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## Voter fatigue deepens in Phase IV

VOTER TURNOUT OVER 63 PER CENT IN PHASE IV POLLS SRINAGAR IMPROVES THREE DECADES VOTERS SCORE

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The intense voters' awareness programmes for increasing the turnout remained futile as the phase four general elections on Monday saw the average plummeting to over 63 per cent till 8.30 pm on Monday. The voter turnout in the first three phases was 66.14 per cent, 66.71 per cent and 65.68 per cent, respectively. Interestingly the good news came in from Jammu and Kashmir which saw voting after abrogation of Article 370. Srinagar recorded 36.88 per cent voter average. This figure is higher than Srinagar's turnout in 2019 when it saw a turnout of 14.43 per cent. The figures for 2014, 2009, 2004 and 1999 are 25.86 per cent, 25.55 per cent, 18.57 per cent and 11.93 per cent respectively. Elections were held in 96 constituencies spread over 10 States and UTs amid incidents of violence between Trinamool Congress and BJP workers in West Bengal, while YSRCP and TDP cadres came to blows at multiple locations in Andhra Pradesh as well as reports of poll boycott in some Uttar Pradesh villages. Besides, there were also



Voters display identity cards while standing in queue to cast their votes during the phase IV of general elections, in Berhampur, Odisha, on Monday

reports of EVMs malfunctioning at some booths in West Bengal and Odisha. This schedule was a critical round for the Congress and not much for the BJP. According to the Election Commission, polling was held smoothly and peacefully. With the fourth phase, the polling for the 379 out of 543 parliamentary constituencies has been completed. Interestingly, amid the Congress demand to vote for NOTA, voter turnout in Indore was recorded 56.53 per cent, lowest in Madhya Pradesh where the Congress nominated candidate withdrew from the polls. West Bengal witnessed over 63.85 per cent, Odisha 76.02 per cent turnout, the

highest among all States polling. Among other States, Andhra Pradesh recorded 68.16 per cent polling, Bihar 55.92 per cent, Jharkhand 63.50 per cent, Madhya Pradesh 68.90 per cent, Maharashtra 52.93 per cent, Odisha 61.54 per cent and Uttar Pradesh 58 per cent. In Telangana, Hyderabad which is considered a stronghold of Asaduddin Owaisi, witnessed 39.17 per cent polling which is lowest in the State. In Bengal, where violence marred previous rounds of voting, a Trinamool Congress worker was killed in a crude bomb attack. The incident took place in the Bolpur Lok Sabha constituency, mere hours before polling was scheduled to begin. Amid claims of West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer that voting has been peaceful so far, clashes broke out between supporters of TMC and BJP in Monteswar's Susunia area of Bardhaman-Durgapur Lok Sabha seat around noon, as BJP candidate Dilip Ghosh was on his way to a polling booth following complaints of booth jamming. Ghosh was allegedly heckled by the TMC activists, sources claimed. BJP candidate in Telangana's Hyderabad Lok Sabha seat K Madhavi Latha was booked by election authorities after a video clip surfaced online in which she was purportedly seen asking burqa-clad women voters to show their faces to compare with the photo identity cards.

## THE PIONEER REPORTS FROM GROUND ZERO

WEST BENGAL	MAHARASHTRA
<p>SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA</p> <p>Stray incidents of violence marked the fourth-phase polling in West Bengal's eight constituencies that went to the polls on Monday, with a little more than 75 per cent voter turnout reported by the Election Commission of India. The EC said the polling percentage could increase by a few percentage points in the final count. While Behrampur — from where Pradesh Congress president Adhir Chowdhury is contesting against TMC's Yusuf Pathan — Krishnagar, Ranaghat and Burdwan East was comparatively peaceful with a couple of incidents of "stick-fighting" being recorded from Krishnagar. Some areas of Burdwan-Durgapur seat from where former BJP State president Dilip Ghosh is contesting against TMC's Kirti Azad witnessed sporadic violence, sources said. A Trinamool Congress supporter at Monteswar in Burdwan-Durgapur seat was hurt after he was allegedly beaten up by the Central forces guarding the booth. A similar incident took place at Burdwan city when Ghosh rushed to a polling booth hearing that the booth had been blocked by the TMC men. After he was returning from the area, local TMC workers resorted to brick-battling. In the melee the back windshield of one of the vehicles in his convoy got smashed and a CAPF jawan sustained injuries, sources said. He was rushed to the hospital. "The TMC goes on to it every year ... they capture booths and chase away voters ... they do not allow people to</p>	<p>TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI</p> <p>Amid a complaint by the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) about the alleged use of money to "purchase" votes in three constituencies, an average 52.75 per cent of 2.28 crore voters exercised their franchise till 5 pm in eleven Lok Sabha constituencies in the fourth phase of polls held on Monday. Except that the tribal-dominated constituency of Nandurbar witnessed 60.60 per cent voting till 5 pm, the polling in other ten constituencies ranged from 43.80 per cent to 58.65 per cent, a percentage that was in line with similar pattern of voting witnessed in the first three phases of Lok Sabha polls in the State. Apart from Nandurbar where high polling percentage was expected considering that the constituency had witnessed 66.77 per cent 68.65 per cent polling respectively in 2014 and 2019 polls, the other ten constituencies recorded the following polling percentages till 5 pm: Ahmednagar (52.27), Aurangabad (55.38), Beed (58.37), Jalgaon (51.98), Jalna (59.44), Maval (46.03), Pune (44.90), Raver (56.16), Shirdi (55.27) and Shirur (43.89). The low polling percentages in constituencies like Pune, Shirur and Maval were a cause for worry for all the political parties. In a related development, the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi leaders made a sensational allegation that large amount of cash were reportedly being transferred to and fro, ostensibly to buy votes in the Lok Sabha elections. Shiv Sena (UBT) spokesperson Sanjay Raut, NCP (Sharad Pawar) MLA Rohit R Pawar and Congress MLA Ravindra Dhangekar who is contesting from Pune, targeted the ruling BJP-led MahaYuti and alleged that the money might be used to "purchase" votes in Pune, Ahmednagar and Nashik LS constituencies. Putting out a purported video of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde alighting from a helicopter in Nashik with two security personnel lugging at least two heavy bags, Raut demanded to know why the CM travelled with such bulky luggage for just a two-hour long poll campaign trip. Rohit Pawar posted another video showing bundles of cash lying on a road in the Ahmednagar LS constituency and claimed that it contained 'prasad' for disbursing among the voters.</p>

