonstrated commendable performance, bagging cash prizes of Rs. 2,500 and Rs. 1,000 respectively. Moreover, 11 other students from DPS Ranchi showcased their proficiency by securing cash prizes of Rs. 500 each, underscoring the school's collective commitment to excellence.



India slams US body religious freedom report

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Thursday slammed the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and said it continues to publish its propaganda on the country "masquerading" as part of an annual report. In a sharp reaction to the USCIRF's latest report that has criticised India for alleged violations of religious freedom, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the organisation is known to be a "biased" entity with a political agenda. "The US Commission on International Religious Freedom is known as a biased organisation with a political agenda. They continue to publish their propaganda on India masquerading as part of an annual report," Jaiswal said. "We really have no expectation that the USCIRF will even



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

severe violations of the right to freedom of religion or belief". The USCIRF report alleged that the government imposed "discriminatory nationalistic policies," "perpetuated hateful rhetoric" and "failed to address communal violence" among minority communities. The report also cited various instances, including Manipur violence, Haryana violence, and several Kashmiri leaders and separatists being detained when the Supreme Court, last year, upheld the government's 2019 decision to scrap Article 370 that granted special status to the then state of Jammu and Kashmir.

India protests against China's illegal construction in Shaksgam Valley

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

No political clearance sought or issued: MEA on Prajwal trip

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



Amid an escalating political row over alleged sexual harassment of several women by JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna who is not in the country, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Thursday said Revanna travelled to Germany on a diplomatic passport and he did not seek political clearance for the trip. On Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's demand for revocation of Revanna's diplomatic passport, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said such action can be taken only on the directions of a court. Revanna, the grandson of former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, is said to have left India on April 27, a day after voting for the Lok Sabha elections took place in his Hassan constituency. The Janata Dal (Secular) has already suspended the Hassan MP from the party. "No political clearance was either sought

from or issued by MEA in respect of the travel of the said MP to Germany," Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing while replying to a volley of questions on the MP's reported travel to Germany. "Obviously, no visa note was issued either. No visa is required for diplomatic passport holders to travel to Germany. The Ministry has not issued visa note for any other country," the MEA spokesperson said. On Wednesday, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah urged the prime minister to take swift action to cancel the diplomatic passport of Revanna

that the JD(S) leader used to travel abroad. Asked about whether the MEA may consider revocation of his passport in view of the allegations of sexual harassment against him, Jaiswal did not give a direct reply. "As regards the possible revocation of the passport of any individual, I would refer you to the relevant provisions of the Passport Act 1967. A direction should come from a court for revocation of passport. We are not in receipt of any directions from any court in this regard," he said. Jaiswal said Revanna travelled to Germany on a diplomatic passport and that he did not seek any political clearance for the trip. The MEA spokesperson noted that parliamentarians are entitled to have diplomatic passports. "The matter is being investigated and we will be doing whatever is needed to be done," he said in reply to another question.

India, Indonesia to review bilateral defence ties during meet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Indonesia will review the entire spectrum of their bilateral defence ties here on Friday during the seventh Joint Defence Cooperation Committee (JDCC) meeting, Defence Ministry said here on Thursday. Giving details, officials said the meeting will be co-chaired by Defence Secretary Girdhar Aramane and Secretary General of Ministry of Defence, Indonesia Air Marshal (Retired) Donny Ermawan Taufanto. Both sides will exchange views on regional and global issues of shared interest. The India-Indonesia friendship, which was elevated to



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

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

diversified to include wide-ranging contacts between the services, military-to-military exchanges, high-level visits, capacity building and training programmes, cooperation in UN Peace Keeping, ship visits and bilateral exercises. The defence cooperation agreement signed in 2001 between India and Indonesia stipulated the establishment of the JDCC to explore and identify potential areas of cooperation, matters of common interest, initiate, coordinate, monitor and control the approved cooperative activities. The Secretary General, who is on a visit to India from May 02-04, will also undertake discussions with Indian defence industries in New Delhi and Pune.

Admiral Swaminathan takes charge as Navy Vice Chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Vice Admiral Krishna Swaminathan on Wednesday assumed charge as Vice Chief of Navy here. He was commissioned into the Indian Navy in July 1987 and is a specialist in Communication and Electronic Warfare, navy said here. He is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Khadakvasla; the Joint Services Command and Staff College, Shrivenham, United Kingdom; the College of Naval Warfare, Karanja; and the United States Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, USA. Swaminathan's educational qualifications include a BSc degree from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; MSc in



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

Marshal Hardeep Bains on Wednesday assumed charge as 36th Commandant of the prestigious National Defence College here. He took over from Lt General S S Dahiya. Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor assumed the appointment of Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief (AOC-in-C) Training

Command (TC) on Monday. Air Marshal N Kapoor was commissioned into the Fighter stream of the Indian Air Force on 06 December 1986. He is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Defence Services Staff College and National Defence College. A Qualified Flying Instructor and a Fighter Combat Leader, he has more than 3400 hours of flying experience. During his illustrious career, the Air Marshal has held numerous field and staff appointments. His operational tenures include being the Commanding Officer of a fighter squadron in the Central Sector, Station Commander of a flying base in the Western Sector and Air Officer Commanding of a premier air base.

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



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

While men face a higher risk of premature death, women tend to spend more of their lifetime grappling with poor health, according to a recent global study published in Lancet Public Health. The findings, drawn from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021, highlight stark differences in the distribution of illness and premature mortality between genders over the past three decades, shedding light on the diverse and evolving health needs of men and women across the globe. Researchers analyzed data spanning from 1990 to 2021, examining the prevalence of various health conditions and events leading to premature death. Key findings reveal that musculoskeletal conditions, mental health issues, and headache disorders, though non-fatal, are more prevalent among women, leading to prolonged periods of ill health. This is compounded by women's longer life expectancy, resulting in higher levels of illness and disability throughout their lives. Furthermore, the study highlights specific conditions like ischaemic heart disease, lung cancer, and chronic kidney disease, where sex differences impact men at younger ages and exacerbate over time. Covid-19, the dominant health

concern in 2021, affected significantly more men than women, further emphasizing the importance of understanding and addressing these disparities. The study revealed that men lost 45 percent more life years from Covid-19 compared to women. This disparity underscores the need for targeted interventions to address the specific health challenges faced by each gender. One notable finding was the wide gap in health loss related to low back pain, which disproportionately disadvantaged women, particularly in regions such as South Asia and Central Europe. The research highlighted that these health differences manifest from adolescence and persist throughout life, with women experiencing higher levels of illness and disability due to their longer life expectancy. The authors emphasized the importance of implementing "concerted, sex- and gender-informed strategies" to promote equitable health outcomes. They called for enhanced reporting of sex and gender data to inform policy decisions and improve health interventions. Senior author Luisa Sorio Flor of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington stressed the timeliness of the study, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic's profound impact on health outcomes.

Every Indian is votebank of Congress, claims Kharge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday said when the elections are over, people will only remember him as the PM who indulged in "divisive and communal speeches filled with lies" to avoid an inevitable defeat. Noting that the PM in his letter to NDA candidates had claimed that reservation will be taken away from SC, ST and OBC and given to the Congress "votebank", Kharge said, "Our votebank is every Indian — the poor, the marginalised, the women, the aspirational youth, the labour class, the Dalits and the Adivasis." In a letter to the prime minister, Kharge urged Modi to seek votes on the performance of his government over the last ten years instead of indulging in "hate speeches". The Congress president's remarks comes days after Modi levelled various charges against his party in his letter to NDA candidates after the second phase of the Lok Sabha polls. Prime Minister Modi asked the BJP-led NDA candidates in



the Lok Sabha polls to spread awareness among voters about the Congress's intention to snatch "reservation from SC, ST and OBC communities and give it away to their vote bank". In a personal letter written to them, Modi also accused the Congress and its allies of having divisive and discriminatory motives, even though reservation on the basis of religion is unconstitutional. "I saw the letter written by you to all the NDA candidates about what they need to communicate to the voters. From the tone and content of the letter it seems that there is a lot of desperation and worry in you which is leading you to use language that does not suit the

office of the prime minister," Kharge said in the letter. Kharge claimed the prime minister was not interested in talking about the ever widening inequality, unemployment and unprecedented price rise. "You are not interested in talking about the increasing atrocities on women by your leaders," he said in his letter to Modi. "It is better as the prime minister if you seek votes on the performance of your government over the last ten years instead of indulging in hate speeches. The Congress Party would like to challenge you or anyone you depute to debate with us on our manifesto and the points you have made," he said.

Rahul accuses Modi Government of snatching quota from Dalits, tribals

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday accused the Modi Government of "clandestinely snatching away" reservation from Dalits, tribals and backward classes by "blindly" implementing privatisation, and said his party guarantees strengthening the public sector enterprises and open the doors for employment. In a post in Hindi on X, Rahul Gandhi said the mantra of Narendra Modi's campaign to remove reservation is -- 'na rahega baans, na bajegi bansuri', meaning neither there will be government jobs nor any reservation will be available. "The BJP government is clandestinely snatching away reservation from Dalits, tribals and backward classes by eliminating government jobs through 'blind privatisation'," the former Congress chief said. In 2013, there were 14 lakh permanent posts in the public sector, which by 2023 stood at 8.4 lakh, he said. "By ruining top PSU's like BSNL, SAIL, BHEL etc., nearly 6 lakh permanent jobs



were eliminated from the public sector alone — these are the very posts which would have given the benefit of reservation," Rahul Gandhi said. There is no count of the jobs that are being eliminated through the back door in institutions such as railways by giving government work on contract, he claimed. "The 'privatisation' of the

Modi model is a plunder of the country's resources, through which the reservation of the deprived is being snatched away," he alleged. The Congress guarantees that it will strengthen the public sector enterprises and open the doors for employment for every section of the society by filling 30 lakh vacant government posts, Rahul Gandhi said.

Women sarpanchs set to shine on global stage at UN

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

Rajasthan also known as 'Hockey wali Sarpanchi' is armed with a Master's in Mathematics and Education and spearheads initiatives for girls' education and environmental conservation. These three extraordinary women leaders, each blending their qualifications with unwavering dedication to community betterment, are set to shine on the global stage on May 3, 2024 at an event at the UN Headquarters in New York, showcasing their pivotal role in driving gender equality, poverty reduction, and inclusive development. The event titled "Localizing the



SDGs: Women in Local Governance in India Lead the Way," is being organized by the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations and the Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj, in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) during the last day of the 57th Session of the

Commission on Population and Development (CPD57) which started from April 29th April, 2024. It symbolises India's groundbreaking approach to empowering Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) in local government to advance Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs) given that India leads the world with 1.4 million women constituting 46 per cent of local elected officials. Secretary Vivek Bhardwaj who will lead the delegation of these women from the grassroots level will discuss strategies derived from India's PRIs to foster gender equality and women's empowerment, focusing on poverty reduction and inclusive development. Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, will inaugurate the event, emphasizing the crucial role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in advancing gender equality. The insights shared by Supriya, Kunuku Hema Kumari, and Neeru Yadav will highlight the transformative impact of women's leadership in enabling inclusive development and promoting women and girl-friendly governance. If Supriya will dwell on how she has been active in promoting child-care facilities to create a conducive work environment for women, Kunuku Hema Kumari will talk about her initiatives in establishing linkages between front-line health workers and women and girls in need of health services through her public outreach efforts.



