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ED stonewall for Kejriwal

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Jailed Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who has sought 'relief' from the Supreme Court to enable him to campaign for the Lok Sabha polls, faced opposition from the Enforcement Directorate (ED), which is probing the AAP leader's role in a multi-crore excise policy. In a fresh affidavit filed on Thursday in the apex court, the ED opposed interim bail for Kejriwal, stating that the right to campaign for elections was "not fundamental" and that no political leader has ever been granted interim bail for campaigning, even if they are not contesting polls. The move comes a day before the Supreme Court is set to hear Kejriwal's interim bail plea in the case on Friday. Sources also said the ED is preparing to file a chargesheet in the liquor scam in which Kejriwal has been named as the kingpin. Interestingly, the ED said such an approach would incentivise every criminal to become a politician and being in campaign mode throughout the year while committing rampant offences and violations of laws in the country. "Around 123 elections have taken place in the past three years and if interim bail is granted for election campaigning then no politician could be arrested



File Photo: PTI

and kept in judicial custody since elections take place all year round," the ED said. It said there are numerous examples where politicians contested elections in judicial custody and some have even won but were never granted interim bail on this ground. "It is relevant to note that the right to campaign for an election is neither a fundamental right nor a constitutional right and not even a legal right," the agency said. It said to its knowledge, "no political leader has been

granted interim bail for campaigning even though he is not the contesting candidate. Even a contesting candidate is not granted interim bail if he is in custody for his own campaigning". "In light of the above, any special concession in favour of the arrestee enlarging him on interim bail for campaigning in general election would, in the humble submission of the respondent, amount to anathema to the rule of law and equality and create a precedent which would

unscrupulous politicians to commit crimes, avoid investigation under the garb of one election or the other be it municipal election, or panchayat election or Assembly election or general election and thereafter upon being arrested, seek interim bail to campaign for one election or the other thereby creating two separate classes in the count viz. ordinary people who are bound by the rule of law as well as the laws of the country and politicians who can seek exemption from the laws in

the hope of securing interim bail to campaign for elections. In this regard, it may be noted that in the past five years, 123 elections have been held in various states in India," it said. The ED said in a federal structure, no set of election is more significant than another and therefore, every politician at every level would argue that if he is not let out on interim bail, he would suffer irreversible consequences. "Under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act alone presently there are many politicians who are in judicial custody and their cases are examined by competent courts upholding their custody. "There must be several political leaders in judicial custody throughout the country in non-PMLA offences. "There is no reason why a special prayer for a special treatment by the petitioner be acceded to". "Grant of interim bail merely for political campaigning would militate against and will be discriminatory to the rule of equality as work/business/ profession or activity of every citizen is equally important to him or her. It would not be possible to hold that work of a small farmer or a small trader is any less important than political campaigning of a political leader who admittedly is not contesting.



File Photo: PTI

Testing times ahead for BJP in Haryana

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

Just a few days ahead of the sixth phase of Lok Sabha elections in Haryana, the BJP-led Nayab Singh Saini Government has been trying to keep its flock together, while there has been a demand for a floor test by JJP leader Dushyant Chautala, who not very long ago was a partner with the BJP in the Manohar Lal Khattar Government. While Dushyant wrote to Governor Bandaru Dattatreya seeking a floor-test for the present Haryana Government to prove its majority on floor of the House, the Congress, which had earlier demanded the imposition of President's rule and early Assembly elections in the State, also sought time from the Governor for a meeting with a party delegation. This comes days after three Independent MLAs withdrew support from the

BJP Government, extending support to the Congress. However, Saini maintained that his Government is not in trouble. He told reporters in Karnal that his Government won a confidence vote in March and "if it comes to seeking the trust vote, I will do it again when the time comes". The BJP currently has 40 MLAs in the Assembly, shy of the majority mark of 45 in the now 88-member House. Technically, the BJP Government has the support of 43 MLAs (including Independents) now, though it claimed on Tuesday that four JJP MLAs too may offer "tactical assistance if needed", taking its strength to 47. The JJP had pulled out of the BJP coalition Government in March 2024. Of the JJP's 10 MLAs, at least six have distanced themselves from Chautala.

Russia says US poking nose into India affairs

PTI ■ MOSCOW

The US has not yet provided any reliable evidence of the involvement of Indian citizens in the murder plot of a Khalistani terrorist in that country, Russia has said, as it accused Washington of meddling in India's domestic affairs and the ongoing elections. In November last year, US federal prosecutors charged Indian national Nikhil Gupta with working with an Indian Government employee in the foiled plot to kill Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. Pannun, wanted in India on terror charges, holds dual citizenship of the US and Canada. He has been designated as a terrorist by the Union Home Ministry under the anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, when asked to respond to a report by *The Washington Post* claiming that India is trying to adopt the policies as Russia and Saudi Arabia, said, "According to the information we have, Washington has not yet provided any reliable evidence of the involvement of Indian citizens in the preparation of the murder of a certain GS Pannun.

Sandeshkhali rape victim turns 'hostile'



SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

After Saturday's "fake video", on Thursday, emerged the 'fake FIR' in the Sandeshkhali mass rape case, threatening to dent and disturb the BJP's soaring graph in the Basirhat parliamentary constituency. Things tended to boomerang against the saffron outfit, even as the Trinamool Congress' sting teams worked overtime to turn the Sandeshkhali rape-and-land-grab cases upside down. Some women on Thursday said the police complaint that they were made to sign on blank sheets were not about rape but about non-payment of hundred days' work schemes. "We were tricked into signing the blank papers ... we were told that the signed papers would be used to claim the 100-days' work dues ... we had no idea that rape stories would be written

there. We discovered later that rape complaints had been lodged in our names. This is a blatant lie," they said. The woman said the incident took place on the day the National Commission for Women visited the island. "A woman called Piyali who is an outsider did it all ... we told them that we had not received money as part of the 100 days' job scheme. But in the name of getting us to write a complaint to that effect she made us sign on a blank sheet," she said. The BJP immediately rose up to control damage by saying the TMC is threatening the women to change their versions. "Earlier they showed a fake and paid video and now they are coming up with this ... The leadership will have to say what has to be said but it is clear that it is the same TMC which has been threatening the villagers into submission for the past 10 years once again have started doing so ... though I haven't seen it ... if the video is true then the women are being threatened to contradict their statements," a local BJP leader at Basirhat said on conditions of anonymity. State BJP leader Priyanka Tibrewal asked, "What the TMC was doing for the past several months ... why they have suddenly brought this fake video and fake FIR issue ... this is an afterthought ... but the damage has already been done ... earlier they said the women were lying and now they are saying they were tricked to lie."

INDIA Bloc to meet EC over turnout figures



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Leaders of the Opposition INDIA Bloc are likely to meet the Election Commission on Friday over their demand to promptly release the absolute voter turnout figures in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls after each phase. The Opposition leaders will also raise the issue of alleged "use of religious symbols" by the BJP in its campaign, sources added. INDIA Bloc parties, including the Congress, Trinamool Congress and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), have written to the poll panel separately so far, expressing concern over the alleged "delay" in the release of the voter turnout data in the first two phases.

Various Opposition parties have also approached the poll panel over speeches made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other BJP leaders during poll campaigns, alleging that the Model Code of Conduct had been violated. Amid the Opposition's allegations, the poll watchdog had asserted that booth-wise data of the "actual number of votes polled" is available to the candidates soon after the voting ends. Opposition parties have also sought the details of the number of voters who exercised their franchise. In a statement issued last week, the EC also said it attaches "due importance" to the timely release of voter turnout figures after each phase of the poll, and said not just constituency, but booth-wise data of the actual number of votes polled is available with the candidates, which is a statutory requirement. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge had written to leaders of various Opposition parties on the issue of alleged "discrepancies" in the voting data released by the EC. In his letter, Kharge urged that the INDIA Bloc leaders to "collectively, unitedly and unequivocally" raise their voice on the issue. The EC officially shared the turnout figure for the first two phases of Lok Sabha polls on April 30.

HOLY DAYS AHEAD



Kedarnath temple being decorated ahead of its opening for the 'Char Dham Yatra' in Rudrapurag PTI

Deadlock over, Air India Express will take to the skies again

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After two and a half days of stalemate, Air India Express and the crew reached a middle ground on Thursday, putting an end to the suffering of hundreds of flyers. The Air India Express cabin crew has decided to withdraw strike and join back for duty after the airline assured to look into all the issues raised by the cabin crew. Besides, the airline has agreed to withdraw the termination letters issued to 25 cabin crew and the management will review the cases as per service regulations, they added. The Tata Group-owned airline has cancelled more than 170 flights since Tuesday night after the cabin crew started

reporting sick to protest against the alleged mismanagement at the airline. Following the cancellation of several flights and the inconvenience to passengers, the Government had to get involved. At the request of the Regional Labour Commissioner Ashok Perumalla, a meeting was held on Thursday between Air India Express Union and the airline CEO to reach a solution. Apparently, after the meeting, a middle ground has been reached and the strike will end, much to the relief of the travellers. In the email notice of termination it sent to the affected employees, the airline added that the widespread sick leave "violated the Air



Air India and other planes parked at the airport in Mumbai on Thursday. Air India Express on Thursday cancelled 85 flights or around 23 per cent of the total daily capacity as the disruptions due to the cabin crew shortage continue. Air India will operate services on 20 of its routes to minimise inconvenience to passengers PTI

India Express Limited Employees' Service Rules as are applicable" in addition to breaching the relevant laws. The emailed statement followed Air India Express CEO Aloke Singh's announcement that the airline was curtailing flight services until May 13 as a result of the cabin crew crisis. A section of the cabin crew

has alleged mismanagement and lack of equality in the treatment of staff. A conciliation process is happening under the Industrial Disputes Act after a union representing a section of the Air India Express cabin crew had filed a complaint before the labour department last year. Room sharing, lack of proper support, revised salary structure and alleged differential treatment of experienced crew members of Air India Express are among the issues being flagged by the striking cabin crew. On Wednesday, the Civil Aviation Ministry sought a report from Air India Express on the cancellation of flights and also asked the airline to resolve the issues

promptly. Discontent has been brewing among a section of staff at Air India Express since the start of the process to merge AIX Connect, formerly AirAsia India, with itself. Regardless of the actions taken by Air India Express, such as the dismissal of employees who went on mass leave without notice, it is ultimately the passengers who bear the brunt. The situation with Air India Express is even more dire, as many passengers are finding out about flight cancellations only after completing security checks. Soon after 30 crew members were sacked for staging mass sick leave, the Air India Express on Thursday announced that the airline

has cancelled 85 flights as flight operations were disrupted by shortage of cabin crew members. "We will be operating 283 flights today. We have mobilised all resources and Air India will support us by operating on 20 of our routes. However, 85 of our flights stand cancelled and we urge our guests booked to fly with us to check if their flight is affected by the disruption before heading to the airport," said the airline in the statement. In case their flight is cancelled or delayed beyond three hours, the Air India Express said the passengers may opt for a full refund or reschedule to a later date without any fees.

Team inspects EVM facilities, 24x7 monitoring through CCTV

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR:
With the Lok Sabha elections 2024 looming, the meticulous preparations for the secure handling of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) are underway. District Election Officer Ananya Mittal and Senior Superintendent of Police Kishore Kaushal conducted an extensive inspection of the EVM dispatch/receiving centers and warehouses to ensure all necessary arrangements are in place. Accompanied by Deputy Development Commissioner Manish Kumar, City SP Mukesh Lunayat, Rural SP Rishabh Garg, and other administrative and police officials, Mittal and Kaushal meticulously reviewed the facilities at Co-operative College, LBSM College, and Kitadih. The inspection focused on various aspects, including the route plan, communication plan, security arrangements, and traffic management. Special attention was given to the safe maintenance of EVMs in the strong rooms, 24x7 CCTV monitoring, and barricading to ensure utmost security. Following the inspection, necessary guidelines were issued to the officials present on-site. Emphasis was placed on adhering to Election Commission guidelines regarding the handling and transportation of EVMs. It was mandated that only vehicles equipped with GPS should be used for the shifting



of EVMs. Furthermore, stringent instructions were given to seal the strong room securely, maintain a logbook of personnel entering the premises, and ensure round-the-clock surveillance through CCTV cameras. During the visit to the EVM warehouse, the shifting team was instructed to strictly follow the prescribed protocols. Additionally, magistrates, police officers, and security personnel were directed to prohibit unauthorized access to the strong rooms and maintain updated records of all activities. The meticulous preparations underscore the commitment of the administration and law enforcement authorities to conduct free, fair, and transparent elections. With tight security measures in place, voters can be assured of the integrity of the electoral process. As the nation gears up for the Lok Sabha elections, such proactive measures ensure the smooth conduct of democratic proceedings and uphold the sanctity of the electoral system. After reviewing the safe maintenance of EVMs in the strong room, barricading, 24x7 monitoring by CCTV, security arrangements in the strong room and the entire college campus, parking and smooth traffic arrangements etc., necessary guidelines were given to the officials present on the spot. Also, during the warehouse inspection, information was taken about the arrangements made for shifting of EVMs as per the guidelines of the Election Commission. Also, the shifting team was clearly instructed that EVMs should be shifted only by vehicles equipped with GPS. Instructions were given to seal the lock of the strong room and arrange for 24x7 monitoring through CCTV, to follow the prescribed rules while opening the strong room, etc. The deputed magistrate, police officer and police force were strictly instructed that no unauthorized person should be allowed to enter the strong room located at the dispatch and receiving center, and the log book register of the guard deployed at the strong room should be kept completely updated.

25 candidates in fray for Jamshedpur Lok Sabha seat, one opts out

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR
On the final day of the withdrawal of nominations for the Jamshedpur Lok Sabha parliamentary constituency, one candidate opted out, resulting in a reduction of candidates to 25. Consequently, the requirement for two ballot units arose. To address this, a randomization process for additional ballot units was conducted at the Collectorate Auditorium in Jamshedpur. The event was presided over by District Election Officer Ananya Mittal, alongside Assistant Returning Officers (AROs) from all assembly constituencies and representatives from various political parties. The randomization process was conducted meticulously to ensure fairness and transparency in the allocation of additional ballot units. After careful assessment, additional ballot units were allocated to all 1887 polling stations across the constituency. This step aims to facilitate smooth and efficient voting procedures during the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in Jamshedpur.