UTTAR PRADESH	BIHAR
<p>PNS ■ LUCKNOW</p> <p>A voter turnout of 58.9 per cent was recorded till 6 pm in the 13 Lok Sabha constituencies of Uttar Pradesh where polling was held in the fourth phase of the parliamentary elections on Monday. The polling commenced at 7 am and concluded at 6 pm. Uttar Pradesh's Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said here on Monday that 58.9 per cent turnout of voters was recorded by 6 pm. He said the voter turnout would marginally increase after final tabulation of the data which would be available by Tuesday morning. Polling for the by-election to Dadraul Assembly constituency in Shahjahanpur was also held on Monday. The constituencies where polling was held on Monday included Shahjahanpur, Kheri, Dhaurahra, Sitapur, Hardoi, Misrikh, Unnao, Farrukhabad, Etawah, Kannauj, Kanpur, Akbarpur and Bahraich. With the conclusion of the fourth phase of polling, 39 of the State's 80 Lok Sabha constituencies have voted, while polling for the remaining 41 seats will be held in fifth, sixth and seventh phases.</p>	<p>PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA</p> <p>Over 54 per cent of around 95 lakh voters in five Lok Sabha constituencies in Bihar exercised their franchise till 5 pm on Monday, the officials said. Voting was held in Begusarai, Ujiarpur, Samastipur, Munger and Darbhanga constituencies in the fourth phase of the Lok Sabha elections. Union Minister Giriraj Singh is seeking re-election from Begusarai where his primary opponent is CPI's Awadhesh Rai. Singh had defeated former JNU Students' Union president Kanhaiya Kumar in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls in the same seat. In Ujiarpur, which has the lowest number of voters at 17.48 lakh but hosts the maximum of 13 candidates, Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai aims for a third consecutive term. His principal rival is Alok Mehta, a senior RJD leader and a former State Minister. Samastipur, formerly known as Rosera, presents a battleground for two debutants — Congress' Sunny Hazari and Shambhavi Choudhary of LJP (Ram Vilas) — both offspring of senior JD(U) leaders and Ministers in the Nitish Kumar Cabinet.</p>

### Modi shows the road to 2024 conquest



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during a road show for Lok Sabha elections, in Varanasi, on Monday

### Kissa Kursi Ka: Why Maliwal was thrashed

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Days after he stepped out of Tihar jail on interim bail, more trouble mounts for AAP and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal as the party's Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal went to the Civil Lines police station on Monday and alleged that Kejriwal's 'controversial' personal assistant, Bibhav Kumar, 'assaulted' her at the Chief Minister's official residence. "Though an official complaint is yet to be made in this regard, sources said AAP leaders, including Kejriwal, have been annoyed with Maliwal due to her prolonged absence and not making at least a courtesy visit when Kejriwal was in jail facing a probe on the multi-crore liquor case. Senior AAP leaders Manish Sisodia, Satyender Jain are still in jail in the same case being probed by Enforcement Directorate while party's Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Singh is on bail. Sources also said due to widening rift between Maliwal and the AAP, she is being forced by the party to resign from the Rajya Sabha as the top leadership of AAP are in a mood to give the RS berth to a top lawyer helping Kejriwal and others in the case. Earlier in the day as per DCP of North M K Meena, she received a PCR call at 9.34 am from a woman who said she had been assaulted at the Delhi Chief Minister's residence. "I am a lady calling from the Chief Minister's official residence. His PA has beaten me up badly on his saying," the PCR call report received by the



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal with Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal

Chief Minister's residence soon after the call. The SHO met Maliwal there and she told him she would soon be going to the police station, the officer said. Maliwal went to the police station at 10 am. "In the police station, she was informed that a medical examination is necessary to file an assault FIR. She was at the police station for five minutes and left without filing any formal complaint. She said she would be back later," he said. According to an official, she also cried at the police station. The Rajya Sabha MP and former chairperson of the Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) for nine years has not yet said anything officially and gave no response to messages and calls made to her for her comment.