RJD stands for Rishwatkhor Jungleraj Dal: Nadda

PTI ■ ARARIA (BIHAR)
 Launching a frontal attack on the RJD, which is an alliance partner of the INDIA bloc in Bihar, BJP national president J P Nadda on Thursday said the party led by Lalu Prasad stands for 'Rishwatkhor Jungleraj Dal'. Addressing a public rally in Araria Lok Sabha seat in support of BJP candidate Pradeep Kumar Singh, Nadda accused the opposition coalition of "protecting" corrupt people, whereas Prime Minister Narendra Modi was "striving hard" to end corruption in the country. Araria will go to polls in the third phase on May 7. "A majority of the leaders of the INDIA bloc, including those of the Congress and RJD, are either in jail or out



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

on bail. PM Modi wants to end corruption but the INDIA bloc leaders call for protecting the corrupt. RJD, whose leaders are on bail, means corruption. R stands for 'Rishwatkhor' (bribery), J for 'Jungleraj' and D means 'Daldal' (slough of mud)," he said. "On one side, we have a PM who is working for the country and on the other, you have the INDIA bloc, a 'parivar bachao, dynasty bachao' alliance," he alleged. Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, RJD's Lalu Prasad and Tejashwi Yadav, all are out on bail, Nadda claimed. "Parties of the 'ghamandiya alliance' are all 'parivarvadi' (dynastic)... Look at Farooq Abdullah and Omar Abdullah, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and Mehbooba Mufti, Mulayam Singh Yadav and KTR-Kavita, Karunanidhi-Stalin-Udayanidhi... Congress has Sonia-Rahul-Priyanka... All of them are dynasts," the BJP national president alleged. "Corrupt leaders of INDIA bloc who are in jail include Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, and other AAP leaders Manish Sisodia and Satyendar Jain," he added. Reiterating that the BJP-led NDA will win 400-plus Lok Sabha seats, including all 40 in Bihar, Nadda asserted that the eastern state has developed only under NDA rule, with a six-lane highway being built from Varanasi and Kolkata which will pass through the state. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's only aim is welfare of every person from the Dalit, tribal and backward sections of the society. The NDA government has brought a large section of the country's poor above the poverty line in the last 10 years. But INDIA bloc leaders want to give reservation on religious lines. The Congress is giving tickets to those belonging to 'tukde-tukde' gang," Nadda added. "India was the 11th largest economy when PM Modi came to power and now the country is the fifth largest economy, leaving behind United Kingdom and many other countries. We will be the third largest economy by 2027," he said. Highlighting growth statistics of the country under NDA rule, Nadda said, "Pharmaceutical and toy exports have surged... India has become the third-largest automobile market, surpassing Japan."

Yogi accuses Kharge of hurting Hindu religious sentiments



PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday accused Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge of hurting the religious sentiments of Hindus with his recent remarks on Lord Ram and Shivam. At a rally in Chhattisgarh on Tuesday in support of a party candidate Shivkumar Dahariya, Kharge said, "His name is Shivkumar. He can compete with Ram because he is Shiva." "I am also Mallikarjun. Main bhi Shiv hoon," he said. Mallikarjun is another name for Lord Shiva. The UP chief minister said that the party is facing significant setbacks in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and is resorting to disparaging the beliefs of the Hindu majority community to vent its frustration over impending defeat in the Lok Sabha elections. Congress president's derogatory remarks are a "new beginning of the party's downfall," he said. "The Congress's history is replete with such actions. Yet, during elections, such behaviour becomes conspicuous. By bringing up such issues, the Congress is not only disrespecting the faith of India but also hurting the sentiments of the majority community," Adityanath said while addressing the media at his official residence before embarking on election rallies in Mainpuri, Etah, and Firozabad. He condemned the attempt to pit Lord Ram against Lord Shiva in speeches of Congress leaders. "Lord Ram and Lord Shiva hold significant reverence within its worship practices. In Ramcharitmanas, there are instances where Lord Ram worships Lord Shiva and vice versa, illustrating their mutual respect and complementarity," he said. "Our scriptures bear testimony to the fact that betrayal of either Lord Shiva or Lord Ram inevitably leads to defeat and downfall," he said. "The Congress carries forward the British legacy of 'Divide and Rule'. It sows the seeds of discord in society based on caste, region, and language for petty political gains. The party will continue its divisive agenda in future as well to stay relevant in Indian politics," he added. He claimed that Congress in its manifesto has pledged to include Muslims also among the beneficiaries of the reservation meant for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. He also expressed his disapproval of Congress' disregard for India's Sanatan traditions and accused the party and its president of disrespecting and manipulating the country's faith. Chief minister Adityanath criticised the party leader for not only undermining the Hindu faith but also steering Congress towards oblivion through such divisive actions. He hoped that the divine wisdom of Lord Shri Ram and Devadhive Mahadev Shiv would guide the Congress leadership to embrace the path of truth amid these challenges.

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



PTI ■ BAREILLY (UP)

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday attacked Rahul Gandhi, saying he started his party's campaign with Bharat Jodo Yatra that will end with a 'Congress Dhundho Yatra,' suggesting that the party will get a severe drubbing in the Lok Sabha elections. Addressing an election rally here, Shah alleged that Rahul, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, and SP's Akhilesh Yadav did not attend the Ram Temple consecration ceremony in Ayodhya fearing this may alienate their vote bank.

Final electoral roll has over 4.14 crore voters in Andhra Pradesh

PTI ■ AMARAVATI



Andhra Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Mukesh Kumar Meena on Thursday published the final electoral roll of the state in the run-up to the forthcoming polls, pegging the total number of voters over 4.14 crore, which rose by nearly six lakh from January 1. In exact figures, the total number of voters in the southern state are 4,14,01,887, who include 2.02 crore male voters, 2.1 crore female voters, 3,421 third gender voters and 68,185 service electors. "Voter list has been finalised and frozen. On the day of freezing the list, April 25, including all categories of voters, service voters, male, female and third gender voters, there are 4,14,01,887 voters," said Meena, addressing a press conference at the secretariat here. The CEO noted that the electoral rolls witnessed an increase by 5,94,631 voters between January 1, 2024 and April 1. The voter list was updated until the last day of receiving the nominations, April 25. Meena called on the electorate to check their names and polling stations at

polling stations where the upper limit of 1,500 electors has been breached. The highest number of auxiliary polling stations (50) have been added in Visakhapatnam district. Meanwhile, the CEO noted that 12,438 polling stations out of the total have been identified as critical while webcasting has been proposed for 29,897 or 64 percent of the polling stations. Until Thursday, as part of the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), Meena observed that two deaths, 156 injuries and 13.4 lakh properties were involved in cases of electoral violence. Besides binding over 72,416 persons, the Election Commission has also registered 9,337 seizure FIRs and 864 FIRs related to enforcement such as loudspeaker violations, irregular meetings and others. Likewise, the poll body seized liquor, cash, drugs, precious metals, freebies and other inducements worth Rs 204 crore from March 16 to May 2. Further, Meena observed that safety measures would be put in place at polling stations prone to heat waves, such as setting up tents, canopies, umbrellas and shade structures, along with providing chairs. Likewise, cooling devices such as fans will be arranged at necessary polling stations for maintaining comfortable temperature for voters and polling personnel, including drinking water facilities at all the polling stations. Elections for the 175-member Assembly and 25 Lok Sabha seats in Andhra Pradesh are scheduled on May 13 and the counting of votes will be held on June 4.

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

PTI ■ SUPAUL/SARAN (BIHAR)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday debunked the opposition charge that the BJP was creating a Hindu-Muslim divide, highlighting the goodwill enjoyed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in several Islamic countries. The former BJP president, who addressed election rallies in Supaul and Saran Lok Sabha constituencies of Bihar, also urged the minority community to be wary of the Congress and its ally RJD, charging the opposition parties with "seeking votes by kicking sand in your face." "In at least five Islamic countries of the Arab world, Modi has been conferred with the highest honour. And they (the opposition) have the temerity of charging us with (creating divisions) between Hindus and Muslims," Singh asserted. "I would, however, urge my Muslim brethren not to be ensnared by these people, the



parties like RJD and Congress, which are trying to get your votes by kicking sand in your face," he said. Singh, in his address, also said reservations along religious lines is not possible under the constitution. "Of course, there is a provision for quotas for the backward classes and those sections of Muslim population that are lagging behind are covered under the same," he said. "Muslims should also understand our motive behind illegalising triple talaq. How can one tolerate such a practice which had inflicted untold miseries upon so many Muslim sisters and daughters? We took action without worrying about electoral consequences. I am glad to see that our stand against triple talaq has also been appreciated by many Muslims," the defence minister said. Singh also claimed that the NDA was on course to achieve its target of 400-plus

"Mahatma Gandhi wanted the party to be disbanded. It seems the party is being cursed by his soul," Singh said. The defence minister said he did "not wish to speak against anybody who has been the prime minister since it involved an institution and not just an individual", while drawing a contrast between the rule of Modi and Congress PMs since Jawaharlal Nehru. "I do not say that those in our ranks have been consecrated with milk. But, whenever somebody is found guilty of any wrongdoing, the BJP-led NDA has not shied away from getting rid of tainted elements," asserted Singh. The senior BJP leader lauded his Bihar ally, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who heads the JD(U), saying, "You may have many grievances against him, but you cannot say that he is corrupt. In contrast, you have the RJD, which has been most notorious with regard to its track record on corruption, while in power."

"Beware of parties like the RJD, which want to take you back to the age of the lantern, and set up cow sheds doubling up as schools," said Singh, referring to the opposition party's poll symbol and a scheme launched by its president Lalu Prasad in the 1990s, when he was the chief minister of Bihar. He also claimed that under Modi, the global standing of India has grown, citing the willingness of Russia and Ukraine to halt the war for a few hours to facilitate return of students. "Also, unlike in the past, terrorists cannot strike at will as we have made known that India will hit back, even going across the border, if the need arises," the defence minister said. He also alleged that the decade-long tenure of Manmohan Singh was marked by stagnation. "But, Modi worked a miracle. We have jumped to the fifth spot and experts around the world agree that we are poised

to be among the top three by 2027," said Singh, who also pointed out that "organisations like the IMF say we have brought out 25 crore people from the clutches of poverty, something which the Congress could not achieve despite slogans of 'garibi hatao'". Referring to the advocacy of inheritance tax by Sam Pitroda "an advisor of the Congress' top leadership who also heads the party's overseas wing", the former BJP president asked, "Do you want such a system to be in place?" The Union minister also stressed on Modi's welfare initiatives, touching upon the 'Jan Dhan' scheme, and the proposal to bring "all people aged over 70 years, whether poor or not", under the Ayushman Bharat Yojana. "We also intend to provide 300 units of electricity, free of charge, to every household through rooftop solar panels," Singh added.

Dharmendra Pradhan files nomination from Sambalpur

PTI ■ SAMBALPUR (ODISHA)

BJP leader and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, who filed his nomination from Sambalpur Lok Sabha seat in Odisha on Thursday, expressed confidence that his party will win not only the general elections but also the assembly polls in the state. Returning to the electoral fray after 15 years, 54-year-old Pradhan visited Samaleswari Temple here in the morning to seek blessings. He then participated in a two-hour-long road show from the temple to the DC office where he filed the nomination. "There is a demand for change in Odisha and the BJP is determined to win not only the Lok Sabha polls but also the upcoming Assembly elections in the State," he told PTI.