Meanwhile, Ananya Mittal conducted surprise inspections of various election-related facilities, including the Postal Ballot Polling Center, Strong Room, media cell, and material cell. During the inspection of the postal ballot polling center at SDO office Dhalbhum and ITDA office, Deputy Development Commissioner Shri Manish Kumar accompanied Shri Mittal. They assessed the facilities, crowd management, and operational procedures, emphasizing the importance of maintaining separate lines for men and women voters and providing assistance through help desks. Furthermore, a thorough examination of the Postal Ballot Strong Room at the Industry Center was conducted to ensure the proper maintenance of postal ballots after voting. In addition to physical inspections, the District Election Officer emphasized the monitoring of social media, paid news, and political advertisements. The media and MCMC cell were directed to coordinate closely with the expenditure cell to enforce strict oversight on election-related expenses. Approval procedures for campaign activities, advertisements, and content dissemination were reiterated, underscoring the importance of transparency and compliance with electoral regulations. During inspections of the material and personnel cells, preparations for polling party materials and overall election conduct were reviewed. Instructions were issued to ensure timely execution of tasks and adherence to election protocols. The District Election Officer's proactive approach underscores the commitment to conducting free, fair, and transparent elections, safeguarding the democratic process in East Singhbhum.

ONGC Bokaro partners with Mission Hospital Durgapur to provide comprehensive treatment

PNS : BOKARO
In a significant move towards enhancing employee welfare, ONGC (Oil and Natural Gas Corporation) has forged a strategic alliance with The Mission Hospital of Durgapur. This collaboration aims to extend top-notch medical facilities to ONGC employees, their dependents, as well as retired personnel and their family members. The formalization of this partnership witnessed the presence of key representatives from both entities. Dr. Aswini Kumar, Senior Medical Officer, and Dr. Shashank Sekhar, Medical Officer, represented ONGC, while The Mission Hospital was represented by Moloy Bhattacharya, Senior General Manager Marketing, Debasish Sen, Regional Business Manager, and Rajiv Singh, Senior Business Development Executive. This initiative underscores ONGC's commitment to prioritizing the health and well-being of its workforce and their loved ones. By aligning with The Mission Hospital, renowned for its excellence in healthcare services, ONGC ensures access to comprehensive medical treatments, including specialized care and advanced diagnostics. Moloy Bhattacharya, expressing his views on the partnership, highlighted the hospital's dedication to delivering high-quality healthcare services. He emphasized the importance of providing ONGC employees and their families with access to state-of-the-art medical facilities conveniently located in Durgapur. This collaboration sets a benchmark in corporate healthcare partnerships, reflecting ONGC's proactive approach towards employee welfare and community engagement.



Newly Developed Green oasis garden in augurated

PNS : BOKARO
The inauguration of the 'Green Oasis Garden,' developed by the C.E.D. department near the Mansa Singh Gate of the Bokaro Steel Plant, was officiated by the Plant Director-in-Charge, B.K. Tiwari. Alongside the garden's opening, DIC Tiwari also planted a commemorative tree on the premises. Present at the event were the Executive Director (Finance & Accounts), Suresh Rangani, the Executive Director (Personnel & Administration, works), Rajan Prasad, and various department heads and divisional chiefs. Notably the garden features a renovated water fountain now transformed into a motorized one, along with the installation of lights and the creation of a water fall, which serves as the centerpiece attraction. Shaligram Singh, Chief General Manager (C.E.D.), highlighted that similar gardens are being constructed and rejuvenated within the plant premises. The transformation of this area into a garden owes much to the significant contribution of Rahul Ranjan, Manager at C.E.D., and other colleagues. Among those present were C.E.D.'s General Manager, R.K. Patro, Assistant General Manager, B. Chandra, Mohd Kashif, P. Minz, A.K. Dheeraj, along with other employees and contract workers of C.E.D.



DEO Bokaro unveils electoral insights



PNS : BOKARO
During a press conference organized at the Collectorate Auditorium, District Electoral Officer Vijaya Jadhav provided information regarding the electoral process. Among those present at the event were Police Superintendent Puja Prakash and other officials. On the final day of withdrawal of nominations from the Giridih Parliamentary Constituency, two candidates, Usha Devi and Puja Kumari, withdrew their names. This leaves a total of 16 candidates in the electoral fray. Election symbols have been allocated to all candidates. Besides the three candidates from recognized national and state political parties, there are candidates from six registered political parties and seven independents. DEO Jadhav, mentioned that due to the increased number of candidates, an additional Ballot Unit (BU) will be deployed at all polling stations, along with supplementary randomization. Furthermore, a second randomization process for polling personnel (Presiding Officer, Polling Officer I, Polling Officer II, and Polling Officer III) has been completed. She informed that the district has a total of 1,801,845 voters, with an addition of 57,564 new voters. Special arrangements have been made to ensure free, fair, and unbiased elections, in line

with the directives from the Election Commission. Webcasting will be conducted at all polling centers, with a dry run scheduled for May 23. General, police, and expenditure observers have arrived in the district to oversee the entire election process. Any issues related to polling centers can be addressed to the concerned officials at the Bokaro Parishad Sabha Hall, B.S. City, from 4 PM to 5 PM. Puja Prakash, the Police Superintendent, assured that an adequate number of security forces will be deployed to ensure peaceful elections. Vigilance is being maintained throughout the district, and prompt actions are being taken to address any issues. Three cases of violations of the Model Code of Conduct have been registered, and appropriate measures are being taken. Also present at the event were Assistant Electoral Officer AC Mumtaz Ansari, Pratibha Kujur, District Public Relations Officer Saket Kumar Pandey and Assistant Public Relations Officer Avinash Kumar Singh, and other officials.

D.A V. Public School illuminates electoral literacy with week-long campaign

R SHARMA : BOKARO
In a bid to cultivate a culture of electoral literacy, D.A V. Public School, Sec-IV, B.S. City orchestrated a week-long awareness campaign culminating in a dynamic "street play" performed at key public venues. Led by Principal Sarbendu Sekhar Kar, the Electoral Literacy Club orchestrated a series of engaging activities within the school premises. Kicking off with a solemn voter's pledge ceremony involving both faculty and staff, the initiative evolved into a diverse range of events, including a poster-writing competition and a captivating street play. Extending their advocacy beyond school boundaries, students brought the message of "Voter's Voting right" to the masses through compelling street plays staged at prominent public locations like Naya More and Chas. Adorned in pristine white uniforms with scarlet scarves, students wielded powerful placards bearing messages like "Each One, Vote One" and "Now or never," garnering positive responses from the public. The inclusivity of the street play, featuring a blend of local dialects, Hindi, and English, ensured accessibility to all segments of society. Principal Kar commended the students' exceptional dedication and acknowledged the collaborative efforts of the Election Commission of India and Sveep coordinators in amplifying the school's initiatives through the #MainBhiElectionAmbassador Campaign.



Failed ISc girl examinees ghaerao DEO in Daltonganj

PNS : DALTONGANJ
A crowd of failed girl examinees of the ISc exams conducted by the JAC in 2024 ghaeraoed the Palamu district education officer Durganand Jha today. The crowd of failed girl examinees comprised two institutions one Government girls plus 2 high school popularly known as KG girls high school and one college YSN Mahila college Daltonganj. A total of 45 girl examinees of KG girls' high school took their ISc exams this year out of which 38 failed. Some girls have failed in one subject, some in two subjects and some in three subjects. As many as 384 girls of the YSN Mahila College wrote their ISc exams this year out of which 171 girls failed, said the professor in charge of the YSN Mahila college Dr Mohini Gupta. Jha said, "38 girls out of 45 failed in ISc exams of the KG girls high school. Many have failed in 3 subjects. Incidentally the girls have failed in science subjects like physics, chemistry, biology and maths, whatever may be their subject combination." Jha said "I have already brought this matter to the notice of the secretary JAC urging him to prevail upon the JAC to take a proper and genuine decision in this regard." The district education officer said the secretary has assured him of taking up this matter with the chairman of the JAC soon. Jha said there is a provision of scrutiny which comes for a fee which a failed examinee has to pay. The professor in charge of the YSN Mahila College Dr Mohini Gupta said that there are many failed girl examinees who have not appeared at all in the internal cum practical exams of the ISc exams and as such their results are bound to be out of the ambit of the pass students.



Tana Bhagats vow to vote for saving democracy and constitution

PNS : LOHARDAGA
Tana Bhagats, followers of Mahatma Gandhi, waving the tricolor in their weekly meeting on Thursday said that lakhs of our ancestors had sacrificed for the independence of India. Only then did we get this freedom. The democracy for which Mahatma Gandhi established and sacrificed his life is being torn apart today. Politics is being done to erase the Constitution given by Baba Saheb and spread hatred in the country. That's why we Tana Bhagat will vote this time to save democracy and the Constitution given by Baba Saheb. When asked, Central Vice President Bijay Tana Bhagat said that they will vote for Congress candidate Sukhdev Bhagat. He said that this time we all Tana Bhagat will vote to save the Constitution, and will vote to save democracy. Will vote to save the country. Central President Tima Tana Bhagat said that the Modi government has increased inflation. Our unemployed youth are not being given jobs. Our water, forests and land are being sold to the capitalists. This time we will vote to save it. Treasurer Dharamshah Tana Bhagat said that this time we will vote for education and employment for our children. Will vote to stop rising inflation. Will vote for women's safety. A large number of Tana Bhagats including Deputy Secretary Shiv Tana Bhagat, Gangi Tana Bhagat, Etwa Tana Bhagat, Bande Tana Bhagat, Jageshwar Tana Bhagat, Sadhu Charan Tana Bhagat, Chaudhary Tana Bhagat, Lakshu Tana Bhagat were present on the occasion.

Chandravanshi community always led the society and country: MLA

PNS : LOHARDAGA
A meeting of All India Year-Old Chandravanshi Chhatriya Mahasabha was held at Amrit Palace Hotel under the chairmanship of Rajendra Verma. Mainly present in the meeting were former National President of Mahasabha cum former Minister Bihar-Jharkhand Ramchandra Chandravanshi, former MLC Praveen Singh, State President of Mahasabha Bajrang Verma, former State President cum National Vice President Ravindra Verma, General Secretary of BJP Lohardaga Rajkumar Verma etc. On the occasion, chief guest Ramchandra Chandravanshi said that people of the society can write history only if they know the history of their society. Chandravanshi works selflessly for the welfare of society and nation. He talked about paying special attention to education and values. Today the need of the hour is that we have to move forward cautiously. So stay organized. Will move forward. He said that he will donate one lakh rupees from his own funds for Dharamshala and also said that support should be given to those under whose leadership the country is developing. Former MLC Praveen Kumar Singh said that Chhatriya gives to the society and never asks.

Anupma to raise voice for Advocate Protection Act if elected

PANKAJ : DHANBAD
Congress candidate Anupma Singh on Thursday tried to garner support from the lawyers community as part of her election campaign here in Dhanbad and assured to raise voice for Advocates Protection Act if elected. She reached Dhanbad Bar Association premises along with senior advocate and former congress district president BP Singh and visited almost each and every table of advocates on either side of the court road and sought support for herself. She also met senior advocates too in person. Talking to the media later she said, advocates have raised their voice for implementation of the Advocate Protection Act. If elected would certainly raise voice in Parliament for implementation of this act. Besides, I would try to root out basic problems faced by advocates here in association. Welcoming the Congress nominee Dhanbad Bar Association president AK Sahay said that Anupma is first candidate contesting 2024 Lok Sabha who reached Bar and tried to get problems faced by advocates. We too have raised issues of advocate protection as it directly relates to the central government, he said. Several senior members of the Bar were present while she addressed media persons in the Bar association hall.

Rampant corruption, migration, lawlessness hindering growth in Jharkhand: Sitharaman

PNS : RANCHI

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Thursday that Jharkhand is grappling with widespread corruption, migration, and lawlessness, emphasizing the urgency for a change in governance in the State.

Addressing a gathering here on Thursday, Sitharaman dismissed claims of neglect towards Jharkhand, stating that such assertions lacked merit. She lamented that despite being the homeland of tribal hero Birsa Munda and blessed with abundant natural resources, Jharkhand has fallen victim to pervasive corruption, migration, and lawlessness, while lacking a favourable environment for industrial growth.

Highlighting the potential of Eastern India to drive national economic growth, Sitharaman stressed the importance of reviving



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks during the Interactive Session on Eastern India-Engine of growth for 'Viksit Bharat' in Ranchi on Thursday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

industrial sectors. She underscored the significance of adding value to mineral resources, noting that Jharkhand holds a substantial 40 per cent share of the country's mineral wealth.

Sitharaman pointed out the decline in Jharkhand's

ease-of-doing-business ranking, attributing it to the prevailing disorder. She asserted that improved law and order would attract more investments to the state, reiterating the necessity for governance reform.

Refuting opposition claims of neglect by the central government, Sitharaman cited significant budget allocations, including a record Rs 7,200 crore for rail projects in Jharkhand in the 2024-25 fiscal year.

During the interactive session themed 'Eastern India - Engine of Growth for Developed India', Sitharaman also remarked on demographic shifts in certain areas of Jharkhand, attributing them to "infiltration."

Behtar Jharkhand initiative and the Federation of Jharkhand Chamber of Commerce and Industry jointly organised an interactive session titled 'Eastern India - Engine of Growth for



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with State BJP President Babul Marandi during the Interactive Session on Eastern India-Engine of growth for 'Viksit Bharat' in Ranchi on Thursday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

Viksit Bharat' here on Thursday.

Former Chief Minister Babul Marandi along with

prominent personalities from various fields like civil society, healthcare, academia, arts, entrepreneurship,

and local governance were also present on the occasion.

The theme of the event

underscored a vision of leveraging the potential of the eastern region of India to drive the holistic development and progress of the nation as a whole. The wealth of natural and human resources, coupled with its vibrant cultural heritage, positions Eastern India as a significant catalyst for economic growth, innovation, and sustainable development.

Marandi praised the Behtar Jharkhand initiative for its instrumental role in shaping a development strategy that will benefit the people of Jharkhand in the long run. He commended the efforts of the Central Government, specifically mentioning the Vishwakarma Scheme which provides end-to-end support to artisans and craftspeople who work with their hands and tools. He also highlighted the importance of learning from various tribal communities across India and suggested

93 candidates file nominations for 6th phase

PNS : RANCHI

Additional Chief Electoral Officer Dr Neha Arora today said that after the withdrawal of nominations for the sixth phase of elections, there are now 93 candidates left in the 4 parliamentary constituencies.

Two people withdrew their names from Giridih parliamentary constituency on Thursday. In this way, now 16 candidates are left in the election fray. No one has withdrawn his nomination from Dhanbad parliamentary constituency. A total of 25 candidates are in the election fray from here. Even from Ranchi parliamentary con-

stituency, no candidate has withdrawn his nomination. A total of 27 candidates are in the fray from here, whereas one candidate from Janshedpur parliamentary constituency has withdrawn his candidature. Now there are 25 candidates left. Deputy Chief Electoral Officer was holding a press conference at Nirvachan Sadan, Dhurva on Thursday.