MP read. However, she has not filed any official complaint as of yet. "After some time, MP madam came from Maliwal's mobile number, said another officer, stating that she was the one on the other side of the line. A team from the Civil Lines police station reached the

# From CM to Union Minister: Political heavyweights lead voting charge in Singhbhum

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Amidst the threat of Maoists violence, senior political figures from the Kolhan region, including Chief Minister Champai Soren, former CM Madhu Koda, and Union Minister Arjun Munda, along with other political icons turned up in large numbers to exercise their voting rights in the Singhbhum parliamentary constituency. The fourth phase of polling in the country commenced at 7:00 am on Monday, with Singhbhum witnessing a significant turnout of voters eager to cast their ballots. Queues formed early at polling stations across the constituency, showcasing the enthusiasm of the electorate. By 9 am, 12.70 percent of the electorate had already exercised their franchise. Notable voting percentages were recorded in different segments,



with Chaibasa leading at 13.37 percent, followed by Manjhgaoon (12.91 percent), Jagannathpur (12.67 percent), Manoharpur (12.22 percent), and Chakradharpur (12.36 percent) in the afternoon. In the broader context of the Lok Sabha elections, Chief Minister Champai Soren exercised his voting right at Utkramit Madhya Vidyalaya in Jilinggora, Seraikela-Kharsawan district. His call for active participation resonated across the region, emphasizing the importance of every vote cast.

Political figures made their presence felt as well, with India alliance candidate Joba Manjhi casting her vote in Chakradharpur. MLA Sukhran Oraon exercised his franchise at his village booth in Banmalipur, underscoring the significance of grassroots participation. Minister Deepak Biruwa, accompanied by his wife, cast their votes in Sindrighauri of Hatgambaria block, highlighting the importance of familial involvement in the electoral process.



Meanwhile, BJP candidate Geeta Koda, along with her husband and former chief minister, Madhu Koda participated in the voting process. Union Minister Arjun Munda, contesting from the Khunti Lok Sabha seat, arrived at the Khalarisai booth number 72

under the Kharsawan assembly constituency to cast his vote, accompanied by his wife Meera Munda. He urged citizens to participate enthusiastically in the democratic process, expressing confidence in a BJP-led government at the center. The Election Commission's meticulous planning was evident, with a total of 64.37 lakh voters expected to participate in the first phase of voting in Jharkhand. To facilitate smooth conduct, 7,595 polling booths were established, with 30,380 polling personnel deployed. Rigorous monitoring, including webcasting and the installation of 15,000 4D cameras, ensured trans-



parency and accountability in the electoral process. Singhbhum, a reserved constituency for Scheduled Tribes, boasts a substantial electorate of 14.32 lakh voters, with women comprising a significant portion at 7.27 lakh. Currently represented by Geeta Koda, the wife of former Chief Minister Madhu Koda, who has been nominated by the BJP for the upcoming elections, Koda, formerly the lone Congress MP from Jharkhand in the previous Lok Sabha, recently switched allegiance to the saffron party. This constituency comprises six Assembly segments, namely Seraikela, Chaibasa, Majhganoon, Jagannathpur, Manoharpur, and Chakradharpur. While Seraikela falls under Seraikela-Kharsawan district, the remaining segments are situated in West Singhbhum district.

period. The enthusiasm of voters in Naxal affected areas was quite pleasant. A huge crowd of women was seen. Similarly, in Udarangi, Masmano, Jangai, Bhitha, Baragai of Bhandra block and Narauli, Hanhat, Sadhabe, Ghazni etc. of Kairo block, more than 55 percent votes are reported to have been cast till 3:00 pm. More than 63 percent voting is reported in the highly Naxal affected Kharta booth of Kairo block. Many people have gone to earn. Due to which voters at many booths were deprived of their voting rights. At some places a huge crowd of voters gathered since morning to cast their votes, while at many places there was commotion among the voters. In remote areas, voters started arriving much later in the voting process. At some centers, voters had started arriving even before the voting started. The pleasant aspect of voting was that women voters from urban areas as well as rural areas came out of their homes and participated enthusiastically in the voting process.