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

PTI ■ JUNAGADH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the ongoing Lok Sabha elections were not for satisfying his personal ambitions, but for fulfilling his "mission." A strong and stable government was important not only for the country but also for the world, he said at a poll rally in Junagadh in Gujarat. "These elections are not for my ambition, as people have fulfilled that ambition in 2014. The 2024 elections are for Modi's mission," the PM said. Accusing the opposition

Congress of having a "dangerous mentality", Modi said its manifesto is written in the language of Muslim League. For Congress, this election was all about saving its existence and the party was taking help of its "Mazhabi vote bank" to stay afloat, the prime minister claimed. In his address, he challenged the Congress to restore Article 370 in Jammu-Kashmir, abolish the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the law that bans triple talaq. "I have buried Article 370. It is gone now. I want to challenge the Congress' royal family and its 'shehzada' (a



jibe at the Gandhi family and Rahul Gandhi) that if it is your hidden agenda, then come out in the open and tell people you will restore Article 370," he said. "I want to see how much courage they (Congress) have to insult the Constitution drafted by Babasaheb Ambedkar. You (Congress) will fail because this (standing in your way) is Modi," the PM asserted. Referring to the controversy surrounding the Katchatheevu island, he said during the Congress rule, the Union Government had no idea about the exact number of islands India had. "I then got a satellite survey done and found that we have 1,300 islands. Some of them are as big as Singapore. We will develop some of them for tourism purposes," said Modi. A Congress leader had

recently spoken about separating South India and forming a new nation, while those in the Opposition INDIA Bloc also make statements on similar lines, he

asserted. Speaking about reservation for Muslims, Modi said after Independence it was decided following careful deliberations that religion-based quotas would not be given. "Those deliberations went on for months. And no BJP or RSS leader was in the picture. Learned Congress leaders as well as Babasaheb Ambedkar took part in the discussion. After deliberations, they decided reservation will not be granted on the basis of religion," he said. The Congress now wants to snatch such quota and give it to others, Modi said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Voter inertia

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

The lukewarm voter response in the first two phases of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections raises several questions about the underlying reasons for their apathy. Is the weather a deterrent, or is it disillusionment with governance, scepticism towards nominees/parties, or lack of faith in electoral procedures like Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)? Indeed, there is a pressing need to rekindle voter enthusiasm and participation in the electoral process. An initial speculation regarding low turnout often points to adverse weather conditions. The scorching heat can indeed discourage voters, especially in regions prone to extreme climates. However, while the weather may play a role, it is seldom the sole determinant of voter participation. A more substantial factor contributing to voter apathy lies in the prevailing disillusionment with governance. Citizens, disappointed by unfulfilled promises, rampant corruption and inefficient administration, often perceive their votes as inconsequential. This disenchantment can lead to voter inertia, where individuals feel disengaged from the political process altogether. Also, scepticism towards parties and their nominees exacerbates voter apathy. In an era marked by populism, polarisation and political opportunism, many voters struggle to identify with candidates or parties that truly represent their interests. The prevalence of dynastic politics and candidate selection based on nepotism only deepens this distrust. The leaders' conduct leaves much to be desired. Many times, they switch sides making a mockery of the voters' decision. Sometimes even the party the voters voted for joins hands with its arch-rival. In such scenarios, voters have reasons to feel cheated.



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

PICTALK



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

Upholding the Fourth Estate in digital age



SANTOSH MATHEW

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

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

Every year on May 3rd, the world comes together to celebrate World Press Freedom Day, a day dedicated to honouring the fundamental principles of press freedom, defending the independence of the media and paying tribute to journalists who risk their lives to report the truth. In an era marked by misinformation, censorship and threats to journalists worldwide, this day holds more significance than ever. Press freedom is the cornerstone of democracy. It empowers citizens by providing them with access to diverse viewpoints and information, enabling them to make informed decisions. A free press serves as a watchdog, holding Governments and powerful entities accountable for their actions. It acts as a voice for the voiceless, bringing attention to social injustices and human rights violations. Despite the crucial role they play, journalists around the world face numerous challenges in their pursuit of truth. They encounter threats, harassment and violence, both online and offline. Many journalists risk imprisonment or even death for daring to report on sensitive issues. Censorship, propaganda and attacks on press freedom have become increasingly prevalent, hindering the ability of journalists to fulfil their vital role in society. World Press Freedom Day. Since 1993, it has been observed globally to honour a declaration made by African journalists in Windhoek, Namibia, in 1991. It commemorates press freedom principles and acknowledges journalists' courage. UNESCO awards the Guillermo Cano Prize to those preserving press freedom. While technology has revolutionised the way information is disseminated, it has also presented new challenges for press freedom. Social media platforms have become powerful tools for



spreading information, but they have also been weaponised to spread misinformation and silence dissenting voices. Journalists must navigate through a digital landscape fraught with fake news and online harassment, often at great personal risk. India, home to one of the world's largest and most vibrant media landscapes, has faced scrutiny in recent years regarding its press freedom record. According to the World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), India's ranking has seen fluctuations. In the 2023 index, India was placed at 163 out of 180 countries, indicating significant challenges to press freedom within the country. "When asked to bend, the media crawled. And when asked to crawl, it cringed." This statement was made by Advani in the context of the Indian media's behaviour during the Emergency period (1975-1977), imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. During this time, press freedom faced severe restrictions, with journalists being arrested, newspapers censored and the Government exerting tight control over media outlets.



PRESS FREEDOM IS THE CORNERSTONE OF A DEMOCRACY. IT EMPOWERS CITIZENS BY PROVIDING THEM WITH ACCESS TO DIVERSE VIEWPOINTS AND INFORMATION, ENABLING THEM TO MAKE INFORMED DECISIONS

Advani's quote reflects his criticism of how certain sections of the media capitulated to Government pressure and failed to uphold journalistic integrity and independence. It suggests that instead of resisting unjust demands or censorship, some media outlets complied with the Government's wishes, even to the point of degradation. This quote serves as a reminder of the importance of a free and independent press in holding those in power accountable and safeguarding democracy. It highlights the need for journalists to remain vigilant in upholding the principles of press freedom, especially in times of political turmoil or authoritarian rule. British politician Edmund Burke is often credited with coining the term in the late 18th century, referring to the gallery of the House of Commons as the fourth estate, symbolising the press's influence on political affairs. The term "fifth estate" underscores the transformative role of social media in democratising access to information, enabling individuals to participate in public discourse and challenging established institutions and power structures. Social media platforms

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EMPOWERING VISUAL NARRATIVES

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

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

Rian Mehta | Chandigarh

CHINA'S SHADOW POLITICS

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

Zara Khan | Mumbai

DANCE UNITES PEOPLE

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

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Time to curb fake videos in elections

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



VIVEK SHUKLA

The ongoing Lok Sabha election campaign has suddenly taken a very ugly turn after a fake video involving Union Home Minister Amit Shah has surfaced. Accusations and counter-accusations are common during campaigns and are not considered harmful. However, it is unacceptable for anyone or political party to resort to using 'deep fake' technology to release fake videos against their opponents to win elections. In a recent case, the country's Home Minister, Amit Shah, has become a victim of 'deep fake' technology. Amit Shah delivered a speech at a BJP election rally in Siddipet, Medak district of Telangana on April 25. The video of this speech was allegedly tampered with and shared on social media. Fact checks have proven this video to be completely fake. In this fake video, Amit Shah is allegedly seen announcing the abolishment of reservations for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC). Now, imagine if someone could abolish the reservations provided to the



above-mentioned classes in the country. It is an impossible thing. In reality, an old video of Amit Shah has been edited, in which he was talking about ending Muslim reservations. In this original video, ST and SC have been added in place of Muslims. However, the question arises as to how the fake video may look exactly like the real one. Fake videos are created with the help of software. As we know, the use of machine learning and artificial intelligence tools has increased in the market these days. In this technology, the tone and voice of a person are captured with the help of machine learning. In fact, with the help of new technology, the face of a person who is not even a part of that video is fitted into the

video. It is difficult to tell the difference between real and fake in a video manipulated through this technique. Whoever leader or political party created and released fake videos showing Amit Shah announcing the abolishment of reservations, how serious an act they have committed to spreading hatred in society. A complaint has been lodged by Prateek Karpe, an office bearer of BJP's Mumbai unit, at Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) Cyber Police Station. The complaint states that a deepfake video of Amit Shah was created, posted and shared on the internet, to defame BJP leader Amit Shah. The complainant also requested the police to immediately remove the fake video and register a case against those accused who allegedly shared it to create enmity and hatred among various castes. Based on the complaint, a case has been registered against the social media handle of Maharashtra Youth Congress and 16 others under various sections of the IPC and IT Act at Bandra-Kurla Cyber Police Station in Mumbai.

Of course, technological development has taken place rapidly in the world in the last few decades. The increasing use of digital platforms has made life easier and faster, but along with this benefit, some serious risks related to cyber security are also coming to the fore. With the boundless nature of cyberspace, the threats associated with it and the deceitful methods and tools of cyber criminals, the trend of cyber-attacks is constantly changing. Apart from this, terrorism and fundamentalism are also finding shelter in cyberspace. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Cybersecurity is no longer limited to the digital world. It has become a matter of national security." Cyberspace has become the new battleground. The Government must take strict action against these elements. Meanwhile, one only hopes that the authorities concerned would curb the menace of deep fake videos sooner rather than later with an iron hand. (The writer is a senior journalist and author of two books; views are personal)

India's semiconductor mission



Apropos the news article, "Semicon ecosystem: A revolution in India," published on May 1, this is my response. The surge of semiconductor development in India marks a pivotal juncture in our technological evolution. As our reliance on technology deepens, so does the significance of these minuscule chips, which power everything from smartphones to space missions. India's strategic vision to foster a robust semiconductor ecosystem is commendable, as evidenced by ambitious projects and partnerships aimed at reducing import dependency and fostering innovation. Initiatives like the India Semiconductor Mission and skill development programmes underscore a concerted effort to nurture indigenous talent and infrastructure. Geopolitical shifts, especially amidst the China-US trade tensions, offer a timely opportunity for India to emerge as a preferred destination for semiconductor manufacturing. However, challenges persist, particularly in bridging the skill gap and accessing advanced technology. Collaborations with global leaders and initiatives to attract talent back to India are steps in the right direction. The road ahead is promising, with India poised to not only meet its self-sufficiency goals but also emerge as a global leader in semiconductor innovation, contributing significantly to economic growth. Advait Rao | Bengaluru

The wonderful aspect of dance is its ability to speak volumes without uttering a single word. It is a great way to share one's passion for dance, impart new skills and foster a sense of unity. One of the greatest strengths of dance is its finesse and ability to touch people emotionally. Remember, every little step counts when it comes to making a difference through dance. Dance comes in many forms, from ballet to hip-hop and from contemporary to folk. A talented dancer will naturally embrace all these styles and weave them into choreography. This not only enriches the dancer's performance but also acknowledges the global tapestry of dance. A dance community is a great space for everyone, regardless of their age, race and gender. After all, diversity is the lifeblood of creativity. Said John Dryden, the literary critic and an accomplished poet from England: "Dancing is the poetry of the feet."



FIRST COLUMN

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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



SAKSHI SETHI

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

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



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

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

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

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

AFSPA repeal: A step towards 'Naya Kashmir'



ABHINAV NARAYAN

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



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

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act gives sweeping powers to armed forces (which also extends to CAPF under Section 2) and most significantly provides them legal immunity for their actions under Section 7 of the act. However, the Supreme Court in 2016 struck down this blanket protection from prosecution. The Supreme Court said "It does not matter whether the victim was a common person or a militant or a terrorist, nor does it matter whether the aggressor was a common person or the state. The law is the same for both and is equally applicable to both". The sweeping powers under Section 4 of the act include -1. Arrest without warrant, -2. Fire (After due warning) upon or use other kinds of force even if it causes death, against the person who is acting against law or order in the disturbed area for the maintenance of public order. -3. To enter and search any premises in order to make such arrests, or to recover any person wrongfully restrained or any arms, ammunition or explosive substances and seize it. -4. Stop and search any vehicle or vessel reasonably suspected to be carrying such person or weapons. The AFSPA debate stems from two perspectives first is security necessity and second is cases of extrajudicial killings in the Northeast. The most debatable part is the second one which has made this act controversial. In 2004, a thorough review of the act was done by the Justice Jeevan Reddy Commission which concluded that the act should be repealed and observed that "agitations such as in Manipur and elsewhere are merely the symptoms of a malaise, which goes much deeper" and called on the Government to address the "core issues". However, the importance of National security somehow gets shadowed by a few cases of misuse of the act.