She said that even on the third day of nomination in the seventh phase of elections, not a single candidate from Dumka (reserved for Scheduled Tribe) parliamentary constituency has filed his nomination. So far 3 people have filed nomination papers



Additional CEO Neha Arora addresses media persons in Ranchi on Thursday. PNS

from Rajmahal (reserved for Scheduled Tribe) parliamentary constituency. So far, 3 people have filed candidature forms from Godda parliamentary constituency.

The Additional Chief Electoral Officer said that since the issue of election notification, the figure of seizure of goods and cash in Jharkhand has reached 1 billion, 13 crore 69 lakh. He said that till now 911 people have voted under home voting. Whereas 211 absent voters associated with essential services have cast their votes. Out of 2,05,525 voters engaged in election work, 19,557 people have voted through postal ballot paper.

Special arrangements at polling booths for senior and Divyang voters

Chief Electoral Officer inspected polling booths in Koderma

PNS : RANCHI

Special facilities have been provided for handicapped and senior voters at polling booths in the Lok Sabha general elections. Home voting facility is being provided for voters who are unable to come to the polling booth. At the same time, arrangements for auto/toto are being made for senior and handicapped voters who have problems in coming to the polling booth. Along with this, arrangements have been made for activities to be done for voters such as registration, wheel chairs, chairs at polling booths, sheds so that voters do not have to stay in the sun.

Chief Electoral Officer, Jharkhand K. Ravi Kumar gave instructions to make voters aware of all these facilities. He was inspecting various polling booths in Koderma district on Thursday. He visited the polling booths of Koderma where voting was less in the last election and enquired about the minimum facilities of the polling booth from the BLOs working there. He also observed the preparations made by them and the various forms filled, absent, shift, dead (ASD) list, polling booth awareness group and the list related to volunteers.

He also enquired about the latest status of distribution of voter information slips and directed to expedite this work and ensure early distribution. He also interacted with the



CEO K Ravi Kumar visits Hazaribagh constituency ahead of Upcoming Lok Sabha election, in Hazaribagh on Saturday. PNS

volunteers and members of polling booth awareness group and enquired about their responsibilities on the day of polling. He taught the volunteers to discharge their duties honestly and directed them to help the handicapped, senior citizens, pregnant women and other voters on the day of polling, this will facilitate the polling process.

The CEO inspected the polling booth and enquired about the arrangements for seating the polling officer and polling agent along with the facilities of fan and light. He also reviewed the minimum facilities including pure drinking water, clean toilets for the voters and polling party. He directed to ensure running water connection in the toilets soon.

The CEO directed the District Electoral Officer to update the ASD list and to guide the BLO regarding the seating arrangements of the

polling officer and polling agent. He also directed to remove minor deficiencies in the preparation of election work.

The CEO inspected the polling stations in the rural and urban areas of Koderma. He inspected various polling stations located at Government Upgraded Middle School, Purnadih, Domchanch, Upgraded Primary School, Vindomoh, Domchanch, Government Primary School, Vidyapuri and Government Upgraded Middle School, Belatand.

During the inspection of the CEO, District Election Officer cum Deputy Commissioner of Koderma Megha Bhardwaj, Deputy Election Officer Prince Godwin Kujur, Sub-Divisional Officer Priya Singh, Senior Nodal Officer of MCMC Cell-cum-District Public Relations Officer Ravi Kumar etc. were present.

Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh to visit Jharkhand today

PNS : RANCHI

Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will address a public meeting in Dumka on May 10. He will also hold a road show in Godda and participate in the nomination filing programme of Godda's NDA candidate Dr Nishikant Dubey.

The Union Minister will come to Deoghar airport by special plane and address a public meeting organized at Yagya Maidan in Dumka on May 10 from 11.30 am. On this occasion, Lok Sabha in-charge Raj Paliwar, candidate Sita Soren, Dumka District President Gaurav Kant, Deoghar District President Sachin Rawani, Jamtara District President Samit Sharan will also be present with him.

Union Defense Minister Rajnath Singh will attend the nomination of NDA candidate Dr Nishikant Dubey from Godda. Singh will also participate in the road show organized at Godda Railway Station from 1:00 pm. On this occasion, Lok Sabha in-charge Ganesh Mishra, candidate Dr. Nishikant Dubey, Godda District President Sanjeev Mishra, Deoghar District President Sachin Ravani and



Dumka District President Gaurav Kant will also be present.

On the other hand, Union

organized at the court ground in Khunti from 12:30 pm. Shah will come to Ranchi airport by special flight from Delhi. From there they will go to Khunti by helicopter.

While issuing the charge sheet, BJP state president Babul Marandi said that the state government is giving protection to the corrupt. Corruption money is reaching the coffers of those in power. Rs 35 crores have been found in the raid from the servant of the Minister's Deputy Secretary. In such a situation, it is difficult to estimate how much money will be received if the minister and secretary are raided. He said that the people in power in Jharkhand are busy looting and earning money from the state.

Congress considers tribals like insects. The friendship between Congress and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha is not hidden from anyone. Congress has been against Jharkhand and the people of Jharkhand from the beginning. MLA CP Singh said that after assuming power, Champai Soren had said in the House that this Hemant government will be Part-2. This government is layer-2 of corruption. More than that is coming out.

Marandi's helicopter makes emergency landing at Sonari airport

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Former Chief Minister and Jharkhand BJP state president, Babul Marandi, encountered a tense situation on Thursday evening as his helicopter was forced to make an emergency landing at Sonari Airport in Janshedpur due to heavy rainfall and stormy weather conditions.

Marandi was en route to Dumka by helicopter following a public meeting in Kharsawan when the incident occurred. Shortly after take off, the helicopter encountered heavy rainfall and turbulence, prompting concern among passengers as the aircraft began to shake.

In a display of quick decision-making and skill, the pilot made the prudent choice to perform an emergency landing at Sonari Airport to ensure the safety of all on board.

DWA donates benches, desks to school



A charity work was carried out by the Doctors' Wives Association on Thursday at Shiksha Niketan School, Dhurva. A delegation of members comprising Chairperson of the Association, Vinita Sharan, President Shreela Choudhary, Secretary Amrita Baidya along with Sushma Mishra, Bindu Prasad, Supriya Thakur, Bibha Singh, Arti Sinha, Anju Kumari Singh, Rashmi Kumar, Dr Soni Sinha, Debjani Sanyal, Preeti Navin and Nibha Mishra visited the school. They were enthusiastically welcomed with a dance and patriotic song by the students. A set of 12 benches and desks were donated by the Association for the students. The authorities were very grateful and thanked them for their timely and useful donation.

World Red Cross Day celebrated

World Red Cross Day was celebrated at the Indian Red Cross Society Ranchi Branch, Ranchi on May 08. On the occasion, the flag was hoisted at the Red Cross by the Chairman of the organization, Dr. Shambhu Prasad Singh and he gave the message of keeping humanity in the people and Vice Chairman Adarsh Kugar Sharma said in his statement that blood donation is a great donation, on this, he emphasized on making all the people aware at their level and donating blood. On the said occasion, a blood donation camp, free health check-up camp, physiotherapy camp, blood group test, blood sugar test and membership campaign were organized on the premises of Red Cross. In which many people took advantage. On this occasion, executive member Ravi Dutt started by donating blood, after which members of All India Rauniyar Vaishya Sabha also donated blood in large numbers.

SAIL reached final by defeating Harmu Youth

In the second semi-final of the Super Division cricket match organized by Ranchi District Cricket Association, SAIL Units Ranchi team defeated Harmu Youth Cricket Club and entered the final. In this match washed out by rain, only one innings could be played. The match was decided by toss and SAIL team won. The final match will be played between MECON and SAIL on 11th May at MECON ground. Mohit Kumar became the man of the match from the SAIL team, he took 2 wickets for 43 runs in 7 overs. Shrestha Sagar scored 96 and Prince Kumar Singh scored 49 runs for Harmu Cricket Club.

Ranchi police arrest 3 drug peddlers

PNS : RANCHI

Ranchi Police has arrested ten youths who were supplying brown sugar and planning a crime. The police team under the leadership of Kotwali DySP, Prakash Soy has arrested four youths who were planning a crime in Mojahid Nagar of Hindpuri police station area. The police arrested Mohammed, Chand, Babar and Mohd. Sajjad is involved. Police have recovered a country-made pistol, live bullet and a knife from them. On the other hand, the police team under the leadership of City DySP has raided Anjuman Colony of Lower Bazaar police station area and arrested six youths who were supplying brown sugar. The arrested youth included Naved Ali, Vicky, Faizan Ali, Mohd. Shahid, Sawan Khan and Shah Nawaz alias Raja are included. Police have recovered 15.25 grams of brown sugar and Rs 36 thousand from them. Vicky, who was arrested, has a previous criminal history. He has been an accused in 12 cases. Mohammad Sahil has been accused in two cases and Sawan has been accused in one case.

State BJP attacks Congress on controversial statement of Pitroda

Sam Pitroda's resignation is just a drama, why did Congress not expel him, asks Pratul



State BJP Spokesperson Pratul Shadeo during a press conference at the Media centre in Ranchi on Thursday. PNS

PNS : RANCHI

State BJP Spokesperson Pratul Shahdeo while addressing the media in Ranchi on Thursday said that Congress has always talked about breaking the country and has worked to sow the seeds of hatred in the society and that the people of the country are already aware of the black deeds of Congress.

Shahdeo said that earlier Congress used to insult the country within the country and abroad, but now it has started insulting even Indians.

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'A photo does not reduce the crime of an accused'

PNS : RANCHI

BJP Spokesperson Pratul Shahdeo gave his reaction to the photo of Nirmala Sitharaman that has gone viral and stated that BJP has nothing to do with this event. It was an event organised by the Chamber of Commerce and Badalta Jharkhand NGO and the entire list of invited guests was prepared courtesy of these two organizations. Pratul said that the opposition is making a hue and cry over the photo and it is like a cat scratching the pole out of frustration. Nirmala Sitharaman and Babul Marandi were paying courtesy visit to the visi-

then this resignation is just for damage control. Sam Pitroda is still in the Congress party and is an advisor to Rahul Gandhi," stated Shahdeo. Pratul expressed surprise as to why Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Vadra and Sonia Gandhi have not yet strongly condemned Sam Pitroda's statement? Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Vadra and Sonia Gandhi should immediately apologize to the people of

tors decided by the Chamber and Badalta Jharkhand.

Pratul also stated that "This is Narendra Modi's New India. The campaign against corruption will continue. It is ridiculous to even think that in the present government someone can get a concession just because his picture with someone else appears. The Supreme Court has also considered PMLA to be a crime like terrorism." Pratul said that till now billions of rupees have been recovered from the opposition leaders and their disciples in Jharkhand and frustrated by that, these people are trying to make a mountain out of a molehill.

the country for insulting the countrymen. Pratul alleged that Sam Pitroda had said two months ago that Pandit Nehru had contributed more to the Constitution than BR Ambedkar. "The whole country knows how many conspiracies Congress made to defeat Baba Saheb in the elections. Congress did not even give Bharat Ratna to Baba Saheb during its rule.

India, Maldives ties based on mutual interests: Jaishankar

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Development of India-Maldives ties is based on "mutual interests" and "reciprocal sensitivity", External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said here on Thursday during his talks with his Maldivian counterpart Moosa Zameer. These remarks came in the backdrop of strained ties between the two countries after President Mohamed Muizzu insisted on withdrawal of Indian military personnel operating three military platforms in the island nation. Zameer is New Delhi in the first high-level trip from Male after the Maldives' pro-China president Muizzu assumed office six months ago. "As close and proximate neighbours, the development of our ties is obviously based on mutual interests and reciprocal sensitivity," Jaishankar said in his opening remarks in his meeting with Zameer. "As far as India is concerned, these are articulated in terms of our Neighbourhood First policy and SAGAR (Security and Growth for all in the Region) vision. I hope that our meeting today will enable us to strengthen the convergence



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Maldives Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer at a meeting in New Delhi

of our perspectives in various domains," he said. The ties between the two countries came under severe strain in view of Muizzu insisting on withdrawal of Indian military personnel operating three military platforms in the island nation. India has already withdrawn most of its military personnel.

Muizzu had set May 10 as the deadline for withdrawal of the Indian military troops from his country. Nearly 50 personnel have returned. In all more than 85 Indian personnel were deployed in Maldives. "India has been a key provider of development assistance to the Maldives. Our projects

have benefited the people of your country; contributed to the quality of life. They range from infrastructure projects and social initiatives to medical evacuation and health facilities," Jaishankar said. "We have also extended financial support on favourable terms in the past.

India has been a First Responder on numerous occasions for Maldives," he said. "Our cooperation has also enhanced the security and well-being of your country through shared activities, equipment provisioning, capacity building and training," Jaishankar added.

BJP expresses concern over rise in Muslim population

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Thursday expressed concern over the pace of increase in Muslim population in the country and wondered its impact on the reservation provided to SCs, STs and OBCs, claiming the Congress is "hell bent" on providing quota to the minority community if voted to power.

The ruling party's reaction came after a recent working paper by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) said the share of the Hindu population decreased by 7.82 per cent between 1950 and 2015 in India, while that of Muslims increased by 43.15 per cent, suggesting that there is a conducive environment in the country to foster diversity. The paper titled 'Share of Religious Minorities: A Cross-Country Analysis (1950-2015)' further said the share of Jains in the population of India decreased from 0.45 per cent in 1950 to 0.36 per cent in 2015. The report comes ahead of the fourth phase of the Lok Sabha polls.

"It's a very well-known fact, which has been in the public domain for around a decade. If you see the 1951 census, Hindus were having 88 per cent population and Muslims 9.5 per cent. In the 2011 census, Hindus (population) reduced to 79.8 percent from



80 percent while Muslims' percentage went up by more than 14.5," BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said.

"But, the question arises that if by this pace the population is increasing and Congress is hell bent upon giving reservation to the Muslims on the basis of population, they will cut the share of the SCs, STs and the OBCs," he added. Trivedi said the Congress, if voted to power will, then keep on "changing" the share of reservation in future with increase in the Muslim population, "which is more likely because they (Muslims) are having possibility of multiple marriages". Muslims share in the reservation will keep on increasing also because of "conversion and infiltration because they are having a secular cover from them (the Congress)," he added. "So this is a bigger question and a bigger challenge which they (Congress) have to

answer," the BJP spokesperson said. Senior BJP leader and Union minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar said that the EAC-PM's report raises many questions because one particular community is "increasing its population in a manner where demography of India is being altered, changed".

"This leads to some questions that need to be asked and answered," he said, adding "How much of growth in Muslim community is being caused by illegal immigration and conversion?" he asked.

"What is the impact of this significant increase in the minority community's (Muslims) population on the rights and opportunities (available) for the other minority communities? There are Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and Christians. Is there any crowding out of these minority communities as a consequence of this (rise in Muslim population)?" Chandrasekhar asked.