worked as a Brahmastra. The people of Lohardaga Lok Sabha have given full blessings. The people of Lohardaga Lok Sabha have blessed the BJP. At the same time, Indian Alliance Congress candidate Sukhdev Bhagat is looking optimistic about victory. He said that this time the people have voted to save the democracy and constitution of the country. He expressed his gratitude to all the leaders and workers of the India Alliance as well as all the seniors including Congress National President Shri Kharke, Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, General Secretary Jairam Ramesh, Congress State President Rajesh Thakur, Working President Bandhu Turkey, religious leader Bandhan Tigga. Said that he has received abundant blessings from every class and community. Our victory from Lohardaga Lok Sabha seat is certain. High voting in Muslim and Christian areas

## DEO takes stock of voter information slip distribution



PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In an effort to expedite the distribution of Voter Information Slips and ensure comprehensive coverage among the electorate, District Election Officer Ananya

Mittal embarked on a comprehensive assessment of the distribution process. Accompanied by Deputy Development Commissioner Manish Kumar, the District Election Officer traversed various neighborhoods across Jamshedpur city, including Sidgora, Agrico, and Bhaalubasa, to gauge the progress of the distribution efforts firsthand. The initiative, which commenced on May 7th, aims to conclude the distribution of Voter Information Slips to all eligible voters by May 13th. Emphasizing the critical importance of this endeavor, Ananya Mittal underscored the necessity for meticulous attention to detail. Booth Level Officers have been tasked with

conducting door-to-door visits to facilitate the distribution process and to encourage voter turnout on May 25th. Additionally, Booth Level Officers assigned to 1887 polling stations in the district are distributing Voter Information Slips along with visually engaging voter guides. These guides include pictorial instructions on how to cast votes via Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and elucidate the various services provided by the Election Commission of India, such as the Saksham-ECI app, Voter Helpline App, Know Your Candidate App, and C-Vigil App. Furthermore, provisions for voter registration, assisted voting for the differently-abled and senior citizens, and postal

ballot facilities are also being highlighted. The front side of the Voter Information Slip delineates pertinent details such as the part number and name in the electoral roll, serial number, name of the polling station, date of voting, and a QR code for easy reference. Meanwhile, the reverse side features a map of the polling station, the name and contact number of the Booth Level Officer, details of alternative documents accepted by the Commission for voting, and other crucial instructions. The proactive engagement of the District Election Officer and the concerted efforts of all stakeholders underscore the commitment to ensuring a smooth and inclusive electoral process in Jamshedpur.

## D.A.V. Bokaro Sec-IV, shines in CBSE results

PNS : BOKARO

In a spectacular display of academic excellence, D.A.V. Public School, Sec-IV, B.S. City, has once again carved its name in the annals of success with its stellar performance in the CBSE board exams. Leading the charge is Deepshikha, a student of the Humanities stream, who has secured an astounding 98.4%, stealing the spotlight and filling hearts with pride. Following closely behind, Aditi Burnwal from the Commerce stream has garnered an impressive 96.8%, while Sukanya from the Science stream has soared high with a commendable 96.2%. The school's prowess doesn't stop there, with over 60 students of standard XII achieving a remarkable 90% aggregate. Among them, Kangana Srivastava, a student who has been a part of D.A.V. since kindergarten, has clinched the top spot in standard X with an impressive 96.6%. Piyush Kumar and Shreyasi Kumari are not far behind, securing 96.4%. Adding another feather to the cap of achievers, Sukanya and Somesh of standard XII have achieved perfection by scoring full marks, 100, in Chemistry. Deepshikha, the arts topper, has also hit the bullseye with a perfect 100 in Political Science. Furthermore, Somesh and Tanmay have achieved a flawless 100 in Informatics Practice.

## Voting peaceful in Naxalite hotbed in Lohardaga



PNS : LOHARDAGA

Barring sporadic incidents of scuffle, Lohardaga Lok Sabha elections were held in a peaceful atmosphere on Monday. A total of 62 percent voting took place till 5:00 pm. In which voting is reported to be 66 percent in Lohardaga, 62 percent in Mandar, 62 percent in Sisai, 62 percent in Gumla and 61 percent in Vishunpur. Even in the remote plateau areas, the voters' passion to cast their vote reached their peak. As the sun's rays became warmer, the enthusiasm of the voters increased. More than 70 percent voting is reported in the Naxalite stronghold. Contrary to expectations, there were long queues of voters at polling stations in rural and especially Naxal affected areas since morning. Voting was conducted peacefully with unprecedented security arrangements. Out of the total polling stations, 324 polling stations were deployed in 72-Lohardaga assembly constituency and other 104 polling stations were deployed under 69-Vishunpur (Part) along with security arrangements in the elections. The enthusiasm of women voters was at its peak in urban and rural areas. Deputy Commissioner cum District Election Officer Dr. Waghmare Prasad Krishna is keeping an eye on the situation to ensure clean and peaceful voting. Police Captain Haris Bin Zaman, Deputy Development Commissioner Dilip Singh Shekhawat, AC Jitendra Munda, SDO Amit Kumar, SDO Shradha Kerketta, DSP Sameer Turkey and other administrative top officials also visited the area and took stock of the voting situation. There is no news of any untoward incident during this