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

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

breakdowns are not ordinary and demand extreme measures and interventions to normalise and any constraints in intervention will affect the normalisation process therefore to let "normalisation" progress an effective emergency response mechanism is required which AFSPA provides. A call for the removal of AFSPA should only come when the security environment is significantly improved or secured as hurried removal might bring back the old situation. The case of a fresh wave of radicalisation in 2018 in J&K after the killing of terror poster boy Burhan Wani is one incidence where a cautious decision must be made to decide the removal of AFSPA. AFSPA is not immune; it has its limitations and misuses. For example, the Nagaland case in 2021 of killing innocent 14 civilians or the 1995 Kohima Massacre where 16th Rashtriya Rifles fired upon civilians mistaking the sound of the tyre bursting for a bomb attack killing 7 and injuring 36. The free pass or the freeness in the name of operational efficiency or capabilities has also led to some serious consequences which are eroding the primary objective of the act. The AFSPA Act is in place to mitigate the extreme situation in the state and to aggravate it. Such incidents aggravate the situation and further complicate the situation in a state. Therefore, these immunities either required a removal or needed a proper check to put caution in the exercise of powers by the armed forces which later was done by the Supreme Court in 2016. AFSPA cannot stay for long as extraordinary or exceptional situations are temporary and once under control, AFSPA could be withdrawn. If it goes beyond necessity, then AFSPA's presence would hinder the normalisation process. The normalisation process does not

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

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

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

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

Engaging in the theatrics of India's electoral carnival

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

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



RAJDEEP PATHAK

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

(read dance) of democracy. Now picture this: Rallies echoing with rehearsed oratory; meetings buzzing with the monotonous drone of 'scripted' discourse; and the landscape littered with towering hoardings and captivating advertisements—all vying for attention like desperate contestants in a reality TV show. Each candidate, eagerly awaits their fate in this grandiose spectacle, hoping to shine bright enough to avoid being relegated to the shadows of political obscurity. But, as they say, once a politician, always a politician. This grand orchestra of democracy will see nearly a billion people herded like cattle into over a million polling booths, expected to cast their votes in a choreographed cha-

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

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

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

rallies, serving as vibrant showcases of democracy where ordinary citizens are swept into the extraordinary theatre of politics. Whether attendees arrive voluntarily or are transported en masse, these gatherings epitomise the essence of democratic engagement. Amidst a backdrop of waving flags and resonant slogans, the democratic spirit radiates, offering a glimpse of both the triumphs and tribulations of competing political factions. Central to this spectacle, is the tireless efforts of party workers, orchestrating the mobilisation of supporters for these occasions. One cannot forget that in this grand symphony, the Election Commission stands as the linchpin, ensuring the sancti-

ty of free and fair elections despite recurrent criticisms. Imagine the stalwart veterans anxiously clinging to their phones, praying for one more display of their experience in the political limelight, while the current faces (read chosen MPs) pace like restless lions in the corridors of authority, fearing either the sweet embrace of reselection or the bitter sting of rejection. But there's nothing to fear. For in the unpredictable world of politics, one never knows when the pendulum of fortune will favourably swing back. So, let us Vote so that the elected parties work to fulfil their manifesto.

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

Police dismantle pro-Palestinian demonstrators' encampment

AP ■ LOS ANGELES

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

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

Will Israel end war without group's destruction?



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Trump calls judge 'crooked' after facing warning of jail time

AP ■ WAUKESHA

Donald Trump returned briefly to the campaign trail Wednesday and called the judge presiding over his hush money trial "crooked" a day after he was held in contempt of court and threatened with jail time for violating a gag order. Trump's remarks at events in the battleground states of Wisconsin and Michigan were being closely watched after he received a USD 9,000 fine for making public statements about people connected to the criminal case. In imposing the fine for posts on Trump's Truth Social account and campaign website, Judge Juan M. Merchan said that if Trump continued to violate his orders, he would "impose an incarceration punishment."



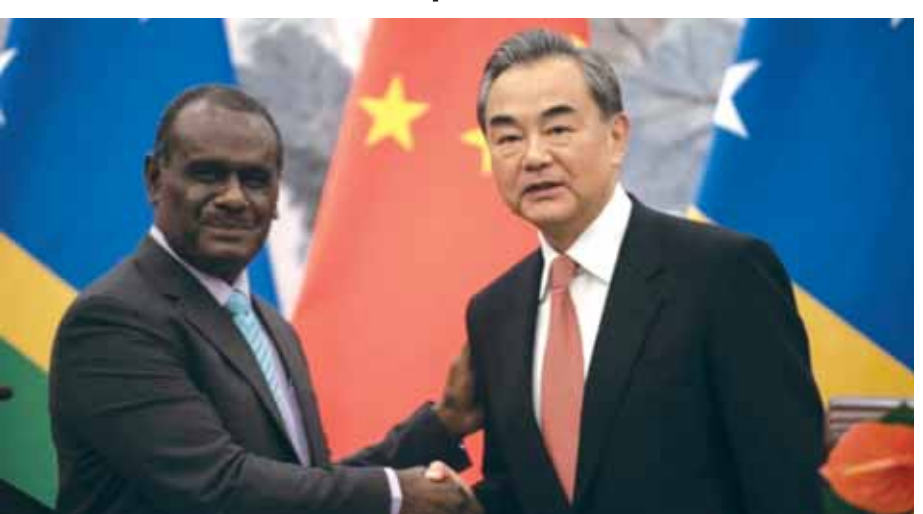
Waukesha, Wisconsin, claiming again that this and other cases against him are led by the White House to undermine his campaign. The gag order bars him from making public statements about witnesses, jurors and some others connected to his hush money case. Trump is still free to criticize Merchan.

The former president is trying to achieve a balancing act unprecedented in American history by running for a second term as the presumptive Republican nominee while also fighting felony charges in New York. Trump frequently goes after Merchan, prosecutors and potential witnesses at his rallies and on social media, attack lines that play well with his supporters but that have potentially put him in further legal jeopardy. Trump insists he is merely exercising his free speech rights, but the offending posts from his Truth Social account and campaign website were taken down. Merchan is weighing other alleged gag-order violations and will hear arguments on Thursday. Trump has often called this case and other criminal cases against him "election interference," saying they keep him from campaigning for the presidential election in November. Attendees agreed he is being unfairly prosecuted, contending the trial and gag order were designed to distract him. "It's a trial looking for a crime," said Ray Hanson, of Hartford. Hanson said he expected Trump's lawyers would "keep him in line" so he doesn't violate the gag order, as much as he likely wants to talk about the trial. Manhattan prosecutors have argued Trump and his associates took part in an illegal scheme to influence the 2016 presidential campaign by purchasing and then burying negative stories. He has pleaded not guilty. Trump's visits to Wisconsin and Michigan mark his second trip to the swing states in just a month. For the previous rallies, the former president largely focused on immigration, referring to people who are in the US illegally and who are suspected of crimes as "animals." Meanwhile, Democrats are hoping to remind voters ahead of these visits about Trump's position on abortion, which Trump has been openly concerned about being a political liability for him and Republicans.

Solomon Islands lawmakers elect former Foreign Minister as new prime minister

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Solomon Islands lawmakers on Thursday chose former Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manale as the new prime minister of the South Pacific island nation that has grown closer to China in recent years. The withdrawal of pro-Beijing former Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare from the contest to remain head of the government to make way for Manale as their party's candidate is an indication the country could follow a similar direction. The prime minister was chosen in a secret ballot of 49 lawmakers who won general elections on April 17. Governor General David Vunagi said Manale received 31 votes. Sogavare had hoped to become the first Solomons prime minister to maintain power in consecutive four-year terms following the election. During his previous term, China's influence increased more in the Solomons than anywhere else in the South Pacific.



Jeremiah Manale with Chinese official.

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

Lowy Institute, a Sydney-based international policy think tank, said Manale will be a "less fiery and combative leader for the West to manage but he will continue to pursue close relations with China." "As the former foreign minister he helped broker the security deal with China that panicked the West. But he is also a seasoned diplomat with experience at the UN and in western countries -- he's no stranger to western engagement," Keen said in an email.

Over 40% of Americans see China as enemy: Report

AP ■ WASHINGTON

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

Half of Americans think of China as a competitor, and only 6 per cent consider the country a partner, according to the report. The findings come as the Biden administration is seeking to stabilise US-China relations to avoid miscalculations that could result in clashes, while still trying to counter the world's second-largest economy on issues from Russia's war in Ukraine to Taiwan and human rights. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen have both recently visited China in the administration's latest effort to "responsibly" manage the competition with Beijing. Despite those overtures, President Joe Biden has been

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

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

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

American attitudes toward China have turned largely critical after the US launched a trade war against China in 2018 and since the emergence of COVID-19, which was first reported in China. Beijing's human rights record, its closeness to Russia and its policies toward Taiwan and Hong Kong also have left Americans with negative views of the country, according to Pew's previous analyses.

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

Norway to increase defence spending

AP ■ COPENHAGEN

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

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

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

In 2024, the Scandinavian country's defence budget is expected to increase to 104 billion kroner (USD 9.4 billion). Finance Minister Trygve Slagsvold Vedum called it "a strong growth" and said it was "a necessary investment to strengthen our freedom."

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

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

Georgia parliament cancels session after huge protests

AP ■ TBLISI (GEORGIA)

The parliament of Georgia cancelled its Thursday plenary session following massive protests against a proposed law that critics fear will stifle media freedom and endanger the country's bid for membership in the European Union. The parliament's announcement said the cancellation was connected to damage the building suffered during Wednesday protests in which police used water cannon, tear gas and pepper spray against the tens of thousands of demonstrators. The legislature on Wednesday approved a second reading of the bill that would require media and non-commercial organizations to register as "pursuing the interests of a foreign power" if they receive more than 20% of funding from abroad. The third and final reading was expected in mid-May and it was not clear if the cancellation of Thursday's session would affect the bill's progress. The



ruling Georgian Dream party withdrew a similar proposal last year after large crowds protested. Protesters denounce the bill as "the Russian law" because neighboring Russia uses similar legislation to stigmatize independent news media and organizations critical of the Kremlin. Eighty-three of Georgia's 150 lawmakers approved the bill in its second reading, while 23 voted against it. Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, increasingly at

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

AP ■ CONGO

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

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

humans; it's happening in a town where people have little contact with the wild animals thought to naturally carry the disease. "We're in a new phase of mpox," said Dr. Placide Mbala-Kingebeni, the lead researcher of the study, who said it will soon be submitted to a journal for publication. Mbala-Kingebeni heads a lab at Congo's National Institute of Biomedical Research, which studies the genetics of diseases. The lesions reported by most patients are milder and on the genitals, Mbala-Kingebeni said, making the disease trickier to diagnose. In previous outbreaks in Africa, lesions were mostly seen on the chest, hands and feet. He also said that the

new form seems to have a lower death rate. In a report on the global mpox situation this week, WHO said the new version of the disease might require a new testing strategy to pick up the mutations. With experts pointing out that fewer than half of people in Congo with mpox are tested, Mbala-Kingebeni said: "The risk is that unless patients themselves come forward, we will have a silent transmission of the disease and nobody will know."