He alleged that some political parties including the Congress are making "huge attempt to alter the Constitution and bring religion based reservation".

"So, what will be the consequence when you have the Muslim community increasing its population so rapidly, from 9 per cent to 14.5 per cent and there are political forces that want to give them reservation," he said.

Defence Secretary urges firms to support border areas development

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane on Thursday here emphasised on the need to achieve self-reliance in every field to deal with future challenges and urged infrastructure firms to contribute in Government's effort towards development of border areas. He made these assertions while inaugurating a national symposium and industry meet on 'Emerging Technologies in Infrastructure Development' organized by the Defence Research and Development

Organisation (DRDO). The two-day event, with the participation from the Armed Forces, academia, industry and DRDO, aims to foster dialogue, exchange knowledge and explore innovative approaches to address the challenges and opportunities presented by emerging technologies in infrastructure development in line with the vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'. In his address, the Defence Secretary emphasised on the need to achieve self-reliance in every field to deal with future challenges. He stated that India is a country with a significant

percentage of young population, and self-reliance will ensure gainful employment to them. Underlining the importance of achieving 'Aatmanirbharta' in defence, Aramane asserted that there is no trusted trend in geopolitics, and India cannot depend on other countries for its security and safeguarding national interests. He stressed that self-reliance will help the country take giant strides on the path of becoming a developed nation by 2047. Highlighting the emphasis being laid by the Government on infrastructure development along the borders, the Defence



Secretary exhorted the infrastructure firms to contribute in further strengthening the apparatus. He added that while the Armed Forces personnel are

being provided with latest weapons and equipment, the private sector should contribute in bolstering the infrastructure set-up in the border areas. He referred to the Vibrant Villages Programme which aims to motivate people to stay in their native locations in border areas, and urged the firms to set up a separate section, within their respective organisations, which focuses on development in far-flung areas. Aramane stated that the DRDO is extending support to the private sector in Research and Development, and

together they can come up with new innovations to build faster and better in the times to come. He called upon the industry to walk hand-in-hand with the government, and focus more on the mass production of quality products in a time-bound manner. He also urged the industry to collaborate with the academia to enhance the skills of the workforce, which can help realise a technology into a product. Speaking on the occasion, DRDO chief Samir V Kamat emphasised on the importance of infrastructure in the development of a nation. He

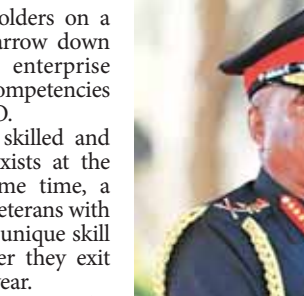
stated that India is witnessing a phenomenal growth in the field of technical infrastructure, which is required to maintain the country's strategic deterrence. The DRDO Chairman added that technology is evolving rapidly, and the necessity of sustainable infrastructure and green infrastructure is now becoming a part of technical domain. The Defence Secretary also inaugurated the industry-partner exhibition, organised on the sidelines of the event, showcasing latest technologies and products developed by the various industry partners.

Effective Defence industry ecosystem taking shape in country, says Army Chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Army Chief General Manoj Pandey said an effective defence-industry ecosystem is taking shape in the country and veterans with their field experience are "ideally suited" for incorporation into indigenous research and manufacturing of technological solutions required by the force. In his address at the Army Welfare Placement Organisation (AWPO) Summit 2024 held at the Manekshaw Centre here on Wednesday, he said the Army's responsibility towards its veterans remains a "sacred commitment". The aim of the summit was to bring

together different stakeholders on a common platform, to narrow down the gap between enterprise requirements, veteran competencies and the pursuits of AWPO. "While the demand for skilled and experienced workforce exists at the industry end, at the same time, a human resource pool of veterans with adequate experience and unique skill sets is also available, after they exit from active service each year. "The endeavour is to synergise the two as well as strengthen the linkages that can facilitate veteran absorption into not only the industry but also PSUs and quasi-government organisations," the Army chief said. He said the veterans with their field



experience and insights into operational conditions, logistics of the systems and weapon platforms "are ideally suited for incorporation into indigenous research, development, innovation and manufacturing of

technological solutions required by the Indian Army". They also bring to the table, leadership qualities, and a very sound understanding of the human element and can contribute towards ergonomics and user interface design, aspects which are critical to produce user-friendly equipment, General Pandey said. He emphasised the invaluable contributions of veterans to the nation's prosperity. The Army chief said services to the nation by the veterans "do not end" when they bid farewell to military life, instead it transitions into "a new chapter" or second innings of commitment to society and nation building.

He underscored that the Army has undertaken the process of holistic skill certification, as per the core competency of each individual, in collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship. He also mentioned initiatives such as 'Project KAUSHALVEER' that help serve personnel in acquiring certification for skill sets according to the established industry standards. General Pandey praised the "Veer Nari", who he said also bring with them unparalleled determination and resilience. He urged the entrepreneurs to integrate them too as part of their initiatives on human capital intake.



National Archives acquires private paper collection of Rafi Ahmad Kidwai

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's rich repository of archival records received a significant enhancement on Thursday as the National Archives of India (NAI) acquired freedom fighter Rafi Ahmad Kidwai's private paper collection comprising original correspondences between Kidwai and other eminent leaders such as Jawahar Lal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, and PD Tandon. These documents hold historical importance and provide a unique perspective on the deliberations, decisions, and collaborations that shaped India's journey towards independence and its early years as a sovereign nation. NAI Director General (DG) Arun Singhal told The Pioneer that the family of the late leader had approached them a month ago, seeking to preserve the documents that were contained in three big boxes. After examining the documents, they were found to be historically significant, and now they will be scanned and made available on the abhilekh portal for public viewing, free of cost, he said. Singhal further said that various historical documents, including correspondence and circulars related to leaders like Gandhi, Subash Chandra Bose and other freedom fighters have been preserved in the

portal and if anyone wishes to download them, they have to pay a nominal amount. Access to these primary sources benefit researchers, historians, and the public alike, deepening their understanding of India's past and its journey towards progress and development. The papers related to Rafi Ahmad Kidwai were handed over to Singhal by late leader's family members led by Faiz Ahmad Kidwai who happens to be Additional Secretary, Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Tazeen Kidwai, daughter of late Hussain Kamil Kidwai, youngest brother of Rafi Ahmad Kidwai and Sarah Manaal Kidwai.

Now the NAI has ensured that valuable historical materials are safeguarded for future generations and made accessible for research and study about the personality who has left an indelible mark on India's history. Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, born on February 18, 1894, in Masauli, Uttar Pradesh, hailed from a middle-class zamindar family. His political journey began with his involvement in the Khilafat Movement and the Non-Cooperation Movement, leading to imprisonment. Known for his vivacity, brilliance, and charm, Kidwai dedicated himself to India's independence and fought against communalism and superstitions.

India, UK review strategic ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and United Kingdom on Thursday here reviewed the entire spectrum of their bilateral strategic ties during talks with visiting British National Security Advisor (NSA) Tim Barrow and his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval. Barrow also held extensive talks with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar. Jaishankar and Barrow discussed various bilateral, regional and global issues. "Good to meet UK NSA Tim Barrow today in Delhi. Discussed a range of regional and global issues of importance. Also reviewed the progress in our bilateral ties," Jaishankar said on X. It is understood that Jaishankar and Barrow delved into the overall situation in West Asia. Barrow is on a two-day visit to India. Talks between Doval and Barrow reportedly focused on Technology and Security Initiative, a major bilateral mechanism aimed at enhancing collaboration in critical and emerging technologies between India



and the UK. The two NSAs also deliberated on bilateral issues of mutual interest and exchanged views on regional and global matters. Barrow arrived in India on a two-day visit to participate in a high-level dialogue led by the NSAs of both countries, which aims to deepen cooperation on various fronts, including security, technology, and regional affairs. This visit is also expected to strengthen and further broaden the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries. In 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his then-British counterpart Boris Johnson agreed to the India-UK 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' and India-UK Roadmap 2030 to steer cooperation for the next 30 years.

Nearly 12 per cent of eligible Indian children missed measles vaccine: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Nearly 12 per cent of eligible children in India have not received any recommended double-dose vaccination for measles, highlighting a significant gap in measles vaccination coverage among the beneficiaries. This deficiency is particularly pronounced in northeastern States like Nagaland, where the share of zero-dose cases is as high as 26 per cent. In contrast, Tamil Nadu was found to report the lowest at 4.6 per cent. Researchers from the Union Health Ministry and Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in Varanasi investigated previously overlooked critical aspects of measles vaccination, focusing on zero-doses, partially vaccinated, and those fully immunised. They analysed data of over 43,000 children aged 2-3 years, collected through the National Family Health Survey 2019-21 (NFHS-5). The team found that close to 30 per cent of the eligible children have received only one measles-containing vaccine (MCV1), while about 60 per cent have been fully immunised (MCV2). The findings are published in the journal Vaccine. In 2017, India adopted the National Strategic Plan for Achieving and Sustaining Measles and Rubella Elimination. The researchers acknowledged that disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic heightened the risk



of measles in vulnerable populations. While immunisation programmes were eventually resumed in a phased manner, measles zero-dose children pose a significant obstacle to achieving goals of eliminating the acute and highly contagious viral disease, the researchers said. Occurring primarily in children, symptoms can include high fever, cough, runny nose and a rash all over the body. Being vaccinated is the best way to avoid getting sick and spreading the disease, according to the World Health Organization. The analysis also revealed huge inter-district variations, according to the researchers. They found that in Uttar Pradesh, while Prayagraj and Banda districts were found to have about 34 per cent and 32 per cent of these cases, respectively, Hapur and Etawah have 2.6 per cent and 2.1 per cent of zero-dose cases. The researchers said Arunachal Pradesh

was another such example, where the West Siang district had the greatest share with almost 50 per cent of eligible children receiving no dose of the vaccination, while the Lower Dibang Valley district had only 2.8 per cent of such cases. Socio-demographic factors were analysed to influence the measles vaccination status of children, with those born later in the family being less likely to have received no dose. Low levels of wealth and mother's education too were found to increase the odds of children not receiving any dose of the vaccination. "Socioeconomic factors play a significant role in measles transmission, with individuals from lower socioeconomic classes experiencing higher attack rates resulting in outbreaks," the authors wrote. The findings underscored the need for tailored strategies, especially within districts displaying close to 10 per cent variability in zero-dose cases, the researchers said. "The identification of a notable percentage (11.5 per cent) of children receiving zero-doses signals a concerning gap in immunisation coverage," the authors wrote and pointed out that, this "highlights the importance of last mile effort and application of big push theory in terms of more frequent rounds of campaigns mode vaccine delivery for the target of 95 per cent vaccine coverage for population-level immunity."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Air turbulence

Air India Express cabin crew's moody 'sick leave' hits operations, leaves fliers high and dry

In the realm of air travel, few situations are as frustrating as flight cancellations. The anticipation of reaching a destination is replaced by uncertainty and inconvenience. Such was the case recently when Air India Express, the low-cost subsidiary of Air India, found itself in a crisis, leading to a wave of flight cancellations. The flag carrier of India has long been grappling with financial woes and operational challenges. Despite various restructuring efforts, the airline has struggled to stay afloat in a fiercely competitive industry. The latest crisis began when over 300 senior cabin crew members of Express flights reported sick at the last minute, resulting in the cancellation of more than 90 flights since Tuesday night, leaving airports in disarray and passengers seething with frustration. Of course, Air India has now lent a helping hand to its subsidiary, deciding to operate 20 flights against 74 Express cancellations on Thursday, and sacking 30 crew members over "sick leave". The root cause of this crisis stems from longstanding grievances articulated by Air India Express Employees Union (AIXEU). They have voiced concerns about unfair treatment, citing instances where internal job postings were filled with external candidates, bypassing qualified internal staff. The owners, on their part, do not recognise AIXEU. The Regional Labour Commissioner in New Delhi has also criticised the management for alleged violations of labour laws, highlighting a lack of responsible decision-making. Adding to the turbulence is Air India's ongoing financial struggles and operational challenges.



Air India Express, despite its parent company's losses, remained profitable. In 2021, it was sold to the Tata Group, which merged it with AirAsia India. It aimed to capture the budget aviation market with a focus on non-trunk routes and ancillary services. It is the only profitable airline in the Tata Group's aviation stable — AirAsia India, Vistara and Air India — incurred a combined loss of Rs 15,530 crores. The fallout from these cancellations has been significant, with passengers expressing their frustration on social media platforms. Long queues, missed connections and inadequate communication have characterised the scenes at airports. In response, Air India Express has issued apologies and promises of improved services, but the damage to passenger trust has been done. The Indian aviation sector has huge potential but the issues of mismanagement are galore. The Govt must proactively ensure that the fliers are not taken for a ride and the airlines also do not incur losses. Besides, the pandemic years were very traumatic for the industry and it is slowly recovering. The Govt must resolve the crisis before it snowballs into a crisis and takes down the whole sector. Looking ahead, the fate of Air India and its subsidiaries remains uncertain. Only time will tell whether Air India Express and its counterparts can rise above the chaos and emerge with flying colours.

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PICTALK



Students perform during the celebration of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary, in Nadia

Enigma of copyright in the digital world

Policymakers face the formidable challenge of revising copyright laws effectively to tackle the complexities presented by AI

People often say that in this digital world, nothing remains secret. Even personal details can be accessed through the Internet. The quantum of information on the Internet is so vast that, despite the security measures, it is not cent per cent foolproof. In such a scenario, one must critically examine copyright's relevance in the digital world. Copyright rules and laws traditionally protect every creation or innovation, so the original creator retains credit for their work and is aptly rewarded through monetary benefits. When an author creates a book, they automatically own the copyright. This gives them the exclusive right to reproduce, distribute, perform, and display the book and create derivative works based on it. In most countries, copyright protection for a book typically lasts for the author's lifetime plus 50-70 years. During this time, others generally cannot reproduce or distribute the book without the author's permission unless their use falls under a specific exception, such as fair use or fair dealing. Within the realm of music,



this signifies that the individual responsible for creating a song, the writer of the lyrics, the composer, or the performer, possesses the sole entitlement to utilise, disseminate, and capitalise on that song. In India, organisations such as the Indian Performing Right Society (IPRS) and Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL) administer the rights of copyright owners and collect royalties on their behalf for the public performance and broadcast of songs. Copyright also extends to research works, protecting and monetising one's creations through patents. Unfortunately, journal publishers own the copyright for research publications. The publishers amass massive amounts through subscriptions and advertisements without providing any monetary benefit to the authors. Most of the reputed journals

do peer reviews free of cost, take processing charges from authors, and get subscription fees and advertisements as revenue. What does the poor researcher get? A mental satisfaction of getting published in a high-impact journal? In a way, it's not fair. A few magazines, of course, practice giving honorariums to the authors. Despite having stringent copyright rules and regulations, its efficacy is questionable in the rapidly evolving digital age landscape. The widespread availability of digital content and the simplicity of sharing information on the Internet have presented unprecedented difficulties and intricacies for existing copyright rules. Today, one can easily copy content from online resources without crediting the original creator. Content available on social media sites, including photographs, is widely reproduced. Identifying the original content creator, be it literary or artistic works, is often difficult. Even stringent protective measures like user authentication mechanisms such as passwords, multi-factor authentication (MFA),

and role-based access controls (RBAC) to restrict access to authorised individuals or groups and watermarking techniques often fail to prevent the infringement of copyrights. The advent of AI in digital platforms has complicated the situation. As AI systems become more sophisticated, their ability to create, replicate, and modify content raises intricate legal questions regarding ownership and authorship. Though AI can do any role, it lacks the human touch in its creation that connects human minds. While individuals are accountable for creating and instructing these algorithms, the AI system autonomously produces the outcome, erasing the distinction between human and machine authorship. The current necessity lies in incorporating ethical, cultural, and economic considerations while crafting a new policy that effectively balances the rights of creators and AI developers.