the shop has been transformed with vibrant banners and posters adorned with various messages aimed at promoting voting awareness. The celebrations will kick off on Tuesday evening at 5 pm with a puja conducted by Pandit Santosh Kumar Tripathi, invoking blessings for Madhuri's long life. The evening will witness a cultural extravaganza with Sarhool dance performances by women from the tribal community scheduled for 9 pm. The highlight of the evening will be the cake-cutting ceremony at 10 pm, symbolizing the joyous occasion. Continuing the spirit of celebration and compassion, Pappu Sardar has planned a heartwarming gesture for Wednesday. At 10 am, he will visit Cheshire Home, Karandih, to share the happiness of Madhuri's birthday with the residents, particularly the disabled individuals, by providing them with food and distributing gifts. This act of kindness underscores the inclusive ethos of the celebration, reflecting the values cherished by both Madhuri and her fans. Furthermore, as a tradition upheld every year, free chat will be distributed to patrons on the evening of Wednesday, 15th May, adding a flavor of festivity to the occasion. Pappu Sardar's initiative not only celebrates the legacy of Madhuri Dixit but also serves as a platform to amplify the message of civic responsibility and democratic participation through voting awareness.

Along with national and independent candidates, leaders and workers of political parties kept reaching the polling stations to get information about the voting process and were asking their polling agents and workers to increase voting. The main contest in Lohardaga is between ruling BJP's Rajya Sabha MP Sameer Oraon and opposition party India Alliance Congress's candidate Sukhdev Bhagat. Apart from this, 13 other candidates are in the election race. BJP candidate Sameer Oraon meeting BJP workers after the completion of Lohardaga Lok Sabha elections, claimed his victory. Said Prime Minister's arrival at Lohardaga and Modi ji's guarantee has

## Pappu Sardar to celebrate Madhuri's birthday with voting awareness message

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

As the city gears up to celebrate the birthday of the iconic Bollywood actress Madhuri Dixit, one of her ardent fans, Pappu Sardar, has planned a unique celebration with a significant message. Pappu, known for his fervent admiration for the 'Dhak Dhak' girl, will mark Madhuri's birthday on Tuesday and Wednesday (14-15 May) with a special focus on spreading awareness about the importance of voting. The festivities will unfold at Manohar Chaat Shop located at Sakshi Handi Line, where all preparations have been meticulously arranged. The ambiance of



the shop has been transformed with vibrant banners and posters adorned with various messages aimed at promoting voting awareness. The celebrations will kick off

with the residents, particularly the disabled individuals, by providing them with food and distributing gifts. This act of kindness underscores the inclusive ethos of the celebration, reflecting the values cherished by both Madhuri and her fans. Furthermore, as a tradition upheld every year, free chat will be distributed to patrons on the evening of Wednesday, 15th May, adding a flavor of festivity to the occasion. Pappu Sardar's initiative not only celebrates the legacy of Madhuri Dixit but also serves as a platform to amplify the message of civic responsibility and democratic participation through voting awareness.

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## DAV Students performed brilliantly in Xth & XIIth board exams

CLASS XII SCIENCE TOPPERS 2024				CLASS XII COMMERCE TOPPERS 2024			
NIKITA KUMARI	ALONA KAPOOR	MAHEEPSINGH	ADITYA AGGARWAL	SOMEN KUMAR	TANISHKA GOEL	RIDDHIMA SAHAY	ANKIT KUMAR
96.4%	96.2%	96%	95.6%	94.6%	93%	92.8%	97%

RANK HOLDERS CLASS X 2024 CBSE RESULT					
MANSHI KUMARI	AKANSHA MEHTA	SWASTIKA	RIVASHARMA	ANKIT KUMAR	SIFA KAYUM
97.8%	95.6%	95%	94.2%	97%	96.8%

AVINASH ANJAN : HAZARIBAG

As is the tradition, the students of DAV Canary Hill have brought a huge success for the school and the city with their results. In the results released by CBSE Ankit Kumar has secured the first position in the entire school with 97% marks, Sheefa Qayyum has secured second position with 96.8 percent marks and Sourabh Dhanapati has secured the third position with 96% marks. The result of the school is 100 percent. A total of 68 children scored more than 90% marks. Shifa Qayyum, Pranav Raj and Tarun Kumar scored 100 out of 100 in Sanskrit subject, while Aditya Kumar Ranu got 100 in Social Science. In Mathematics, Sanyamit Raj Singh got 99 marks, in Science, Anish Kumar got 99 marks, in English, Komal Bharti and Arnav Raj Singh got 97 marks, in Hindi, Harshit Raj got 97 marks, and in IT, Anish Kumar got 96 marks. On this wonderful success, the Principal in-charge of the school, Mrs. Kavita Pandey, congratulated all the children and wished them luck for a