Mbala-Kingebeni said most people were infected via sex, with about a third of mpox cases found in sex workers. It was not until the 2022 global emergency of mpox that scientists established the disease

was spread via sex, with most cases in gay or bisexual men. In November, WHO confirmed sexual transmission of mpox in Congo for the first time. There are two kinds, or clades, of mpox, which is related to smallpox and endemic to central and west Africa. Clade 1 is more severe and can kill up to 10 per cent of people infected. Clade 2 triggered the 2022 outbreak; more than 99 per cent of people infected survived. Mbala-Kingebeni and colleagues said they have identified a new form of clade 1 that may be responsible for more than 240 cases and at least three deaths in Kamituga, a region with a significant transient population travelling elsewhere in Africa and beyond.

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

AP ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

country has changed constantly, with lawmakers passing measures and courts ruling on challenges to them. Currently, 14 states are enforcing bans on abortion at all stages of pregnancy, with limited exceptions. Most Democratic-led states, meanwhile, have taken steps to preserve or expand access. "Some of it's exactly what we knew would happen," said David Cohen, a professor at the Thomas R. Kline School of Law at Drexel University who studies abortion policy, "and others have been big surprises that have put, frankly, the anti-abortion movement on their heels."

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

Asked to weigh in on the emotional debate, voters have supported the position favoured by abortion rights advocates on

all seven statewide ballot measures since then. The Supreme Court's decision in the Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization case was released officially on June 24, 2022, upending nearly 50 years of abortion being legal nationwide. But the world caught a glimpse of it about six weeks earlier, on May 2, after a news outlet published a leaked draft. "With the Dobbs decision, the will of the people is now able to be adhered to," said Stephen Billy, vice president of state affairs for Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America. He said abortion rights supporters have amplified uncertainty in laws -- especially over whether abortion is allowed in medical emergencies. "They've tried to sow political division just to advance their policy agenda," he said. At the time Politico published the leaked draft, Amanda Zurawski was undergoing fertility treatment and was about two weeks away from learning she was finally pregnant.

Senior PML-N leader signals possibility of early elections

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

PTI ■ LAHORE

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



Senior Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader Javed Latif's comments came during an interview with a private TV channel. Nawaz Sharif, 74, was all set to become prime minister for the fourth time but his party failed to get a clear majority in the National Assembly on its own in the February 8 general elections. In a surprise move, he allowed his 72-year-old younger brother and the incumbent party president Shehbaz Sharif — who is considered the favourite of the military establishment — to lead a six-party coalition government at the Centre. Latif said whether the elections take place in two or five years, Nawaz Sharif, the PML-N supremo will take the reins of power for the fourth time. He hinted that early elections could be in the cards within the next two years to pave the way for Nawaz Sharif's fourth stint as the country's prime minister. The Express Tribune newspaper reported. Pressed to explain how Nawaz Sharif could reclaim the top spot within two years, especially with his brother currently occupying it, Latif said it would be possible through elections. "The elections can happen tomorrow," he said. Nawaz Sharif returned to Pakistan from London in October 2023 after ending his nearly four-year-long self-imposed exile, hoping to be the prime minister again. He predicted that even those who once obstructed Nawaz Sharif's path to a fourth term as premier would now rally

Pak Military aware of its constitutional limits: Army chief

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Pakistan Army chief General Asim Munir on Thursday said the military was "well aware" of its constitutional limits and expected others to uphold the Constitution, amid allegations of the powerful army's involvement in politics and interference by the intelligence agencies in the working of the judiciary.



The general, who was the chief guest at a passing out parade, said that those who flout the clear restrictions imposed on freedom of expression in the Constitution cannot point fingers at others. "We are well aware of our constitutional limits and expect others to uphold the Constitution," Gen Munir said while addressing the Pakistan Air Force's passing out parade at the Asghar Khan Academy in Risalpur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. "Article 19 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan clearly defines the limits of freedom of speech and expression of opinion," he said. His remarks came two days after Pakistan's Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa said that pushing the judiciary towards taking a certain action was akin to interference in the judicial process. The top judge was referring to a letter written by six Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges on March 25, alleging interference of agencies in their matters. The apex court took suo motu notice of the letter and later several bar councils also filed petitions and they were made parties to the case. The powerful army, which has ruled Pakistan for more than half of its 75-plus years of existence, has hitherto wielded considerable power in matters of security and foreign policy. However, the military has denied meddling in the country's politics. Gen Munir lauded the PAF for patrolling the airspace in all kinds of difficulties, terming the shooting down of an Indian fighter jet in February 2019 as a great example of the same. "You are the centre of our hopes, the guardian of the skies and the guarantors of regional unity," the army chief told the cadets. Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman shot down the Pakistani F-16 jet during an aerial combat before his MiG 21 Bison aircraft was hit on February 27, 2019. He was captured by the Pakistani Army and later released on the night of March 1. Without naming any country, Gen Munir highlighted that the arms race posed a risk of disturbing the region's balance of power. "Specific technologies, including artificial intelligence, robotics and quantum computing, are changing the use of air power as well as expanding its scope," he noted. Gen Munir also pledged Pakistan's "moral, political and diplomatic support" to the Kashmiri people.

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

Islamabad (PTI): A top court in Pakistan on Thursday reserved its verdict on the petition filed by former prime minister Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi requesting her transfer to the high-security Adiala Jail, where her husband is incarcerated. The 71-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Khan has been lodged at Adiala Jail at Rawalpindi after conviction in multiple cases while Bushra Bibi, 49, is currently jailed at Bani Gala — Khan's home in Islamabad — which was turned into a sub-jail since the couple was sentenced in the 'un-Islamic nikah' case in February. After hearing the arguments from both sides, Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) reserved the verdict in the petition requesting Bushra Bibi's transfer from the Bani Gala sub-jail to the Adiala jail, The News International said. Former first lady's lawyer Usman Gul said the process of declaring the residence as a sub-jail was completed within a few hours. The court said that the Adiala Jail Superintendent had informed that they could not accommodate Bushra Bibi as the jail was already overcrowded. "Apparently, it was already decided that she had to be transferred to Bani Gala," it added. Justice Aurangzeb posed an array of questions on declaring Bani Gala a sub-jail, asking the state counsel if its notification was prepared in a minute, The News International said further quoting the proceedings. "Don't you feel it was already decided that Bushra Bibi had to be transferred (home)? How many women have been brought to Adiala jail, after sending Bushra Bibi home?" he inquired. The IHC judge questioned if the 141 women brought to the jail after that had lesser rights. "Why don't you send the other women home as well?" he asked. Responding to the judge, the government's lawyer said Bushra was transferred to Bani Gala due to a threat to her in jail. Justice Aurangzeb said he would be overjoyed if he was "willingly" confined to his house and questioned how a prisoner's property could be made a sub-jail without their consent.

Pak witnessed 77 militant attacks in April: Report

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Following a brief lull in March, militant attacks in Pakistan surged once again in April, as the country experienced 77 verifiable attacks last month, a security assessment report by an Islamabad-based think-tank said. Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) in a report said the attacks, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa particularly bearing the brunt, resulted in 70 fatalities, including 35 civilians and 31 members of security forces, Dawn News reported on Thursday. It said four militants were killed, and 67 individuals — 32 civilians and 35 security personnel — were injured in the attacks. In comparison, March saw 56 militant attacks, resulting in 77 fatalities and 67 injuries. This indicates a 38 per cent increase in the number of militant attacks, although there was a nine per cent decline in deaths, with no change in the number of injuries. The security report also underscored

the efforts of the country's security forces in thwarting numerous potential attacks during the month. At least 55 suspected militants were killed and 12 others arrested, including individuals involved in the Basmah suicide attack, marking a 55 per cent increase in militant deaths compared to March. The report further said that 73 per cent of the total number of militant attacks reported in April took place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including the tribal districts of the province. Fifty-six attacks were reported in the province during the previous month. The attacks killed 43 people — 26 members of security forces and 17 civilians, the report said. The number of the injured stood at 32, with 19 members of security forces and 13 civilians with injuries. Within KPK, mainland districts saw more attacks and fatalities than tribal districts (formerly Fata). Mainland KPK witnessed 31 attacks, resulting in 25 fatalities and 10 injuries.

The southern districts of DI Khan, Lakki Marwat, Bannu, and Tank were the most affected, with D.I. Khan and Lakki Marwat facing seven militant attacks each, Bannu facing six, and Tank experiencing two attacks. Together, these districts accounted for 71 per cent of the attacks in mainland KPK. Additionally, Peshawar faced four attacks while Swat, Swabi, Charsadda, Shangla, and Battagram experienced one attack each. In the tribal districts of KPK (formerly Fata), PICSS recorded at least 25 attacks, resulting in 18 fatalities and 22 injuries. North Waziristan, Bajaur, and South Waziristan were the most affected districts, with nine, five, and four attacks reported, respectively. According to the report, Balochistan faced 16 attacks, resulting in 21 fatalities, including 17 civilians and four security personnel, with 31 individuals injured. Most of these attacks occurred in the province's Baloch belt, particularly in the south and southwest.

Bad weather returns to UAE, several flights cancelled

PTI ■ DUBAI

Heavy rains and thunderstorms lashed the UAE on Thursday, leading to the cancellation of several international flights, two weeks after Dubai was hit by unprecedented storms that paralysed the emirate for days. On Wednesday, the country's National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority (NCEMA) elevated the readiness and preparedness levels of the national system to deal with the situation. While these rains are expected to be less severe than the unprecedented downpour that hit the country last month, the public is urged to take precautions. On April 14-15, extreme rainfall battered regions of the Arabian Peninsula, with Dubai experiencing the heaviest rains on record since 1949. Dubai-based Emirates airline announced the cancellation

of several flights on Thursday due to bad weather across the UAE as movements at Dubai International Airport (DXB) were reduced. "Customers arriving or departing from Dubai airport on 2 May can expect some delays as flights are rescheduled," Emirates said in a statement. The following flights have been cancelled on May 2: EK 123/124 — between Dubai and Istanbul, EK 763/764 — between Dubai and Johannesburg, EK 719/720 — between Dubai and Nairobi, EK 921/922 — between Dubai and Cairo, EK 903/904 — between Dubai and Amman, and EK 352/353 — between Dubai and Singapore (EK353 departing 3 May, 12:30 am — UAE time). The airline has also waived rebooking charges to help stranded passengers. "Based on the expected weather conditions, the Ministry of Interior recommended, in coordination with NCEMA,

activating remote learning on Thursday and Friday for all educational institutions, with decisions to be made by the competent authorities at the federal level and officials of local emergency management teams, in coordination with the Ministry of Education and the Emirates Schools Establishment," it said on Wednesday. As heavy winds and light rains lashed across the main cities, residents appeared more equipped to ride it out. Remote work systems were advised for all government and private sectors on Thursday and Friday, except for vital jobs that require presence at the workplace and those involved in response and recovery efforts. The Ministry of Interior, in coordination with NCEMA, also decided to close all roads leading to areas prone to flash floods, water accumulations, and dams during the weather conditions.