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



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

Dear Vazir-e-Azam Shehbaz Sharif Sahab, I have taken the privilege of writing to the Prime Minister of our neighbouring country, which, till 76 years ago, was part of us, but separated in acrimonious circumstances. I'm sure that you're aware, as a lot of in India are, that this separation and the aftermath it gave rise to continues to not only cast its shadow over the subcontinent but also torment relations between various communities. This open letter to you is a humble attempt, not to hark back to the events of those decades and apportion blame, but to address the contentiousness of modern-day issues that continue to trail in their wake.

Whenever the issue of Ayodhya, the Gyan Vapi temple (Varanasi) or the Krishna Janmabhoomi (Mathura) comes up, my mind travels to Lahore and the Gurudwara Shaheed Gunj at the Naulakha Bazar locality of your splendid city. The ownership of the place was disputed by the local Muslims who claimed that the place had originally been a mosque. It had been converted into a gurudwara by the local Sikhs during the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. When opportune in the 19th century, the people of the city, led by some Muslim Leaguers, went to court over this. They did not win their case for the re-conversion of the gurudwara into a mosque. Legal counsel argued that an appeal could be filed if necessary, right up to the Privy Council. However, the then premier of Punjab Sir Sikanar Hayat Khan advised against any further action as it might open a Pandora's Box across the subcontinent, which was then undivided. Sikanar Hayat also advised against any further litigation.

Any use of the argument of adverse possession might cause the return of many of the temples that had come into Muslim possession. What was then perhaps overlooked was that a Hindu temple is a residence of the divine and not merely a prayer hall. The pratimas (icons) are the first step in the quest for spirituality. Ultimately, spirituality can be

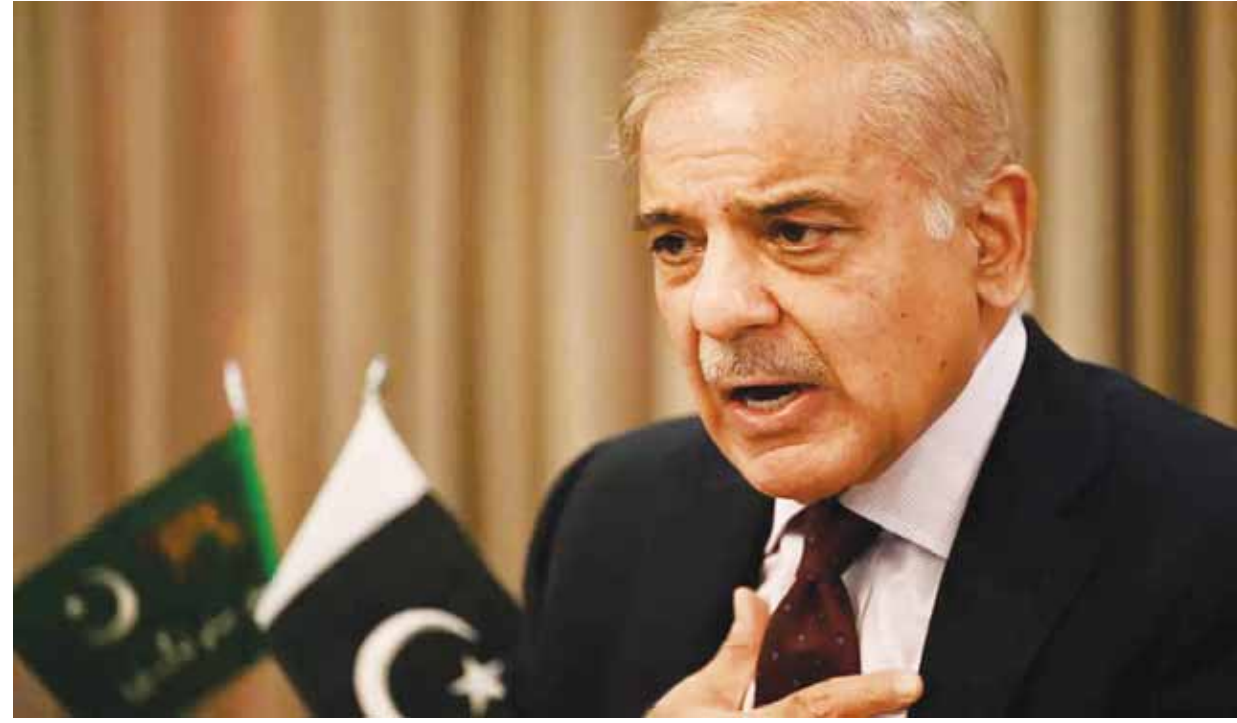
active by having a darshan of the avatar of the divine. In Sikhism, they do not have an icon nor the scope of spirituality in the same way as in a Hindu temple. Prophet Moses, the founding prophet of Judaism, the first of the three Semitic religions—also called Religions of the Book—known in Islam as Hazrat Moosa, had expressly forbidden any idol worship by the second of his Ten Commandments; "Thou shalt not make any graven image of thy lord the god". Your faith has rigidly adhered to this particular Commandment. However, it does pain me no end to state that you have carried this adherence way too far. In your country, over 75 temples have been desecrated or pulled down after independence in 1947, a sordid trend that is continuing. From my Urdu teacher who was a scholar, I have learnt that it is your bounden duty as a momin (believer) to desecrate butts (idols) installed by kafirs (infidels). But for the sake of friendly relations between us two neighbours, your people should desist from such desecrations. I am saying this after

We tolerated terrorist violence for many years but when we could no longer tolerate it, we went to Parliament to do away with Article 370. But we did not resort to violence

An open letter to Shehbaz Sharif



PRAFULL GORADIA



POLITICAL LEADERS OF YOUR GENERATION MIGHT STILL FIND COMFORT IN THE NOTION THAT INDIANS ARE A PEACEFUL AND DORMANT LOT AND THEREFORE WON'T REACT MUCH. THAT MIGHT INDEED HAVE BEEN THE CASE A COUPLE OF DECADES AGO, BUT IT IS NO LONGER SO

accepting the fact that Islam detests parasti (idol worship) and insists on majahab parasti (adherence to the faith) alone. But we live in a world where adherents of other religions too have equal rights to profess and practice their faith, without hurting others. I appeal to you to care for our sentiments and not target the temples and idols that still survive. Political leaders of your generation might still find comfort in the notion that Indians are a peaceful, and also dormant, lot and therefore won't react much. That might indeed have been the case till a couple of decades ago but is no longer so. India and Indians are changing. Real change in our civilizational journey was heralded in December 1992, of which I was fortunate to be a humble part. In India, we have begun a movement to restore the temples that were casualties of the medieval age. I shall shortly be writing to Madam Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of our eastern neighbouring country. Dozens of temples continue to be desecrated in her country every year. You would agree that good neigh-

bours do not hurt each other. Kindly, remember that there are thousands upon thousands of mosques built upon the ruins of ancient temples. So far, we have preferred to approach the courts of law and minimize unilateral action. I appeal to you to also eschew violence. In Kashmir too, over 130 temples were attacked and desecrated even as India continued to hold control over the state's territory. I am aware that Pakistan took great umbrage when we abrogated Article 370, but it is my wonder that we had to do so? We tolerated terrorist violence for many years, but when we could tolerate it no longer, we went to Parliament to do away with Article 370. But you would certainly appreciate that we did not resort to violence even on this issue. Our Muslim compatriots are cooperating to a moderate degree, even in the state of Kashmir. This is a trend which we hope continues. *(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EVOLUTION OF MONETARY POLICY

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Evolution of Monetary Policymaking in India" published on May 8, this is my response. The journey of India's monetary policy from its inception to the present day is a saga of adaptation and evolution. From the establishment of the Reserve Bank of India to the modern era of inflation targeting, each phase has been marked by its unique challenges and responses. The nationalisation of banks in 1969 marked a pivotal moment, transitioning monetary policy towards a more centralised, planned approach. However, external shocks like the oil crises of the 1970s tested the resilience of this system, necessitating revisions and reforms.

The introduction of the Multiple Indicator Approach in 1998 reflected a shift towards a more holistic understanding of economic dynamics. Yet, the global financial crisis of 2008 exposed vulnerabilities, prompting a recalibration towards inflation targeting. While inflation targeting has its merits, recent disruptions such as demonetization and the pandemic have highlighted its limitations in addressing supply-side pressures. As the landscape of inflation evolves, a nuanced and comprehensive policy framework is imperative, one that combines the principles of inflation targeting with proactive measures to mitigate supply-side disruptions. In essence, the history of India's monetary policy underscores the need for continual adaptation in the face of evolving economic realities.

Vihaan Reddy | Bengaluru

REFLECTIONS ON ELECTIONS

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Elected leaders need to rethink," published on May 8, this is my response. Election times unveil a complex tapestry of our democracy, woven with threads of hope, disappointment, and societal reflection. As citizens, we witness the ritual dance of power, where promises collide with reality, and deals meet the harsh edges of pragmatism. The model code of conduct, ostensibly a guardian of fair play, often feels like

Political manoeuvring



Apropos the news article, "Modi, Lalu in a tug of war on Muslim quota," published on May 8, this is my response. The recent political discourse surrounding reservations in India has taken a contentious turn, with various parties embroiled in a heated debate over extending reservation benefits to Muslims. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has vehemently opposed such a

mere whisper against the cacophony of electoral fervor. Expenditure limits crumble under the weight of unchecked spending, leaving us disillusioned with the integrity of the process. The impact of elections extends beyond just voting, as they can turn schools into battlegrounds, with political theatre taking centre stage and the future suffering while the eloquence of our founding luminaries seems lost amidst the mudslinging and vitriol of contemporary discourse. Yet, amidst the chaos, there is a glimmer of hope embodied by figures like APJ Abdul Kalam, whose legacy reminds us of the transformative power of leadership rooted in humility and service.

Arya Kapoor | Kolkata

move, labelling it as a ploy to undermine existing quotas for SC, ST, and OBC communities. The BJP accuses its rivals of attempting to appease a specific vote bank by advocating for Muslim reservations while disregarding the principles of social and educational backwardness outlined in the Constitution and the Mandal Commission report. Conversely, opposition figures argue that denying reservations to Muslims would be unjust and tantamount to disenfranchisement. Amidst these exchanges, accusations of conspiracy and attempts to manipulate voter sentiments loom large. The charged rhetoric underscores the high stakes of the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, where competing visions of governance, identity, and social justice are at play. As citizens, it's imperative to critically engage with these debates and hold our leaders accountable for their promises and policies.

Kiara Sharma | Mumbai

sion and even a kind of recreation in our country. Beggars in India easily outnumber their ilk in other big countries. To the Westerners, India is a land of mendicants. Beggars are found everywhere—on roads, crossings, footpaths, etc. But their favourite hangouts are bathing ghats, temples, religious fairs, railway stations, trains and bus stands. It is a real nuisance to be confronted by street beggars in all places. Like the Almighty, they seem to be omnipresent. You are waiting for a bus or walking down a road with your friend, and beggars suddenly appear from nowhere and start an endless volley of supplications until you give them a few coins out of sheer disgust and helplessness. The monstrous practice of begging cannot be eradicated from our society because millions are living 'below the poverty line', yearning for a morsel of food. Unfortunately very little has been done by our past and present governments to obliterate the social illness of begging. **Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai**

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

EU-CHINA RELATIONS AT A CROSSROADS

Xi embarks on a strategic journey across Europe, a move laden with symbolism



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Geo-political adjustments are getting done, bilaterally and plurilateral, even as the world's largest democracies are busy calming their domestic constituencies, where a key rallying agenda is China. The two largest democracies, India and the US, both of whom have their own set of issues with China, are in the middle of some of the most competitive election processes, ever seen across the globe. Meanwhile, the EU, or at least many of its member countries, not to mention US allies such as Australia are carefully recalibrating the entangled web of engagement with China.

It is by no coincidence that Chinese Premier Xi Jinping, was on a strategic three-nation tour of Europe, earlier this week. This tri-nation tour, during which the Chinese premier, also met the European Union president Ursula Von der Leyen, comes after a gap of almost 5 years and is also a time when many European nations have been blaming China for pushing highly subsidised electric vehicles into their markets, making several European auto factories redundant. The Europeans also wanted to focus on China playing a larger role in stabilising its "friends without limits" Russia, in the war against Ukraine, pushing up fuel-aided inflation across the region. The Europeans in the plain speak, they are known for, outlined clearly in the president's press statement, "the first topic where we exchanged views on was the geopolitical situation. We especially discussed Ukraine and the conflicts in the Middle East. We agree that Europe and China have a shared interest in peace and security. We count on China to use all its influence on Russia to end Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. President Xi has played an important role in de-escalating Russia's irresponsible nuclear threats, and I



am confident that President Xi will continue to do so against the backdrop of the ongoing nuclear threats by Russia. We have also discussed China's commitment not to provide any lethal equipment to Russia. More effort is needed to curtail the delivery of dual-use goods to Russia that find their way to the battlefield. And given the existential nature of the threats stemming from this war for both Ukraine and Europe, this does affect the EU-China relations. "The message from the EU to China was, don't help Russia in its unjust war on European soil, or else the bilateral relation would be in trouble. No surprises, Ukraine and the Middle East didn't feature, till the bottom three paragraphs of the press statement issued by the Chinese team, post the trilateral meeting.