bright future. This spectacular success has created an atmosphere of joy in the entire school. The students of DAV Public School Hazaribag this year too, made the school family proud with their exuberant performance in CBSE Board 24. Mansi Kumari ( Humanities) topped in school by securing 97.8, Nikita Kumari ( Science) stood second with 96.4% whereas Alona Kapoor ( Science) became third with 96.2%. Altogether 75 students scored 90% and above. Altogether 324 scored 75% and above, whereas, number of students scoring first division was 511.15 students scored 100 marks in Fine Arts, 2 students in Music, 1 in Maths and 1 in History. In Science stream Nikita Kumari became topper with 96.4%, Alona Kapoor became second with 96.2%, whereas Maheep Singh became third with 96% in school. Similarly, in Humanities group, Mansi Kumari became first with 97.8%, Akansha Mehta became second with 95.6% and Swastika became third with 95%. In Commerce, Somen Kumar became first with 94.6%, Tanishka Goel

became second with 93% and Riddhima Sahay became third with 92.8. It is a matter of pride that Aditya Aggarwal scored 100 in Mathematics, Tanishka Goel and Neha Kumari scored 100 in Music. Manshi got 100 in History. Akansha, Manshi, Chahat, Raj Laxmi, Riya, Soumya, Tanya, Arshi, Rajita, khushi, Krishan, khushi Priyadarshini, Aditya Vijay and Saket secured 100 in Fine Arts. The highest marks in English is 97, in Mathematics 100, in Physics 95, in Biology 99, in Economics 95, in Bst 97, in political science 99, in History 100, in Chemistry 98, in Geography 98, in Accountancy 97, in Fine Arts 100, in IP 99, in CS 99, in physical Education 97 and in Hindi 88. Mrs. Kavita Pandey, Principal In-charge of the school congratulated all performers, the parents for continuous cooperation and the teachers who guided them. She expressed her hope that all these performers would join the different halls of fame and would maintain the ideals that have been inculcated in them during schooling.

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## CBSE Class 12 : Aprajita Kumari from DAV tops with 97.6 percent

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Celebrations echoed through the Steel City as students showcased remarkable performances in the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) Class 12 examinations, with several shining stars emerging from the academic fray. Reflecting the academic prowess of Jamshedpur, Aprajita Kumari from DAV Public School, Bistupur, soared to the top in Arts with an outstanding score of 97.6 percent, while Aditya Kumar Sabu from the same institution clinched the highest spot in commerce, securing a commendable 97.4 percent. Amongst the myriad of achievements, Bhavika Shree from Chinmaya Vidhyalaya, Telco, ascended to the pinnacle with an impressive 97.2 percent in Bio Science.



Aprajita Kumari from DAV Public School

Bhavika Shree, beaming with pride, attributed her success to the unwavering support of her teachers and, notably, her parents. "I am really happy with my result and I give my teachers and especially my parents who helped me achieve this," expressed Bhavika, encapsulating the sentiment of many triumphant students. In a region renowned for its academic fervor, approximately 4,000 students from 12 prominent schools in Jamshedpur and its environs



Bhavika Shree from Chinmaya Vidhyalaya, Telco, with her teachers.

partook in the rigorous Class 12 examinations. Among the standout performers was Anuj Kumar Ranjan, emerging as the topper in Pure Science with an impressive 96.8 percent. When probed about the secret to her success, Bhavika Shree emphasized the importance of consistent effort and diligent work ethic. "Study on a regular basis and work regularly, for that helps ease the pressure as the exams

approach," shared Bhavika, unraveling the formula behind her stellar performance. As the city basks in the glow of academic excellence, these exemplary achievements stand as a testament to the diligence and dedication of both students and educators alike. With aspirations soaring and futures brimming with promise, the journey of these bright minds continues to inspire generations to come.

# Jharkhand records 63.14 percent voting in first phase of polling

The four constituencies where voting took place includes Khunti, Singhbhum, Lohardaga and Palamu

PNS : RANCHI

Voting passed peacefully in four Lok Sabha constituencies of Jharkhand in the fourth phase of elections. Till 5 pm, an average of 63.14 percent voting took place in all four Lok Sabha constituencies. The four Lok Sabha constituencies where voting is taking place includes Khunti, Singhbhum, Lohardaga and Palamu. The voting percentage in these four Lok Sabha constituencies was 65.82%, 66.11%, 62.60% and 59.99% respectively. The candidates whose fate has been sealed in EVMs today include Union Minister Arjun Munda, MP BD Ram, Geeta Koda, Joba Manjhi, Sukhdev Bhagat, Sameer Oraon, Mamta Bhuyana and Kalicharan Munda.

Till 1 pm, 43.80% voting took place. Voting was 43.83% in Singhbhum, 47.41% in Khunti, 41.85% in Palamu and 43.46% in Lohardaga. Whereas in Mandar assembly constituency falling under Lohardaga Lok Sabha constituency, 42.80 percent voting took place. The voting percentage of Tamar assembly constituency falling in Khunti LS area was 49.31. Meanwhile, there was reports of clash in Chhatarpur booth number 94 of Palamu Lok

Sabha constituency, where BJP and RJD workers clashed with each other. Security forces chased away the miscreants.