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

AP ■ KUALA LUMPUR

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

vices in Indonesia during his visit there as part of his Southeast Asia tour. On Wednesday, he said Microsoft will build its first regional data centre in Thailand. In April, the tech giant similarly unveiled a USD 2.9 billion investment in Japan and USD 1.5 billion in G42, an AI firm in Abu Dhabi. Microsoft also pledged to provide AI training for 2.5 million people in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam by 2025. Nadella earlier met Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who said the investment will be the key support pillar for the government's goal to enhance AI capacity in Malaysia. The new investment will include AI training for another 300,000 people, the establishment of a national AI centre of excellence, enhancing the nation's cybersecurity capabilities and supporting the growth of Malaysia's developer commu-

nity, Anwar said on Facebook. Microsoft runs one of the world's largest cloud computing operations and has taken a leap into artificial intelligence through its partnership with OpenAI, developers of ChatGPT. Since then, Microsoft has integrated an AI assistant into its Microsoft Edge browser, named Copilot, helping lift its profits by 20 per cent in the first quarter. Microsoft sees Southeast Asia, with its population of over 600 million people, as a growing market and potential location for more AI product development. A study held by global consulting firm Kearney said AI could contribute nearly USD 1 trillion to Southeast Asia's GDP by 2030. Indonesia is expected to capture USD 366 billion of the total and Malaysia USD 115 billion. Microsoft said in a statement that the investment in Malaysia will build on its 2021 program to support inclusive economic growth.

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

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

Russia proposes UN resolution on banning weapons in space

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

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

space. The vetoed resolution focused solely on weapons of mass destruction including nuclear arms, and made no mention of other weapons in space. It would have called on all countries not to develop or deploy nuclear arms or other weapons of mass destruction in space, as banned under a 1967 international treaty that the US and Russia ratified, and to agree to the need to verify compliance. Before the US-Japan resolution was put to a vote on April 24, Russia and China proposed an amendment that would call on all countries, especially those with space capabilities, "to prevent for all time the placement of weapons in outer space, and the threat of use of force in outer spaces." The vote was 7 countries in favour, 7 against, and one abstention and the amendment was defeated because it failed to

get the minimum 9 "yes" votes in the 15-member Security Council required for adoption. US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield told the council after the vote that Russian President Vladimir Putin has said Moscow has no intention of deploying nuclear weapons in space. "Today's veto begs the question: Why? Why, if you are following the rules, would you not support a resolution that reaffirms them? What could you possibly be hiding," she asked. "It's baffling. And it's a shame." Putin was responding to White House confirmation in February that Russia has obtained a "troubling" anti-satellite weapon capability, although such a weapon is not operational yet. Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said after casting the veto that the US-Japan resolution cherry-picked weapons of mass destruction.

Lanka continues to service loans despite default

Colombo (PTT): Sri Lanka has maintained strict financial discipline while taking unpopular decisions to facilitate economic recovery and continues to service its multilateral debt despite the default announced in 2022, state minister of finance Ranjith Siyambalapitiya said on Thursday. He said USD 2.5 billion debt in 2022 and USD 2.6 billion debt in 2023 had been repaid to multilaterals such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Only the bilateral external debt payments had been suspended with the announcement of the debt default in mid-2022. "We have maintained strict financial discipline while taking unpopular decisions to facilitate economic recovery," Siyambalapitiya said. Meanwhile, the official sources said the talks with sovereign bondholders to restructure about USD 46 billion debt are being continued.

Ukrainian soldiers say rear defensive lines barely exist amid Russian advance

AP ■ KHARKIV

During pitched battles with far better-armed Russian forces, Ukrainian soldier Batyars unit has few options. Devastating Russian aerial glide bombs that can drop up to 1.5 tons of explosives out of range of most of Ukraine's air defences are gnawing away at his men's positions in a new tactic. Yet, to retreat carries no promise of safety — the rear defensive lines meant to give them cover barely exist, he said. Lack of ammunition is forcing the outnumbered Ukrainian soldiers to pull back, one village after another, including three surrendered on Sunday, as intense fighting roils the countryside surrounding Avdiivka nearly three months after the strategic city fell to Russia. "It's necessary to increase the pace of building fortifications

... so that when we retreat, we will retreat to a prepared position," said Batyars, a unit commander who gave only his military call sign in line with brigade protocols. "These fortifications are not enough." Facing an outcry after Avdiivka's fall, Ukraine is rushing to build concrete-fortified trenches, foxholes, firing positions and other barricades on the front lines. But relentless Russian shelling, lack of equipment and crippling bureaucracy plague construction across the vast 1,000-kilometre (600-mile) front, even as a new Russian offensive looms, according to a dozen Ukrainian soldiers, government officials and construction company directors interviewed by The Associated Press. The much-awaited aid package passed by the US Congress last month is expected to help Ukraine close the firepower

gap. But until replenishments arrive, which could take weeks, Russia will continue to exploit Ukraine's weaknesses. **DIG AND FIGHT** Ukraine has allocated nearly 38 billion hryvnias (USD 960 million) to build an extensive fortification network this year. Soldiers across the front line maintain that should have happened last year, when Ukraine had the upper hand in the fighting, not in the heat of battle now. Besides trenches and other barricades, the layered system includes mines and anti-tank obstacles known as "dragon's teeth", normally built in advance of fighting. Russia's preparedness paid off during Kyiv's failed counter-offensive last summer: Ukraine's momentum was slowed in the Zaporizhzhia region by Moscow's extensive fortifica-

tions. But Ukraine was slow to follow suit; it was not until this spring, when weather conditions improved, that any real progress was made. In March, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced Ukraine was building 2,000 kilometres (1,240 miles) of fortifications across three lines of defence. "There was an absence of responsibility. ... People didn't understand that fortifications can save your life if you do it in advance," said Oleksandr, a deputy infantry commander with the 47th brigade in the Avdiivka area who gave only his first name in line with military rules. "Many people thought we ... wouldn't need to prepare such lines. They didn't expect a new Russian offensive." Unlike Russia, Ukraine does not have the option of forcing thousands of prisoners to do the work. That means

Ukrainian soldiers on the front lines must both fight and dig their own trenches. "It's very hard to do both," Oleksandr said. Building the second line, 2 to 5 kilometres behind the front line and within range of Russian artillery, is the responsibility of Ukraine's poorly-resourced engineering force. The third line, at a greater distance from battle, is constructed by companies under military contracts. The reasons for Ukraine's lack of preparedness are rooted in the years after independence when it began downsizing its military because it couldn't afford to maintain the large force inherited from the Soviet Union. Its engineering regiments were dismantled until there were only a handful left. Equipment, including excavators and plows so direly needed now, were sold off.

"We entered the war with nothing," said a serviceman in Ukraine's engineering force, who spoke on condition of anonymity to talk openly about the lack of preparation. When he arrived to build fortifications in Ukraine's east in October, all his unit had were ageing equipment from the 1960s and shovels, he said. "Accordingly, that's the kind of trenches we made." **DISCONNECTED PITS** Ukraine's lack of adequate defensive lines has helped Russia make significant military gains, and constant enemy fire hinders building. Five commanders in Avdiivka and Chasiv Yar, which have been under relentless Russian assault, said without well-prepared positions they were unable to gain a foothold in unfamiliar terrain and defend without suffering huge losses. In Chasiv Yar, a strategic hill-

top town in Donetsk, the lack of fortifications helped turn the tables in Russia's favour. In mid-March, Ukraine's 67th brigade was rotated in to hold positions roughly 3 kilometres from the town. "I would be hard-pressed to describe them as 'positions'," said a Ukrainian serviceman who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the failings candidly. He expected dugouts, a labyrinth of trenches and firing positions, but what he found were a series of pits, barely large enough to hide in during artillery barrages. Under fire, "soldiers would climb out of pits and start digging in each other's direction so that there is at least some connection between them," he said. The soil was so sandy that whenever shells struck, the trenches they dug crumbled. With nowhere to take cover and no means to match the

Russian barrages, they retreated 2 kilometres back. Over 100 Ukrainian soldiers were killed or are missing, he said. "We lost department commanders, platoon commanders, company commanders and sergeants," he said. "That is, we lost the entire skeleton of the brigade." **TIME, MONEY, PRESSURE** To rush building across the third line, construction companies were awarded contracts without the usual bidding process. "There was no time," said Kharkiv Gov. Oleh Syniehubov. The move speeded things up but raised concerns of potential corruption — a worry Syniehubov asserted was overstated. "Believe me, we have so many checks-and-balances and government agencies overseeing the building, it is impossible to steal something," he said.

Stock markets rebound as GST revenues hit record in April

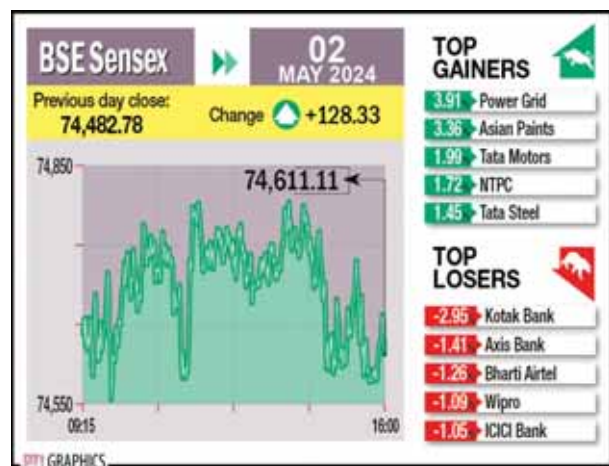
PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 128.33 points or 0.17 per cent to settle at 74,611.11. During the day, it jumped 329.65 points or 0.44 per cent to 74,812.43. The NSE Nifty went up by 43.35 points or 0.19 per cent to 22,648.20.

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

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



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

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

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

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell from 59.1 in March to 58.8 in April, signalling the

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India is one of the "fastest-growing markets" for online accommodation hosting platform Airbnb and the country has the potential to be among its top 10 global markets in the coming years, according to its Chief Business Officer Dave Stephenson. The company is investing in India to tap the opportunity of a rapid rise in tourists travelling to foreign destinations as well

as domestic places that are rapidly growing post-pandemic and where 90 per cent of its first-time bookers are Gen Zs.

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

For Airbnb, India is going to

be "a large travel market", where it has seen a "strong desire" among the "Indian travellers to venture overseas as well as explore domestic destinations, especially those off the beaten path", he said.

Though, Stephenson did not say any specific growth numbers but said India is a "focus area" and "is one of our fastest-growing countries".

When asked as whether India figures among Airbnb's top 10 markets globally, Stephenson

replied in negative. Further he said, "It should be one of the top 10 markets. It is getting to be a large travel market and we definitely think it can be. That would be the goal."

Airbnb is investing specifically in India, where a number of tourists travelling to foreign destinations as well as domestic places are on the rise post-pandemic and is supporting them to stay in its range of "inexpensive homes all the way to luxe homes".

This may be published in Newspapers and TV form the day following the last date for withdrawal of candidature and upto two days before the date of poll

Format C-2

(for candidate to publish in Newspapers, TV)

Declaration about criminal cases

(As per the judgment dated 25th September 2018, of Hon'ble Supreme Court in WP (Civil) No. 536 of 2011 (Public Interest Foundation & Ors. Vs Union of India & Anr.)

Name of Political Party : **BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY**

*Name of Election : **LOK-SABHA- 2024**

Name of State/UT : **JHARKHAND**

1	2	3	4		5		
SI. No.	Name of Constituency	Name of Candidate	(A) Pending criminal cases		(B) Details about cases of conviction for criminal offences		
			Name of Court, case no. & status of the case(s)	Sections of the Acts concerned & brief description of offence(s)	Name of Court & date(s) of order(s)	Description of offence(s) & punishment imposed	Maximum Punishment Imposed
1	Singhbhum	Geeta Kora	Shri K.K. Mishra CJM Ranchi, Complaint Case no. 2/2012 Lalpur PS, Pending	Under Section 276 of the Income Tax Act, 1961 Failure to make Payment or deliver returns or statement or allow inspection.			

*In the case of election to Council of States or election to Legislative Council by MLAs, mention the election concerned in place of name of constituency.