Also no surprises with the language which read "On the Ukraine crisis, President Xi pointed out that China, France and the EU all wish to see an early ceasefire and return of peace in Europe, and support political settlement of the crisis. China has been working vigorously to facilitate talks for peace. China's objective and just position and its constructive role have been widely recognized by the international community. China is ready to stay in communication with relevant parties." The other significant element of these conversations was traded, as all parties involved are feeling the constraints of escalating fuel costs, the volatile geo-political environment and, the post-Covid, supply chain mismatch. The EU provided sharp pointers on Chinese subsidised products, free and fair access to each other's markets and supply chain resiliency in their conversations. A defensive China maintained that the two sides have extensive common interests and broad space for cooperation in green and digital transition. It is necessary that they properly address economic and trade frictions through dialogue and consultation, and accommodate each other's legitimate concerns." China has started making, the right moves to woo back some of its largest market partners, at a time when India and the US, the other key stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific theatre, are busy with their elections. India will get over elections in about a month, and an agile nimble China policy outlook awaits.

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

Economic progress in India: A reality check

Despite notable achievements, economic progress falters due to the neglect of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Public Sector Undertakings and agricultural reforms



ATUL SEHGAL



India has come a long way since 2014 in the matter of various indices and parameters of economic development. Consider this. India has increased her per capita income through this decade from USD 1560 to USD 2500, a 60 per cent increase. It has purportedly lifted 400 million persons out of poverty during the decade. Its foreign exchange kitty has increased from USD 322 billion to USD 640 billion during the same period. These are impressive figures. Large figures are always impressive, but they need to be checked, compared and corroborated to be sanctified. Consider this now. The per capita income of India increased from USD 600 to USD 1560 for the period from 2004 to 2014 which is a bigger increase of 160 percent. Its foreign exchange reserves increased from USD 107 billion to USD 322 billion between 2004 and 2014. Whereas the surge from 2004 to 2014 was 200 per cent, it was only 100 per cent in the next decade.

The above comparative figures talk aloud about India's poor economic development in the last decade. This is not an overall performance report on the current NDA government. This government has many unprecedented achievements to its credit. But on the economic front, it doesn't seem to have delivered. Why has the NDA not been able to deliver on the economic front? There are several reasons.

Neglect of MSMEs: The micro, small and medium enterprises sector in the country did not receive the attention due to it. This sector is the main source of employment generation. Imports from China continued to swell and many manufacturers closed down their factories to become traders and distributors. Poor implementation of the Make in India programme: The Make in India was a well-conceived ambitious programme



THE GOVERNMENT DID WELL TO BLUEPRINT REFORMS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR—THOSE RELATED TO MSP AND PROCUREMENT OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE. BUT THE GOVERNMENT FAILED TO IMPLEMENT IT BY CAPITULATING IN FRONT OF FAKE PROTESTERS MASQUERADING AS FARMERS

to boost indigenous manufacturing. The scheme had its points of deficiency but regrettably, the major driving points of the grandiose scheme remained largely on paper and were never implemented properly. The result—share of manufacturing in the economy continues to stagnate at 14 percent.

Absence of bureaucratic reforms: Our obsolete, corruption-ridden colonial bureaucratic system had never delivered earlier and cried for reforms. But the reforms did not come. The result was a failure of key developmental programmes like the 100 Smart Cities Programme. The government did a remarkable job of establishing GST and promulgating the IBC. This enabled a clean-up of banks and a sharp decline in their NPAs. However, the failure of the government to increase the ease of doing business by cutting down on bureaucratic red tape is a big reason behind the continuing lack of a suitable ecosphere for business and big investment.

Failure to implement Agricultural Reforms: The government did well to blueprint reforms in the agricultural sector—those related to MSP and procurement of agricultural produce. But the government failed to implement the same by capitulating in front of fake protesters masquerading as farmers.

Neglect of PSUs: The government paid very little attention to the state and central PSUs which account for 15 per cent of the total economic activities in the country. It kept on harping on the absence of the need for the government to be in business. This

was an impractical approach to handling the Indian economy and failed to tap the big PSUs in which so much of public money had been invested.

Failure to bring about judicial reforms: Justice in this country continues to be delayed, denied and derailed. Despite big talks to the contrary, the government did nothing in the direction of judicial reforms. This was and remains a big dampener to FDI and even domestic investment in new business.

Notwithstanding the above, we must bear in mind that most of the previous governments had left deep pits in our economy that needed to be filled to prepare the ground for the rapid holistic development of the country. The UPA government, between 2004 and 2014 did produce better numbers for FE reserves and economic growth rate but the money generating that investment and growth was preponderantly from the huge proportion of parallel-black money economy out of the overall economy. Money was meagrely flowing for the critical sectors of defence and infrastructure and even for some important socialistic schemes. Modi 1.0 and Modi 2.0 changed this by bringing economic discipline and curbing corruption and economic malfeasance. It brought GST and IBC and did the clean-up of Banks by bringing down drastically the NPAs. It severely dented the black money economy. These were the pits filled by the Modi government that have prepared fertile soil for the fast-track economic progress of the country now. Given the above, it is imper-

ative and is also expected that the Modi government, if returned to power, will take the undermentioned steps to boost real progress on the economic front. Economic progress is the foundation of the overall progress of a country. Progress on other fronts like defence, foreign affairs, etc. has been significant but sustainable multifaceted development can only be achieved on the foundation of a strong and healthy economic bottom line.

The country needs drastic institutional and bureaucratic reforms. It needs urgent implementation of the farming sector reforms which were shelved after so much drum beating. The education sector calls for a thorough overhaul to replace the colonial Macaulay established system with an indigenous system in tune with the nation's ethos and tradition.

Sloganeering and political gamesmanship need to be replaced by serious, earnest and committed steps for boosting investment, trade, manufacturing and exports. India has a huge potential for becoming an economic powerhouse in quick time but we need to go about building our economy with due seriousness and dedication, rising above narrow interests of caste, class, political affiliations and last but not least, political expediency. It is very much hoped that Modi 3.0, with a two-thirds majority, will usher in the much-needed administrative, bureaucratic and judicial reforms for the speedy economic progress of the country.

(The author is a management consultant; views are personal)

India and Armenia strengthen defence ties amidst regional instability

As the Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan axis looms, the growing Indo-Armenia partnership emerges as a vital defence against destabilising forces

In recent years, the strategic partnership between India and Armenia has undergone a remarkable transformation—fired by their shared commitment to fortify defence capabilities and confront regional security challenges head-on. Against the backdrop of Armenia's enduring struggle with Azerbaijan and Turkey's support for Azerbaijan's advantages, the precipitating connection between Armenia and India stands for recognition. Armenia's proximity to India and both agreeing to diversify their strategic alignment, deserves special attention on the global stage.

Military Cooperation: Armenia's imperative to diversify its security alliances and bolster its military capabilities,



PADMALOCHAN DASH

particularly amidst the enduring conflict with Azerbaijan, is evident through heightened defence spending and collaborations with nations such as India and France. India's involvement with Armenia's military not only strengthens its defensive capabilities but also serves to counterbalance external-internal influences like Turkey and Pakistan in the South Asian region. The expanding Indo-Armenian

partnership encompasses various facets, including the exchange of weaponry, joint military exercises, and strategic consultations, all aimed at enhancing defence readiness and security in their respective regions.

Advanced Weaponry and Joint Exercises: The acquisition of state-of-the-art weaponry highlights the growing defence cooperation between India and Armenia. Reports indicate ongoing provision of military hardware from India to Armenia, including multiple-launch rocket systems, anti-tank missiles, and radar systems. Additionally, joint military exercises and training programs are underway to enhance preparedness and interoperability between their

armed forces. These collaborative efforts facilitate the exchange of expertise and tactics, fostering effective coordination for potential future operations, from joint exercises to intelligence sharing, both nations are committed to showcasing their military capabilities and strengthening their strategic partnership.

Geopolitical Determinations: Armenia's pivotal role in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) offers India diversified trade routes and enhanced access to Eurasian markets, bolstering strategic interests in economic resilience and geopolitical balancing. Conversely, India's military support for Armenia underscores its commitment to preserving regional peace and countering aggressive

manoeuvres by the Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan axis. Through the realisation of mutual interests, India and Armenia can reshape security dynamics in the South Caucasus region by challenging the dominance of larger geopolitical actors and their support for rogue powers.

Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan Axis: The Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan axis poses a substantial threat to respective regional stability, with Turkey's unwavering support for Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict then raising concerns about potential escalations. The longstanding military partnership between Turkey and Pakistan, characterised by defence production, joint training exercises, and high-level military dialogues, under-

scores their concerted efforts to advance mutual geopolitical goals and exert influence in the regions. This axis represents a significant challenge to the security and stability of the South Caucasus and South Asian regions, as that axis seeks to consolidate its power and undermine the influence of other regional stakeholders. Responses and Ongoing Efforts: In response to the burgeoning influence of the Turkey-Azerbaijan-Pakistan axis, India's steadfast support for Armenia signifies a resolute stance against their aggressive manoeuvres in the region. Aimed at preserving a delicate balance of power, India and Armenia are all set to intensify their collaboration to address these threats.

While Turkey's stance on

Kashmir validates the burgeoning Indo-Armenia defence cooperation, the nexus between Turkey's involvement in the Kashmir issue and Pakistan's alignment with Azerbaijan's agenda cannot be seen as a mere happenstance, rather a meticulously orchestrated strategy with far-reaching intention. In this backdrop, the urgent need for a meticulously planned multilateral defence partnership underscored. This becomes essential to counter the unholy Turkey-Pakistan-Azerbaijan axis thereby ensuring stability in both the Caucasus and South Asian regions.

The Promising Prospects: The emerging strategic cooperation between India and Armenia holds immense promise for enhancing region-

al security and advancing shared interests. Both nations are poised to deepen their partnership and address prevailing challenges through concerted efforts in military collaboration and strategic alignments. India's steadfast support for Armenia underscores its dedication to maintaining peace and stability in the Caucasus region. With far-reaching implications for global geopolitical outcomes, the Indo-Armenia partnership has the potential to redefine the regional balance of power and contribute significantly to the stability and prosperity of both the Caucasus and South Asian regions.

(The writer is working with an Independent Think Tank, views are personal)

Putin accuses West of fueling global conflicts

AP ■ MOSCOW
Russia on Thursday wrapped itself in patriotic pageantry for Victory Day, as President Vladimir Putin celebrated the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II by hailing his forces fighting in Ukraine and blasting the West for fueling conflicts around the world.



Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Ground Forces Oleg Salyukov, left, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, centre, and Russian President Vladimir Putin leave Red Square, walk, after the Victory Day military parade in Moscow, Russia, Thursday, May 9, 2024, marking the 79th anniversary of the end of World War II. AP/PTI

Even though few veterans of what Russia calls the Great Patriotic War are still alive 79 years after Berlin fell to the Red Army, the victory remains the most important and widely revered symbol of Russia's prowess and a key element of national identity. Putin has turned Victory Day — the country's most important secular holiday — into a pillar of his nearly quarter-century in power and a justification of his military action in Ukraine. Two days after beginning his fifth term in office, he led the festivities across Russia that recall the nation's wartime sacrifice.

“Victory Day unites all generations,” Putin said in a speech in Red Square that came on the coldest May 9 in decades amid some snow flurries. “We are going forward relying on our centuries-old traditions and feel confident that together we will ensure a free and secure future of Russia.”

As battalions marched by and military hardware — both old and new — rumbled over the cobblestones, the sky cleared briefly to allow a flyby of warplanes, some of which trailed smoke in the white, red and blue of the Russian flag. Putin hailed the troops fighting in Ukraine as “our heroes” for their courage, resilience and self-denial, adding that “all of Russia is with you.”

He accused the West of “fueling regional conflicts, inter-ethnic and inter-religious strife and trying to contain sovereign and independent centers of global development.” With tensions with Washington over Ukraine soaring to their highest level since the Cold War, Putin issued another stark reminder of Moscow's nuclear might. “Russia will do everything to prevent global confrontation, but will not allow anyone to threaten us,” he said. “Our strategic forces are in combat readiness.”

Pak leadership vows not to allow May 9 ‘executors’ to get away

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/LAHORE
Pakistan's top civil and military leadership Thursday strongly condemned the unprecedented violence by the supporters of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan on May 9 last year and vowed not to allow its “executors” to get away with their acts which were aimed at establishing an “individual's dictatorship.”

Termed May 9 (Black Day) as one of the “darkest days in our national history”, the Inter-Services Public Relations - the media wing of the army - said that the politically motivated and brainwashed miscreants in an act of rebellion deliberately resorted to violence against state institutions and vandalised sacred symbols of the state and the sites belonging to national heritage.

“Every family is honoring its heroes, looking at pictures with dear faces and remembering their relatives and how they fought,” he said. Putin, 71, talks frequently about his family history, sharing memories of his father, who fought on the front during the Nazi siege of the city and was badly wounded. As Putin tells it, his father, also named Vladimir, came home from a military hospital during the war to see workers trying to take away his wife, Maria, who had been declared dead of starvation. But the elder Putin did not believe she had died — saying she had only lost consciousness, weak with hunger.

For several years, Putin carried a photo of his father in Victory Day marches — as did others honoring relatives who were war veterans — in what was

Taliban sound warning to journalists, experts

AP ■ KABUL
The Taliban on Thursday warned journalists and experts against working with Afghanistan International TV. It's the first time they have told people not to cooperate with a specific outlet.

day (Wednesday), it was decided that participating in discussions and facilitating the broadcast of this media outlet in public places is prohibited,” added Ghofran. He didn't give further details, including what would happen to those who cooperated with the station. The director of Afghanistan International TV, Harun Najafzada, said the decision would not affect the channel because it had no employees or freelancers in the country.

without Borders ranked the country 178 out of 180. It ranked 152 last year. RSF said that three radio reporters were arrested in April for broadcasting music and receiving calls from female listeners during shows. Local authorities weren't available to confirm the arrests. Also last month, the Taliban suspended two TV stations for failing to “consider national and Islamic values.”

Spanish court shelves tax probe against Shakira

Madrid (AP): A Spanish investigative magistrate on Thursday provisionally shelved the latest probe into an alleged case of tax fraud by pop star Shakira following recommendations by prosecutors. The Colombian singer had been under investigation for the alleged evasion of 6.7 million Euros (USD 7.2 million) in taxes on her 2018 income via an offshore company. She denied wrongdoing.

IS group claims bombing in Afghanistan

AP ■ ISLAMABAD
The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a bombing in Afghanistan's northeast that killed police officers who were part of an anti-poppo crop campaign. A motorcycle was booby-trapped and exploded, targeting a Taliban patrol in Faizabad town in Badakhshan province, killing and wounding 12 members of the patrol as well as destroying a four-wheel drive vehicle, the group said in a statement late Wednesday.



out the country's drug cultivation industry and imposed a formal ban in April 2022, dealing a heavy blow to hundreds of thousands of farmers and day laborers who relied on proceeds from the crop to survive. Opium cultivation crashed by 95% after the ban, a report from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime said last November. Protests are rare in Afghanistan under Taliban rule, but there was a backlash

in Badakhshan last week in response to the poppy eradication campaign. It prompted a high-ranking delegation led by the chief of military staff Fasihudin Fitrat to visit the region and negotiate with protesters. Protests erupted last Friday after a man was shot and killed by the Taliban for resisting poppy eradication attempts in Darayum district. Another was killed on Saturday during a protest in Argo district.