Earlier till 11 am, 27.40% voting had taken place. Voting was 26.16% in Singhbhum, 29.14% in Khunti, 26.95% in Palamu and 27.77% in Lohardaga. Whereas in Mandar Assembly constituency falling under Lohardaga Lok Sabha constituency, 27.69 percent voting took place. The voting percentage of Tamar assembly constituency falling in Khunti LS area was 32.8. Till 9 o'clock, 11.78% voting took place in all four assembly constituencies. There was 12.67% voting in Singhbhum, 12.20% in Khunti, 11.47% in Palamu and 10.97% in Lohardaga. Till 9 am, 10.78 percent voting took place in Mandar assembly constituency falling in Lohardaga loess area and 11.25 percent voting took place in Tamar assembly constituency falling in Khunti loess area.

Union Minister for Tribal Affairs and Agriculture and Farmers Welfare and BJP candidate from Khunti Lok Sabha Arjun Munda cast his vote at booth number 172 of East Primary School, Khelaisai in Kharsawan. Along with him, his wife Meera Munda also voted.



Former Rajya Sabha MP Dheeraj Prasad Sahu reached polling station number 279 located in Thana Toli Girls Middle School of Lohardaga urban area and cast his vote. After coming out, he appealed to all the voters to vote in the national interest and use their



franchise. Dheeraj Sahu said that he has voted for the development of the country. Let us tell you that a lot of enthusiasm is being seen among the voters in Lohardaga Lok Sabha constituency. From general to special polling stations, people are exercising their franchise.

A total of 7595 polling stations have been set up for voting in Lohardaga, Khunti, Palamu and Singhbhum Lok Sabha seats. In which 639 are in urban and 6956 in rural areas. 30380 polling person-

nel have been entrusted with the responsibility of conducting elections in a peaceful and fair manner in all four Lok Sabhas. This time all the booths have been made like model booths. There are 23 unique booths among these. Where the district administration will make artwork on the theme of their area. Out of 7595 polling stations, 519 are being operated by women voter workers. Besides, PWD personnel was present at 14 polling booths. The Election Commission is monitoring the voting taking place in these polling centers through web casting. 15000 4D cameras have also been installed. The Election Commission has sent security forces, polling personnel and election related materials to these polling stations.

These four seats, Lohardaga, Khunti, Palamu and Singhbhum, cover 10 districts and 23 assembly constituencies of the state. 45 candidates are in the electoral fray from these four Lok Sabha constituencies. There are 14 candidates from Singhbhum, 15 from Lohardaga, 9 from Palamu and 7 from Khunti. According to the Election Commission data, 64 lakh 37 thousand 460 voters of Jharkhand will participate in the fourth phase. In which there are 32 lakh 29 thousand 480 male voters and 32 lakh 07 thousand 938 female voters. Palamu has the highest number of voters 22 lakh 38 thousand 460. Whereas 14 lakh 36 thousand 351 voters in Lohardaga, 14 lakh 41 thou-

sand 841 voters in Singhbhum and 13 lakh 20 thousand 808 voters in Khunti will exercise their franchise.

1715 polling stations have been made in Singhbhum Lok Sabha constituency. In which 250 are in urban and 1454 in rural areas. 1705 polling stations have been made in Khunti Lok Sabha constituency, out of which only 83 are in urban areas. Whereas 1622 polling stations are in rural areas. 1748 polling stations have been made in Lohardaga, out of which only 76 polling stations are in the urban area. Whereas in Palamu Lok Sabha, 2427 polling stations have been made, of which 230 are in urban areas and 2197 in rural areas.

There are 481 voters above 100 years of age in these four Lok Sabha seats. Of these, 223 are male and 258 female voters. Out of 481 voters, 182 are in Palamu, 120 in Lohardaga, 105 in Khunti and 74 in Singhbhum.

9878 VVPAT machines will be used to conduct elections in these four Lok Sabha constituencies. In which 30% has been kept in reserve. Whereas 9114 ballot units and 9114 control units will be used. In which 20 percent has been kept in reserve.

## Women candidates in fray this Lok Sabha elections

DIVYA MODI : RANCHI

In the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, various political parties from across the State have fielded some old and some new faces to woo voters. The General Assembly elections which started in Jharkhand on May 13 will be conducted in four phases.

INDIA bloc comprising of Congress, JMM and RJD has given tickets to four women candidates while the BJP is fielding three.

GEETA KODA (40)



Wife of former Chief Minister Madhu Koda, Geeta Koda (40) who recently switched over to the Bharatiya Janta Party from Congress is contesting from Singhbhum in the Lok Sabha elections. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Koda had defeated the then Jharkhand BJP president Laxman Gilua by over 70,000 votes in Singhbhum, a reserved seat for scheduled tribes (ST) and became the first woman to win the constituency. Koda became the youngest MLA in the Jharkhand Assembly in 2009 from the Jagannathpur constituency.