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1	Khunti	Arjun Munda	Smt. Nutan Ekka SpI. JMFC, MP, MLA, Civil Court Ranchi, Dhurwa PS Case no. 107/2023 Pending	Allegation for Participating in a public protest against the state government. Sec. 147, 148, 188, 109, 353, 332, 427, 323			

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1	Loharadaga	Samir Oraon	Smt. Nutan Ekka Spl. JMFC, MP, MLA, Civil Court Ranchi, Dhurwa PS Case no. 107/2023, Pending	Allegation for Participating in a public protest against the state government. No coercive allowed by Hon'ble Court. Sec. 147, 148, 188, 109, 353, 332, 427, 323			

*In the case of election to Council of States or election to Legislative Council by MLAs, mention the election concerned in place of name of constituency.

Travel Across Enchanted Landscapes

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

Imagine wandering into a world where art reflects the vibrant spirit of nature, capturing its rhythmic seasons and climates with elan. This is the essence of 'Paradise Regained,' an exhibition at Palette Art Gallery which celebrated Earth Day with a stunning display of landscape. In a harmonious blend of acclaim for nature and artistic mastery, the title of the exhibition draws inspiration from renowned English poet John Milton's epic poem by the same name; indeed, a fitting tribute to Earth Month in April. Curator Uma Nair explains the choice, stating, "April is Earth Month, and landscapes are the most important part of the Earth. 'Paradise Regained' thus becomes a powerful symbol, not only honouring the artistic legacy but also emphasising the critical role landscapes play in our world." The exhibition featured works by 10 exceptional artists, each offering a unique perspective on the beauty and importance of landscapes. It was in fact a symphony of artistic interpretations. Each artist, with his or her unique style and vision, came together to paint a mesmerizing portrait of nature in all its splendour. Sanam Narayanan's work invites us into a fantastical realm. His paintings, meticulously crafted on canvas with rice paper as the base, depict houses adorned with Kerala's verdant foliage. The technique of pointillism is used to create a captivating sense of depth and detail, highlighting the soil conditions and the ethereal mist that seem to cling to the trees. This interplay of imagination and reality creates a truly magical experience. Umesh PK's landscapes are



incomparable odes to nature's multilayered beauty. His brushstrokes transport us to a world where nature thrives, and constantly remind us of power to captivate. His pieces are a subtle testimony to the delicate balance between humans and nature, an stark pointer to the connection we humans often tend to overlook or forget. Paramjit Singh, a veteran artist with over six decades of experience, showcases his love for nature with vibrant oil paintings. His landscapes are pathways that draw the viewers in and invites them to explore a kingdom in which flowers reign supreme. Each piece reflects a lifetime dedicated to the artistic exploration of the natural world. The beauty of 'Paradise Regained' is transcendental and is etched in one's memory beyond the initial visual impact. Each artist offers a window to his or her creative process and evokes artistic emotions through art. Sanket Viramgami's intricate miniature landscapes offer a glimpse into the future world, like postcards from an imagined future. Jyodip Acharjee presents a stark contrast

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



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

Kumar emphasises that his artwork serves as a resource for him, a way to process and express his inner world. He finds a sense of freedom in the creative process, stating, "I never make art by keeping in mind that everyone would have to like it." His primary motivation is to create art that resonates with him, hoping it will connect with others as well. Uma Nair's vision as a curator takes centre stage in 'Paradise Regained,' as her discerning eye for talent and craft come through in her exhibition that about the very essence of nature. Through an insightful walk-through, she acts as a guide, enriching the visitor's experience with each piece. Her discerning eye reveals every artist's inspiration and the deeper meaning informing their landscapes, allowing viewers to appreciate not just the art, but also the emotional depth that informs each piece of poetry. 'Paradise Regained' serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of appreciating and protecting our planet, each piece a masterpiece in its own right, offering visitors a chance to experience the wonder of landscapes through the unique lens of artistic expression. This exhibition is truly a celebration of Mother Earth where one can immerse oneself and draw lessons from the fact that Earth Day is not just another Day; it is a call for action for each one of us, every day, a chance to celebrate and protect the paradise we have been blessed with. Only by appreciating its beauty, understanding its complexities, and taking steps towards its preservation, can we ensure a healthier planet for ourselves and future generations. Photos: Pankaj Kumar

AN ARTIST FINDS SOLACE IN NATURE

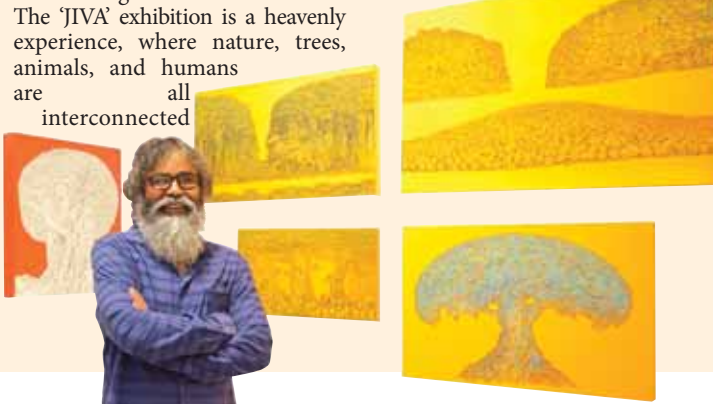
Ompal Sanswal's solo Exhibition JIVA reflects his unwavering commitment to preserve nature



BY SAKSHI PRIYA

Renowned for his exquisite artistry, National Award-winning artist Ompal Sanswal's solo exhibition, JIVA is a mesmerizing journey into the heart of nature. Featuring around 60 of Ompal's paintings, this marks his first solo outing after a hiatus of 15 years. Each piece of art in the gallery feels like a shower of rainbows, with every stage of colour highlighted, showcasing the artist's unparalleled skill and artistic vision. It serves as a poignant reminder of the beauty and importance of our natural surroundings, particularly as the world observed Earth Month last month. Each artwork evokes a profound connection to nature, reminding us of the beauty that the artist has captured. It's akin to sitting in a peaceful forest, listening to the gentle chirping of birds — a hall full of paintings that truly lives up to the title of 'Meditations on Trees'. In his meticulously crafted paintings, the long roots and branches heavy with leaves take on various shapes, telling different stories — some mythological, others resembling human-like figures with eyes, nose, and mouth. Each painting reflects the deep bond between Ompal and his mother, evoking a sense of nostalgia and connection. Curated by renowned art historian and scholar Uma Nair, the exhibition was hosted by Black Cube Gallery for its debut at Bikaner House. Uma Nair's eyes for art never fail to impress, showcasing each painting in its true essence, beyond mere visual appeal. Her ability to highlight the intricate details and deeper meanings embedded in each artwork elevates the exhibition to a whole new level. The timing of the exhibition during Earth Month in April adds to its significance. Sanya Malik, the director of Black Cube Gallery, has played a pivotal role in bringing this exhibition to life. Her keen eye for detail and her dedication to presenting Sanswal's paintings in the most captivating manner have truly enhanced the overall experience of 'JIVA'. As the world celebrates Earth Month, this exhibition serves as a poignant reminder of the beauty and importance of our natural surroundings.

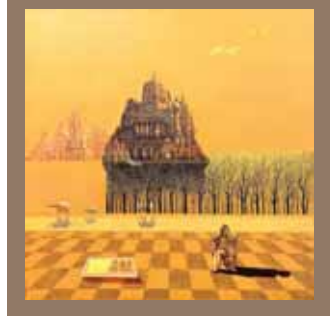
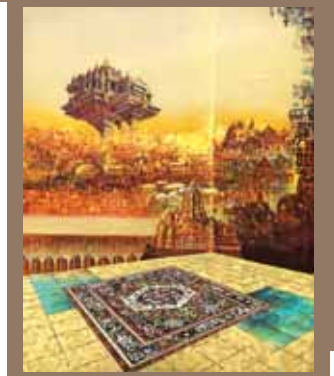
The acrylic, pen and ink on canvas, and watercolor pieces are striking for their intricate treatment and vibrant colors. They beautifully represent the connection between humans and trees, offering an immersive impact on viewers. Ompal's 15 years of paintings depict his journey of getting lost in his own world of art, where trees are not just subjects but extensions of his being, evoking beautiful stories. It's a meditation not just for him but for all visitors who stand in awe of his work, appreciating each piece. In a conversation with the artist Ompal, he shared that his mother is his greatest inspiration. Growing up surrounded by trees and forests near his hometown, he drew inspiration from the stories and environment around him. For Ompal, painting trees and nature, and even humans, is a form of meditation, deeply involving him in the process of creating art. His paintings, deeply rooted in humanity and nature, carry a special message to love and preserve trees and nature—plant as many as you can and save our planet. The 'JIVA' exhibition by Ompal Sanswal is not just a collection of paintings but a profound reflection of the artist's soul and his deep-rooted connection with nature. Through his meticulous artistry, Sanswal transports viewers into a world where trees are not mere subjects but living beings, each with its own story to tell. His paintings, with their intricate details and vibrant colors, evoke a sense of tranquility and harmony, inviting us to contemplate our relationship with the natural world. 'JIVA' is not just an exhibition—it's a journey, a meditation, and a celebration of our deep-seated connection with nature. It urges us to cherish and preserve our environment for generations to come, echoing the artist's message of love and respect for trees and nature. Photos: Pankaj Kumar



A SURREAL JOURNEY THROUGH TIME AND IMAGINATION

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

Step into a world where art tells stories, and dreams come to life. Kumar Vikas Saxena's latest exhibition, 'It makes me wonder,' is a magical journey through time and imagination. Each painting is like a window to a different world, inviting you to explore and discover. Drawing inspiration from history and culture, Saxena's art blends reality with dreams, that is unique and captivating. 'It Makes Me Wonder,' is a series of paintings that explores the human subconscious through a surrealistic lens. Each painting is a visual narrative of history and culture, seamlessly weaving together elements of the past and present, taking viewers on a breathless journey through time. The well-balanced colours of yellow and brown, coupled with the rustic feel of the theme, evoke a sense of time travel to ancient civilizations. Saxena's solo exhibition is a historical and an immersive experience through a series of thought-provoking paintings. Each artwork feels like a pathway to a history book, every piece discovering its own historical