Yoon rejects S Korean opp calls for probe against wife, top officials

AP ■ SEOUL
South Korea's president on Thursday dismissed calls for independent investigations into allegations involving his wife and top officials, drawing quick, strong rebukes from his political rivals.

alleged involvement in a stock price manipulation scheme and the release of spy camera footage showing her receiving a luxury bag from a Korean American pastor. In a news conference marking his two years in office, Yoon said he apologizes for what he calls “my wife's unwise behavior” in accepting the Christian Dior bag but refused to elaborate because the scandal is under investigation by prosecutors.

had vetoed a bill calling for the appointment of an independent counsel to investigate his wife's stock price allegation. During Thursday's conference, Yoon also made it clear that he opposes another Democratic Party-led push for a special investigation into suspicions surrounding the death of a marine who drowned during a search for flood victims in 2023. Yoon called the marine's death heartbreaking, but stressed that police and an anti-corruption investigation agency have already been examining the case. Yoon said he would approve a new independent investigation if police and the anti-corruption investigation agency fail to address public suspicions over the case.

House rejects Greene's effort to remove Speaker Johnson

AP ■ WASHINGTON
Hardline Rep Marjorie Taylor Greene tried and failed in sudden action Wednesday to oust Speaker Mike Johnson, her long-shot effort swiftly and resoundingly rejected by Democrats and Republicans tired of the political chaos.

to vacate the speaker from his office, the Republican Majority Leader Steve Scalise countered by calling first for a vote to table it. An overwhelming majority, 359-43, kept Johnson in his job, for now. It's the second time in a matter of months that Republicans have tried to oust their own speaker, an unheard-of level of party turmoil with a move rarely seen in U.S. history.

ward. “The country desperately needs a functioning Congress.” The Georgia Republican had vowed she would force a vote on the motion to vacate the Republican speaker if he dared to advance a foreign aid package with funds for Ukraine, which was overwhelmingly approved late last month and signed into law. But in recent days it seemed her effort had cooled, as she and Johnson met repeatedly for a potential resolution. Johnson of Louisiana marched on, saying he had been willing to take the risk, believing it was important for the US to back Ukraine against Russia's invasion and explaining he wanted to be on the “right side of history.”

Prez pins Sri Lanka's economic stability on IMF programme

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Thursday told lawmakers that there was no “alternative path” to economic recovery for the island nation other than the IMF-prescribed reform plans. Sri Lanka has been facing the worst economic crisis, leading to a sharp rise in the prices of essential commodities, including fuel, since its independence from the British in 1948.

Parliament. The president said the budget deficit had surged to over 10-12 per cent, resulting in an increase of interest rate to 30 per cent. He added that there were insufficient funds to import food and essential goods even for a week and the “majority of the population found themselves on the streets with some enduring lengthy queues for necessities.” He said under the IMF bailout of USD 2.9 billion, the government implemented economic discipline. He said he anticipated a growth of 3 per cent this year. He said the interest rates had also decreased substantially to as low as 10-13 per cent. “I reiterate once more there exists no alternative path to reconstructing our economy. No other programme rivals the efficiency of the one currently in place, nor does any other plan offer a viable alternative,” he said. Separately, the Election Commission of Sri Lanka said on Thursday the island nation will hold a presidential election between September 17 and October 16. Although the two main opposition leaders and several others had already announced their candidature for the presidential poll, Wickremesinghe has not announced his intention to seek a second term.

BABA FARID UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES, FARIDKOT
(Admission Branch)
Admission Notice for PPMET (Basic B.Sc. Nursing) Course, session 2024
Online applications are invited alongwith requisite fee for admission to Basic B.Sc. Nursing course in all the Govt./University constitute/Private colleges of Punjab through University website from 09.05.2024 to 23.05.2024. Prospectus for admission to Basic B.Sc. Nursing course will be available on university website from 09.05.2024. The Entrance Test (PPMET- 2024) for admission to Basic B.Sc. Nursing course will be conducted on 05.06.2024
Note:- Any Notification/Corrigendum/Amendment by Govt. of Punjab will be followed. For Prospectus/fee details/schedule/online counselling/details & updates visit us at: www.bfhs.ac.in.
REGISTRAR
001/12/234/2023/34047 Dated CHD :- 5/9/2024

Household savings decline due to rising home, auto, personal loans

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Household savings are estimated to have declined for the third year in a row in FY24 as liabilities on account of interest towards housing and vehicle loans have continued to rise, but the trend could reverse in 2024-25 on account of the impact of RBI's curbs on personal loan. The net household savings declined sharply by Rs 9 lakh crore to Rs 14.16 lakh crore in three years to 2022-23, as per the National Account Statistics 2024 data released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI). Explaining the data, ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar attributed the declining trend in household savings to a sharp 73 per cent year-on-year increase in liabilities during 2022-23. She further said that as per the indication the trend of decrease in household savings has continued in 2023-24, the data for which is likely to be released later. However, the trend could reverse in 2024-25 as Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has taken measures to curb unsecured personal loans, she told PTI. Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran



attributed the decline to a shift in portfolio where savings were being channelised to real assets. "Household net financial savings flows were lower in FY23 and there were some concerns around that, which said households are saving less. But, in reality, it was a portfolio shift where the savings were going into real assets," Nageswaran had said at a NCAER event on Wednesday. Following is an explainer of what household savings means, the historical data and the outlook for 2024-25. 1. What does households mean? Households include everything that is not

institutions. Loans to households by financial corporations and NBFCs increased four-fold to Rs 3.33 lakh crore in 2022-23 from Rs 93,723 crore in 2020-21. It grew 73 per cent in 2022-23 over Rs 1.92 lakh crore worth of loans in 2021-22. 4. Why are the liabilities going up? According to Nayar, a part of this is towards housing loans. We have seen the housing market recover after Covid and housing sales have touched highs in the next few years post Covid. But it is not just housing loans where household liabilities have gone up. It also includes vehicle and education, agri and business loans. "It looks quite likely that household liabilities will go up in FY24 so some of these trends may continue. However, with the recent tightening of regulation by RBI, we do expect that some categories of personal loans will see slower growth in FY25. And that will augur well for household savings rate for the current fiscal," Nayar said. Seeing a surge in personal loans, the RBI in November last year, raised the provisioning requirement for unsecured loans, including personal loans.

Sensex tumbles over 1,000 points

Nifty falls below 22,000 amid poll uncertainties

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark Sensex on Thursday crashed over 1,000 points while the Nifty dived below the 22,000 level due to across-the-board selloff amid general election uncertainties. Besides, persistent foreign fund outflows and heavy selling pressure in HDFC Bank, Larsen & Toubro and Reliance Industries weighed on investor sentiment, traders said. Declining for the third day running, the 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 1,062.22 points or 1.45 per cent to settle at 72,404.17. During the day, it tanked 1,132.21 points or 1.54 per cent to 72,334.18. The NSE Nifty dived 345 points or 1.55 per cent to 21,957.50. It tumbled 370.1 points or 1.65 per cent to 21,932.40 during the session. "The broader market witnessed volatility, underscoring caution on account of Q4 earnings and general election uncertainties, which led investors to stay on the sidelines. We expect the trend to continue in the short term as the market slid below the physiological level of 22,000. The global indices are trading with mixed cues ahead of the BOE policy meeting later today and US inflation figures due next week," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.



From the Sensex basket, Larsen & Toubro tanked over 5 per cent after March quarter earnings. Asian Paints, JSW Steel, ITC, Bajaj Finance, IndusInd Bank, Tata Steel, NTPC, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries and Power Grid were among the laggards. In contrast, Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, State Bank of India, Infosys and HCL Tech were the gainers. Meanwhile, the country's largest lender SBI reported 18.18 per cent growth in the March quarter consolidated net profit to Rs 21,384.15 crore against Rs 18,093.84 crore in the year-ago period. Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) on Thursday posted a 25 per cent fall in its March quarter net profit on lower refining margins and announced one free bonus share for every two

shares held. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 2.41 per cent and midcap index dropped 2.01 per cent. Among the indices, oil and gas lost 3.41 per cent, capital goods dropped 3.37 per cent, metal tanked 3.13 per cent, industrials (2.92 per cent), utilities (2.59 per cent) and commodities (2.39 per cent). On the other hand, auto emerged as the major gainer. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 6,669.10 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. "Nifty ended sharply lower led by institutional selling and traders squaring up due to nervousness on election progress. World shares were mostly lower on Thursday ahead of the Bank of England's policy decision and after the US market's pause stretched

into a second day and as Chinese stocks rose after China reported better-than-expected trade figures for April," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled with gains, while Seoul and Tokyo ended lower. European markets were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street closed mixed in overnight trade on Wednesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.48 per cent to USD 83.89 a barrel. "The market is continuously witnessing pressure ahead of the election outcome. We don't have any global reason for this correction, while some uncertainty ahead of the big event is causing profit-booking in the market. Our market has been largely driven by domestic investors, including both HNIs and institutional investors, for the last few months. "Now, they are sitting on the sidelines for the last couple of days and taking some profit off the table ahead of the big event, while FIIs are continuously selling in our market, which is pushing the market lower. The Volatility index, India VIX, has risen 70 per cent from its lows, which is also creating some uncertainty among traders and investors," Santosh Meena,

Fairfax backed Go Digit to float IPO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Go Digit General Insurance Ltd, a firm backed by Canada-based Fairfax Group, is set to launch its initial public offering on May 15. The initial share sale will conclude on May 17 and the bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on May 14, according to the Red Herring Prospectus (RHP). Go Digit's proposed IPO comprises fresh issuance of equity shares worth Rs 1,125 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of 5.47 crore equity shares by a promoter Go Digit

Infoworks Services and existing shareholders. At present, Go Digit Infoworks Services owns an 83.3 per cent stake in the company. Proceeds from the fresh issuance have been proposed to be utilised for the augmentation of the company's capital base and maintenance of solvency levels and general corporate purposes. Cricketer Virat Kohli and his wife and actor Anushka Sharma are among the investors in the firm. They are not selling any shares in the IPO.

In March, Go Digit secured approval from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) to float the IPO. The company had first filed the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) with the Sebi in August 2022 to raise funds through an initial share sale. However, it was thwarted primarily due to certain compliance requirements pertaining to the employee stock appreciation rights scheme. Sebi returned Go Digit's draft IPO papers on January 30, 2023, and asked the company to refile the documents with

certain updates. Following this, the company again filed the preliminary IPO papers with Sebi in April 2023. Go Digit offers motor insurance, health insurance, travel insurance, property insurance, marine insurance, liability insurance, and other insurance products, to meet the needs of the customers. It is one of the first non-life insurers in India to be fully operated on the cloud and has developed Application Programming Interface (API) integrations with several channel partners.

IHCL expands partnership with CG Hospitality

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Indian Hotels Company (IHCL) on Thursday announced a strategic partnership with CG Hospitality with a plan to grow its portfolio in the Indian sub-continent to 25 hotels by 2025, involving a total investment of around Rs 4,000 crore. The portfolio of 25 properties by 2025, will include 11 operating hotels with 900 keys and will add

another 14, which will be under one platform — 'Ekyam' — to pursue opportunities in destinations that offer adventure experiences across the Indian Ocean and Greater Himalayan regions and wildlife escapes, IHCL Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Puneet Chhatwal told reporters. IHCL's Vice President Commercial Ram Maheshwari will lead the 'Ekyam' platform, he added.

Maruti Suzuki to re-energise small car segment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Betting big on the entry-level segment, Maruti Suzuki India on Thursday said it will continue to "re-energise" the small car segment as the automaker expects the vertical to revive over the next few years, according to MD & CEO Hisashi Takeuchi. Speaking at the launch of the new generation Swift here, he noted that the automaker aims to cater to the diverse needs of customers as it aims to sell 40 lakh units by 2030-31. Takeuchi noted that the entry-level segment continues to be a high volume vertical accounting for around 28 per cent of the overall domestic passenger vehicle sales. "For us to maintain our leadership position, it is important to cater to diverse customer segments. The hatchback segment in India continues to be a high-volume segment, accounting for approximately 28 per cent of total passenger vehicle sales," Takeuchi said. Interestingly, the premium hatchback segment contributes nearly 60 per cent of total hatchback sales, he noted. "As a market leader, we took the responsibility to re-energise the hatchback segment at a time when this segment really needs a



catalyst for growth," Takeuchi said. He noted that the company has a strong belief in India's growth story. "As the government aims to make India a developed country by 2047, we can expect increased economic activity and robust demand for automobiles in the coming years," Takeuchi stated. With only 32 vehicles per 1,000 people compared to over 600 in developed countries like Japan, India presents a vast pool of car aspirants, he said. "As car ownership rises, the hatchback segment will serve as an entry point for many customers, and thus shall expand," Takeuchi noted. Therefore, the hatchback segment will continue to remain relevant for India, and the company's focus on this segment will persist, he added.

Fitch affirms ratings of Axis Bank, ICICI Bank on supporting operating environment

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fitch Ratings on Thursday affirmed the ratings of Axis Bank and ICICI Bank with a stable outlook citing supportive operating environment and large domestic franchise. Fitch Ratings has affirmed India-based Axis Bank and ICICI Bank's Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at 'BB+', the global agency said in two separate rating commentaries. Fitch has also affirmed the banks' Government Support Rating (GSR) at 'bb+' and Viability Rating (VR) at 'bb'. Fitch said its IDR ratings reflect expectation of a moderate probability of extraordinary state support from the government relative to large state banks.

The agency said its expectation of a supportive operative environment is on account of India's robust medium-term growth potential. Fitch expects GDP growth of 7 per cent in 2024 and 6.5 per cent in 2025, supported by investment prospects. "The economy has been resilient as healthy business sentiment, steady financial markets and the government's capital spending buffered global economic headwinds and inflation. These factors are conducive for banks to sustain profitable business, provided risks are well-managed," Fitch said. With regard to Axis Bank, Fitch said the bank's appetite for growth is likely to remain above the sector average, albeit similar to other large private banks.