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

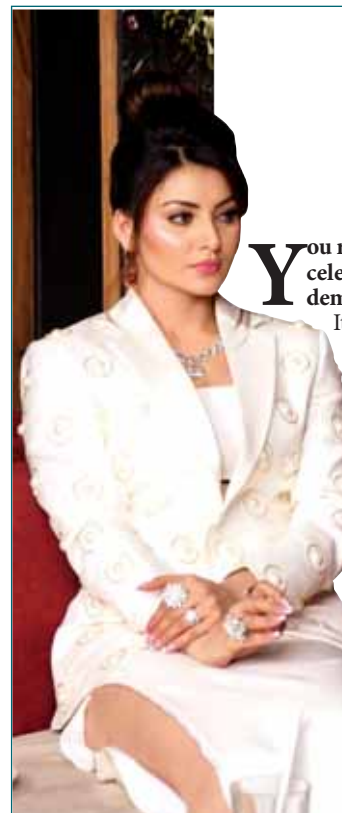
architectural styles, creating a harmonious blend that resonates with his love for ancient architecture. His paintings are not mere depictions of buildings; they are monuments to the human spirit, testaments to our capacity for greatness and our quest for meaning. Saxena's childhood spent in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, where his home environment was full of art, is reflected in his solo exhibition. His love for nature, nurtured during his solitary moments in the lush pine forests of the mountains, is evident in every piece of art. Each painting captures the beauty of nature in the raw, a textured rawness that retains its innocence. Saxena's art is a tribute to his sense

of freedom. He does not believe in imposing his thoughts on his viewers, preferring instead to let them interpret his artwork in their own way. "I don't give titles to my paintings because I don't want to impose my thoughts," he says adding, "I want people to think whatever they want to think of my artwork." This approach has resulted in a body of work that is both personal and universal, inviting viewers to embark on their own journey of discovery. In a conversation the artist revealed that his main source of inspiration is his love for ancient architecture. "I love creating art that is mostly in a rustic form, which takes me into history whenever I go to any historic place," he says, emphasising that, "I want to live in that moment, as if I was there at that time." He expressed a desire to create art that not only reflects the past but also speaks to the present and the future. His paintings are a testament to his belief that the future is built upon the foundations of the past, and he seeks to celebrate the timeless beauty of heritage while embracing the dynamism of progress. In the words of Kumar Vikas Saxena, "Every piece of art resonates with a dream within a dream, the mesmerizing art that allows us to get lost in the fantasy world. Each piece of artwork takes you on a journey to a fascinating

wonderland, a reality world that makes you think of the past and the future." Saxena's exhibition is a testament to the power of art to inspire, provoke thought, and ignite our imagination. The exhibition showcases Saxena's excellence in creating a world that captivates everyone who views it, inviting them to lose themselves in his artwork. The paintings are evidence of his artistic vision, showcasing a world that seamlessly blends mankind's history and civilization with each artwork telling a unique story of balance between man and nature. 'It Makes Me Wonder' is a dreamlike experience, transporting viewers to a world that is both familiar and unknown. Saxena's works are a testament to his ability to create a sense of wonder inviting viewers to get lost in the fantasy world he has created that transports you to a world where time stands still and imagination knows no bounds. So take a moment to immerse yourself in the timeless wonder of Saxena's art and let your imagination soar. It is a beautiful journey through history, mankind, and nature, inviting viewers to explore the beauty of the past and the potential of the future. His artwork is a gift to the world, and it reminds us of the power of creativity to transform our lives and our world.

Balancing professional and civic duties

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



You recently cast your vote. How important is it for celebrities to actively participate in the democratic process?
It is very important. I was the first person in the queue to cast my vote at 6:45 am to focus as it is our birthright, and similarly for responsible Indian citizen. At the same time as artists, we inspire today's generation, so it is very important for all of us to set a great and positive example. I feel the more youth participate in the electoral process, the better the result for our country and nation.
What challenges did you face breaking into Bollywood as an outsider, and how did you overcome them?
I believe people are familiar with my journey, including my background, the titles I have won, and my filmography. I feel the power and love of my audiences, which has made the entire journey great. I am grateful and blessed by the kind of love I have received on social media. I

visited a blind school in Uttarakhand for some Urvashi Rautela Foundation work, and the response was beautiful.
Vigdiyan Heeran with Honey Singh has generated a lot of excitement. What drew you to this project, and what can audiences expect from it?
Yes, it has received a lot of love. Even though the video was short, I being a part of the legendary and cult song 'Love Dose', 'Vigdiyan Heeran' instantly became a hit the moment it was announced. It's a great track, part two 'Love Dose' after 10 years. There will be a part three as well as people love me and Honey's pairing. They have an emotional connection with us, and fans love us together. It's all about the love from the people

and the fondness for Honey Singh.
There's a great back-and-forth energy between you and Honey Singh in the video. How was it working with him again?
My experience working with Honey Singh was amazing and fantastic. But I really want to ask Honey Singh about his working experience with me. Next time, I will definitely meet him and ask as I really want to know.
Finally, there is a lot of buzz about your stunning palace-like home in Uttarakhand, reportedly valued at Rs 25 crore. Why has it taken so long to complete?
It is a beautiful property, and generally, amazing and beautiful things take time to build.

Whether it's a house, property, or even the Ram Mandir, it takes time to construct. It will be ready soon, and I will definitely do a housewarming soon.
As a public figure, you often face both praise and criticism on social media. How do you handle negative comments?
I don't let success get to my head, and I don't let negative comments affect me either. They are just momentary things for me. I believe in improving myself and keeping things simple. I focus on making myself better and don't really pay attention to negative comments.
Looking back at your journey so far, what would you say has

been the most defining moment of your career, and why?
This is a difficult question for me, but I believe there isn't just one defining moment. Meeting the Prime Minister of Israel stands out to me. I gifted him the 'Bhagavad Gita' and had a two-hour conversation with him and my family. He is a very powerful political leader and one of the most influential people in the world. Additionally, being the youngest judge in the history of Miss Universe was another defining moment for me.
What are your thoughts on the current music scene in India, and how do you see it evolving in the future?

I believe that old songs had a different charm, and their lyrics were very meaningful. However, today, I feel more inclined towards old cinema and songs from the 80s and 70s. I think that era was great, and I prefer the music from that time.
How do you balance your personal life with your professional commitments, especially in an industry as demanding as Bollywood?
I believe it's all about balance. Despite the demanding nature of the industry, I try my best to balance my personal and professional life. For example, I recently voted and also made sure to spend quality time with my family.



KKR look to iron out flaws against off colour MI

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

With six wins in nine games giving them 12 points and the second position in the IPL points table, a berth in the playoffs looks within the grasp of two-time winners KKR. But the Shreyas Iyer-led side will have to find consistency across departments and avoid any slip-ups in order to make it to the final four. Each of their three losses have come in the last six games for KKR, who were at the receiving end of a record run chase by Punjab Kings but did well to bounce back with a seven-wicket thrashing of Delhi Capitals.

With the bat, KKR's requisite firepower in the ranks entwined with an ultra-aggressive approach has delivered the goods more often than not but it is their bowling which needs improvement.

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

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

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

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

For Mumbai Indians, the race to the IPL playoffs seems lost even though the five-time winners have five more games to play. Even if Mumbai Indians win each of these, they can only get to 16 points and somewhere in the middle of the points table - not necessarily challenging those who have been consistently good.



Jasprit Bumrah (14 wickets) and Gerald Coetzee (13) have been MI's best bets with the ball but despite their impressive showing, the batters' collective failure has resulted in the team's underwhelming season.

Tilak Varma has been MI's best batter with 343 runs, including three fifties this IPL, but his performances have not been enough to hide the failings of others.

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

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

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

Mumbai Indians' under-fire skipper Hardik Pandya has neither dazzled with the ball nor the bat after a long injury lay-off. But the fact that he

finds himself in the Indian side as vice-captain for the World Cup should motivate him to turn things around.

TEAMS (FROM):

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

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

OTHER SPORTS

Füllkrug fires Dortmund to 1-0 win over PSG

AP ■ DORTMUND

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

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

"It's not the first time that I've tried to stick the ball in at the near post this season. This

time it worked out and I'm even happier that it's in such an important game," Füllkrug said. The win gives Dortmund a narrow advantage before the teams play again in the second leg in Paris next Tuesday, when the French champion will need to overturn the result if it's going to capture Europe's biggest prize before Kylian Mbappé leaves the club.

PSG is under pressure to finally win to the Champions League to justify more than a decade of huge investment from its Qatari owners.

Dortmund's win ensured it qualified for the tournament next season and it gives the

Bundesliga five teams in the expanded tournament. Dortmund is assured of finishing at least fifth.

Roared on by most of the 81,365 fans present, including the famed "yellow wall" behind one of the goals, Dortmund made the busier start and maintained its

intensity for the whole game. The home team ran 119.7 kilometers - almost 10 more than the visitors.

Defender Lucas Hernández went off injured after trying to stop Füllkrug from scoring. It looked like Hernández suffered a left leg injury.

PSG pushed hardest early in

the second half, when Mbappé hit the right post before Achraf Hakimi struck the left post.

Gregor Kobel saved Mbappé's next effort and Dortmund survived the pressure.

Füllkrug went on to miss further good chances for the German team, while Marquinhos made a crucial

block to deny Julian Brandt late on.

"It would have been nice if we could have made our counterattacks count to get a second goal at the end," Dortmund veteran Mats Hummels said.

"But now we have to come through in Paris."



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

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings head coach Stephen Fleming admitted that seamer Deepak Chahar's latest injury "doesn't look good" but he is hoping for a positive report from the franchise's medical team ahead of the business phase of the ongoing IPL.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Talking about the demanding

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

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

"We also had a good start in the (first) six overs before things became difficult. We also tried a few lefties in the form of Dube and (Ravindra) Jadeja but we just couldn't get anything through the middle. They bowled really well, they got good purchase and held onto it. We just got stifled through the middle, which prevented us from getting a score of 180," he said.

With a low score to defend, Fleming was impressed with the commitment and performance shown by English pacer Richard Gleeson, who made his debut last night.

"Richard Gleeson was good, and it was a positive. Losing Fizz (Mustafizur Rahman) is disappointing."

"Tushar (Deshpande) has a bit of flu going around as well. So, we've had to make a few changes, which is unusual. Again, that's part of it, and we have got the resources," he said.

"Just they haven't had the game time to be really comfortable with their roles and us to be comfortable with a game plan, which we're struggling a little."

Although veteran opener Ajinkya Rahane managed to get to double figures after a lean phase in the last four games, he didn't last beyond a 24-ball 29.

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

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

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

WOMEN HOCKEY TEAM



Salima replaces Savita as skipper

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Mid-fielder Salima Tete on Thursday replaced veteran goalkeeper Savita Punia as captain of the 24-strong Indian women's hockey squad for the Belgium and England legs of the FIH Pro League starting later this month.

Navneet Kaur has been named her deputy for the tour.

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

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

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

Barring three changes, the squad was the same that took part in the Bhubaneswar and Rourkela legs of the Pro League in February this year.

Defender Gurjit Kaur, mid-fielders Sonika and Nisha and

striker Beauty Dungdung have been dropped and were replaced by Mahima Chaudhary, Manisha Chauhan, Pretti Dubey and Deepika Soreng.

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

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

During the London leg, the team will take on Great Britain and Germany.

India are currently placed sixth in the FIH Pro League table with eight points from as many matches.

Salima was recently honoured with the prestigious Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr Award for Player of The Year in the women's category at the sixth Hockey India Annual Awards.

The goalkeeping responsibilities will rest with Savita and Bichu Devi Kharibam, while the defensive line-up includes Nikki Pradhan, Udita, Ishika Chaudhary, Monika, Jyoti Chhattri and Mahima.

The midfield will be marshalled by Salima, Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Navneet, Neha, Jyoti, Baljeet Kaur, Manisha and Lalremsiami.

This may be published in Newspaper and TV from the day following the last date for withdrawal of candidature and up to two days before the date of poll

Format C-1
(for candidate to publish in Newspaper)

Declaration about criminal cases

(As per the judgment dated 25111 September, 2018, of Hon'ble Supreme Court in WP (Civil) No.536 of 2011 (Public Interest Foundation & Ors. Vs. Union of India & Anr.)

Name and address of candidate : Samir Oraon, R/O-Vill. Bishunpur Karamtoli
PO+PS- Bishunpur, District- GUMLA, Jharkhand-835231

Name of political party : BHARATIYA JANTA PARTY

Name of Election : LOK-SABHA- 2024

Name of Constituency : LOHARDAGA

I SAMIR ORAON, a candidate for the above-mentioned election, declare for public information the following details about my criminal antecedents:

(A) Pending criminal cases

Sl. No.	Name of Court	Case No. and dated	Status of case (s)	Sections of Act concerned and brief description of offence(s)
1	Special Court MP MLA, Civil Court, Ranchi, Jharkhand	Dhurwa PS Case no. 107 /2023 Dt. 11-04-2023	Pending	147, 148, 188, 109, 353, 332, 427, 323 of IPC. Allegation for Participating in the public protest against the State Government.

(B) Pending criminal cases

Sl. No.	Name of Court	Case No. and dated	Status of case (s)	Sections of Act concerned and brief description of offence(s)