HPCL Q4 net falls 25 per cent, records ₹16,000 profit in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) on Thursday reported a 25 per cent fall in its March quarter net profit on lower refining margins and announced one free bonus share for every two shares held. Its consolidated net profit of Rs 2,709.31 crore in January-March - the fourth quarter of the 2023-24 fiscal year - compares to Rs 3,608.32 crore in the same period of the previous financial year, according to a company's stock exchange filing. The firm earned USD 6.95 on turning every barrel of crude oil into fuel in the quarter against USD 14.01 per barrel gross refining margin a year back and USD 8.50 per barrel margin in the preceding quarter. HPCL board also approved a



1:2 bonus issue - 1 free share for every 2 shares held. Turnover was higher at Rs 1.22 lakh crore when compared to Rs 1.15 lakh crore in January-March 2023. For the full 2023-24, HPCL reported a record net profit of Rs 16,014.61 crore as opposed to a loss of Rs 6,980.23 crore in the previous year. The annual profit benefited from the nearly two-year-long freeze in petrol and diesel prices. While the freeze was affected when crude oil (the input used for making fuels like petrol and diesel) started rising in 2022 post-Russia's invasion of Ukraine, international rates moderated in most of 2023, helping companies like IOC book handsome profits. It was only in mid-March that petrol and diesel prices were cut by Rs 2. The rate cut, which came just before the

general elections, happened when crude oil prices started inching up. For FY2023-24, the revenue from operations stood at Rs 4,61,638 crore (Rs 4,66,192 crore during the previous year). The average gross refining margin (GRM) for 2023-24 (April 2023 to March 2024 fiscal) was USD 9.08 per barrel as opposed to USD 12.09 per barrel during the previous financial year. "The reduction in GRMs is in line with the trend of international product cracks," the company said in a statement. The Board of Directors has recommended the issue of bonus shares in the ratio 1:2 - one new bonus equity share of Rs 10 each for every two existing equity shares of Rs 10 each fully paid up, subject to the approval of shareholders.

India's exports rise in 115 nations out of 238 destinations in 2023-24: Data

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's exports have increased to as many as 115 countries out of the total 238 destinations during 2023-24 despite the global economic uncertainties, according to commerce ministry's data. These 115 export destinations, which account for 46.5 per cent of India's export basket, include the US, UAE, Netherlands, China, UK, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Bangladesh, Germany and Italy. The country's merchandise exports dipped by 3 per cent to USD 437.1 billion in the last fiscal. However, services exports rose to USD 341.1 billion in 2023-24 as against USD 325.3 billion in 2022-23. The data showed that despite persistent global challenges, overall exports (goods and services together) hit the

highest level in 2022-23. Overall exports reached USD 778.2 billion in 2023-24 as compared to USD 776.4 billion in 2022-23, registering a marginal growth of 0.23 per cent. The share of India's merchandise exports has also increased marginally from 1.70 per cent in 2014 to 1.82 per cent in 2023. India's rank in world merchandise exporters too has improved from 19th to 17th during the same period. Further, India's export to its top 10 destinations witnessed a 13 per cent year-on-year increase in 2023-24. The UAE has emerged as the primary destination, with a substantial 12.71 per cent growth in export value at USD 35.6 billion. Similarly, exports to Singapore that surged by 20.19 per cent to USD 14.4



billion, to the UK (up 13.30 per cent to USD 13 billion), and to China (up 8.70 per cent to USD 16.7 billion) also recorded healthy growth indicating a sustained demand for Indian products. The data showed that the exponential growth rates observed in countries like Russia (35.41 per cent), Romania (138.84 per cent),

and Albania (234.97 per cent) underscore the exploration of new markets. "Strengthening trade relations with these nations could unlock untapped opportunities and bolster India's overall export competitiveness," an official said. The country's outbound shipments to regions including CIS (commonwealth of independent states, Oceania and Europe too witnessed expansion during 2023-24 over 2022-23. The top five export destinations driving export growth in CIS region during 2023-24 are Russia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Armenia and Tajikistan. Similarly, the top five destinations driving India's export growth in Oceania region in the last fiscal are

Australia, Timor Leste, Samoa, Vanuatu and Solomon Island. And in Europe, the major countries where Indian exporters recorded healthy growth in their shipments during 2023-24 are the UK, Romania, Albania, Netherlands and Greece. On the commodities front, as many as 17 items have registered an increase in exports in 2023-24 over the last financial. These sectors constitute 48.4 per cent of India's export basket. These sectors include engineering, electronic goods, pharmaceuticals, and cotton yarn/fabrics/handloom products. However, there were notable decline in key sectors in the last fiscal such as petroleum products (- 13.66 per cent) and gems and jewellery (- 13.83 per cent).

According to the data, of the 229 source nations, India's imports have declined from 124 countries in 2023-24. The top 10 source countries, which constitute 59.3 per cent of India's import basket, include China, USA, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Russia, and Switzerland. Decline in imports are reported from countries like the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman and it highlights the need for India to bolster its trade relations, especially with GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) member countries, the official said. "While some declines may stem from market dynamics or economic conditions, they also present opportunities for policy makers to reconsider trade strategies, prioritize domestic production, and foster indigenous industries," the official added.

Meanwhile, India Exim Bank on Thursday projected that India's merchandise exports would rise by 12.3 per cent to USD 116.7 billion during April-June this fiscal. "Positive growth in India's exports could be as a result of India's strong GDP growth fundamentals and outlook, sustained momentum in manufacturing and services sector, backed by expected global easing of monetary tightening spurring global demand, and to some extent due to base effect," it said in a statement. The outlook is, however, subject to risks of uncertain prospects for advanced economies, geopolitical shocks, the Middle East crisis leading to the intensification of the Red Sea crisis and deepening geo-economic fragmentation, among other factors, it added.

Russian Cultural Centre celebrates victory day with the Cottage



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In commemoration of the 79th Anniversary of the Victory Day of the Russians, a delegation led by Eliana Burman, president of Indian Association of Russian Compatriots, along with families of various Russian citizens living in India visited "the cottage", Tolstoy Marg, Janpath to pay homage to the eminent luminary and renowned Russian writer Leo Tolstoy.



Photos: Pankaj Kumar/Pioneer

THE ENCHANTING TAPESTRY OF INDIAN CULTURE

The Kendra Dance Festival mesmerised audiences with its captivating blend of dance and storytelling, showcasing India's rich heritage. From spiritual explorations to mythological tales, each performance left a lasting impression, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**



Step into a world where art transcends boundaries and narratives come alive through graceful movements. The Kendra Dance Festival 2024, hosted at the prestigious Kamani Auditorium in New Delhi, was a mesmerising journey through the rich tapestry of Indian culture. Over three enchanting evenings from May 3 to May 5, 2024, this festival promised and delivered an unforgettable exploration of Indian culture through the captivating art of dance drama.

Each night unfolded a unique dance drama, transporting audiences to a different realm. The festival opened with *Parikrama*, a production that transcended the boundaries of entertainment to delve deep into the human psyche. Through a harmonious blend of direction, choreography, lighting, costumes and production *Parikrama* entranced the audience. The choreography, a brilliant fusion of movements mainly derived from the Chhau dance form, drew a standing ovation, highlighting the dedication and skill of the performers. Principal performer artist Shivam Sahni, essaying the challenging role of Atma, spoke of the difficulty in portraying a non-being showcasing the depth and complexity of the production.

The visionary direction of Padmashri Shobha Deepak Singh transformed the

stage into a realm of spiritual exploration. The production beautifully depicted the cyclical nature of existence, from birth to liberation, drawing from the profound concepts of Indian philosophy. The audience was taken on a journey from the potentiality symbolised by *Hiranyagarbh* to the manifestation of the soul as *Atma*, exploring the soul's struggle against the senses and its quest for liberation, ultimately achieving *Moksha*. The innovative use of lighting and sound coupled with a thoughtful script added layers of depth to the performance making it a profound theatrical experience.

The second night brought the epic *Mahabharata* to life with *Karna*. This captivating dance drama delved into the complexities of human existence through the lens of the enigmatic Karna. We stood witness to his struggles and triumphs, his unwavering ideals, and the timeless questions of morality and righteousness that his life embodied. The choreography, expressive and evocative, brought Karna's life to vibrant life on stage, evoking both sympathy and admiration from the audience. The performance was a visual masterpiece, with every detail from the expressive dance to the exquisite costumes contributing to its exceptional excellence. The unwavering support from the audience filling every seat in the auditorium further solidified the importance of celebrating and preserving Indian culture.

The final evening culminated with *Meera*, in vibrant portrayal of renowned saint

poetess. This dance drama, titled after its central figure, delved into her life and legacy. Meera's poetry bursting with vibrancy and effervescence resonated with audiences carrying messages of liberation and inner awakening. The performance challenged societal norms and redefined Meera's image offering an introspective exploration of the struggles faced by women. Drawing inspiration from Rajasthani dance styles, the choreography beautifully captured Meera's enduring influence. The Kendra Dance Festival's success was solidified by the audience's profound engagement with the performances evident in the thunderous applause and heartfelt comments such as "heaven for the eyes" and "a soulful performance."

Throughout the festival, the commitment of the Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra to preserve and promote India's rich cultural heritage was evident. Their tireless efforts in organising this exceptional dance festival have not only enriched our lives but also provided a platform for these alluring stories to be shared with the world. The choreography for all three performances by Shashidharan Nair, combined with Padmashri Shobha Deepak Singh's visionary direction, created an alluring experience that celebrated the timeless beauty of Indian culture.

As Padmashri Shobha Deepak Singh aptly stated, "The Kendra Dance Festival's productions are not just performances; they are reflections of our cultural essence and timeless wisdom." The Dance Festival was

a testament to the power of artistic expression and a celebration of the enduring relevance of Indian culture in today's world. It was an unforgettable journey that left a lasting impression on all who were fortunate enough to witness its magic. The deepest appreciation is reserved for Padmashri Shobha Deepak Singh for her visionary leadership and unparalleled artistic direction. Under her guidance, the Kendra Dance Festival has transcended mere entertainment to become a transformative and unforgettable experience showcasing the profound beauty and depth of Indian culture to audiences worldwide.

The three-day celebration of dance was an enduring and compelling experience where storytelling, acting, dance, drama, and music converged to create an unforgettable spectacle. The festival beautifully showcased the rich tapestry of Indian history and mythology weaving together narratives that resonated with audiences and left a lasting impression. The performances were a testament to the cultural heritage of India offering a glimpse into its vibrant traditions and timeless stories. This festival was a celebration of artistic excellence and a tribute to the depth and beauty of Indian culture. This festival wasn't just a celebration of dance; it was a celebration of heritage, a testament to the enduring power of storytelling and a glimpse into the soul of India.



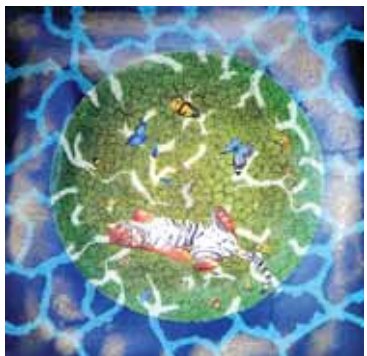
A Journey through Creativity and Appreciation

SAKSHI PRIYA explores the world through the eyes of master artists and emerging talents whose works redefine the boundaries of creativity

Embark on an alluring journey into the vibrant world of art with *Detente: A Haven of Artistic Rhapsody*, an exhibition that celebrates the spirit of creativity and cultural diversity. This exhibition showcase of modern and contemporary Indian and international art invites spectators to explore a variety of artistic themes and narratives, each piece offering a unique perspective on evolution, culture, and society.

Stepping into the gallery feels like entering an enchanted world where each painting tells a captivating story, inviting viewers on a journey of emotions and creativity. The exhibition, featuring works by renowned master artists such as MF Hussain, SH Raza, GR Santosh, Satish Gujral, Manu Parekh, B Prabha, Anjali Ela Menon, Ajay Samir, Anup Kumar Chand, Ashok Bhowmick, alongside contributions from contemporary and participating artists like M Narayan, Bahaar Dhawan Rohatgi, Sanuj Birla, Aditee Garg and more, is a testament to the richness and diversity of contemporary Indian and international art.

The artwork demands to be seen and appreciated by all, showcasing the exquisite talent of each artist. Visitors stand before the paintings, interpreting and admiring the work in their unique way, captivated by the details, patterns,



and colours. This experience highlights the immense value and appreciation for art in today's world. The gallery itself feels like a journey through memory lane which continues to resonate even after they are no longer with us. Their art speaks volumes, as the saying goes, "an artist's work always stays with us." Artists like SH Raza, GR Santosh, MF Husain, B Prabha, and Satish Gujral demonstrate their mastery through their paintings, with each piece reflecting their profound skill and artistic vision. The walls of the gallery

exude a mesmerising aura, showcasing the true worth and beauty of these artworks. M. Narayan's artwork, with its focus on equestrian aesthetics, captures the power and speed of horses through expressionist strokes and dynamic lines. His paintings convey the thrilling energy and elegant beauty of horses and polo players, drawing viewers into a world of vivid colours and bold strokes. Satish Gujral's canvas delves into the depths of history, channelling an expressionist grandeur of gesture and space. Bahaar Dhawan Rohatgi's art invokes a sense of calmness with abstract explorations

performative in nature. Her work invites viewers to join in transporting them to the realm of magnificent creatures through intricate narratives and expansive spaces. The artwork of Anup Kumar Chand is described as a tribute to the majesty of nature, particularly awe-inspiring tigers. His paintings create a world of fantasy shapes where colours seamlessly blend with the background resulting in a harmonious visual symphony. Sanuj Birla's exceptional painting is noted for its excellence in art, creating dreamy visions inspired by movies and comic books holding a special place in everyone's heart. Each artist's work is celebrated for its uniqueness and ability to evoke a range of emotions and interpretations making the exhibition a truly immersive and inspiring experience for all visitors. The exhibition is not just about showcasing art; it is about honouring the legacy of artists and the impact of their work. It is a celebration of power, grace, and beauty. As visitors immerse themselves in this artistic journey, they

are transported to a world where time slows down and the boundaries between reality and fantasy blur. The gallery becomes a testimony to the immersive experience that art can offer, where every piece evokes a beautiful sense of emotion and reality. Sumer Raj Chadha, the founder of Gallery West End reflects on his appreciation for art, nurtured over the years by his grandmother, Santosh Raj Chadha, a passionate art collector. He says, "This exhibit is a tribute to a true art aficionado and a fervent connoisseur of beauty, our vanguard, late Santosh Raj Chadha, my beloved grandmother. She sowed the seed of love for art and has been a custodian of creative curiosity in our family." Chadha's dedication has transformed this exhibition into a platform for artists to showcase their talent and connect with enthusiasts. His commitment to honoring artistic legacies and encouraging creativity shines in every aspect of this remarkable exhibition. 'Detente: A Haven of Artistic Rhapsody' is more than just an art exhibition; it is an incredible source of inspiration and an immersive journey into the artistic vision of modern and contemporary artists. It is a place where art speaks to everyone, inviting them to delve into realms of exploration, connection, and inspiration.

Photos: Pankaj Kumar/Pioneer