JOBHA MAJHI



The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) has decided to field four-time MLA and former cabinet minister Joba Majhi (60) in the Singhbhum Lok Sabha seat. Majhi who hails from the Santhal community is mobilizing people to

raise the issue of former Chief Minister Hemant Soren's arrest as an insult to the tribal community. Majhi has served as a cabinet minister during the Babulal Marandi and Arjun Munda government when she had contested as an independent candidate. She was also a cabinet minister in the Hemant Soren led government till January 2024.

ANUPAMA SINGH (38)



For its Dhanbad seat, this election the Congress has decided to field a face who has not been directly associated with active politics-Anupama Singh. Singh's biggest identity till now is that of her husband Jaimangal Singh alias Anup Singh who is a Congress MLA from Bermo in Bokaro district. Interestingly, apart from seasoned politicians, Anupama's brother-in-law and Youth Congress leader Kumar Gaurav was also involved in the race for the ticket to this seat. For this seat, Singh will have a direct contest with her BJP counterpart Dhullu Mahto.

SITA SOREN



Sita Soren is the BJP's candidate from Dumka constituency this election. Former Chief Minister Hemant Soren's sister-in-law and widow of his elder brother Durga Sore, Sita Soren recently quit Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and joined hands with the

Bhartiya Janta Party in Jharkhand. Soren was first elected as the MLA from Jama in 2019 and later was appointed as JMM's National General Secretary. She has also won the Jharkhand Legislative Elections from Jama in 2014 and 2019. In her resignation letter addressed to JMM party supermo and father-in-law Shibu Soren, Sita expressed being sidelined from the family and the party's failure to provide adequate support to her and her family.

ANNAPURNA DEVI

Annapurna Devi (54) is a distinguished politician with a career spanning over two decades and is also the BJP candidate from Koderma in the on-going Lok Sabha elections. She was initially a member of Rashtriya Janta Dal before joining hands with the BJP. In 2021, Devi was appointed as the Minister of State for Education in the Modi government. Devi began her political career as a Member of the Legislative Assembly from the Koderma constituency from 1998 to 2014.

YASHASWINI SAHAY



A political newbie and daughter of former Union Minister Subodh Kant Sahay and TV artist Rekha Sahay, Yashaswini Sahay is the face of the Congress from Ranchi this election. Upon completing her education in law, Sahay has been practicing in Mumbai and is also associated with the Kailash Satyarthi foundation. The budding politician aims to make model villages in the constituency and turn the State Capital into a metropolitan city.

## PMLA court rejects Hemant Soren's bail plea

PNS : RANCHI

A special PMLA court here on Monday rejected former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren's bail plea in an alleged land grab linked money laundering case in which he was arrested on January 31, official sources said.

In a linked development, the Supreme Court on Monday sought the Enforcement Directorate's response by May 17 on Soren's plea, challenging his arrest in this money laundering case. Soren, in his plea before the apex court, had challenged the May 3 order.

Soren, in his plea before the apex court, had challenged the May 3 order of the Jharkhand High Court dismissing his petition against the arrest. He had also sought interim bail to campaign in the Lok Sabha elections till the court delivered its verdict.

A special Prevention of Money Laundering Act court in Ranchi dismissed Soren's bail plea on Monday. Soren, a senior JMM leader, was arrested by the ED on January 31 under allegation that he illegally acquired an 8.86 acre land in Ranchi with the hel...

It is noteworthy that Hemant Soren was arrested by ED on 31 January 2024 after a long interrogation. ED has so far arrested many people including former Chief Minister Hemant Soren in this case related to land scam. All the accused are currently lodged in Hotwar (Birsamunda Central Jail). In this case, within 60 days of the arrest of former Chief Minister Hemant Soren, on March 30, ED has filed the special court charge sheet of PMLA. In which former Chief Minister Hemant Soren, suspended Deputy Revenue Officer Bhanu Pratap Prasad, Architect Binod Singh, Rajkumar Pahan and Hilarius Kachhap have been made chargesheeted accused. Out of which Hilarius Kachhap has died.

## City students shine in CBSE Class 12 Board exams

PNS : RANCHI

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) announced the results for Senior School Certificate Examination also known as Class 12 board exams on Monday, May 13. The results were declared on the board's official websites cbseresults.nic.in and cbse.gov.in and other platforms including DigiLocker website digilocker.gov.in.

Students of Delhi Public

School, Ranchi passed the exam with flying colours. In the commerce stream, Prakash Aukia scored 99.2% in best of five and was declared the school topper while Piyush Pratap Singh and Sweta Kumari with 98.4% emerged as the science and humanities topper respectively. Out of the 728 students who appeared for the exam from the school, 112 have scored 95% and above, 351 students have scored 90% and above and 22 students have scored

100% marks in different subjects. DPS Principal Ram Singh acknowledged and appreciated the efforts of the students, teachers and parents for this commendable achievement.

Students of Cambrian Public School have performed brilliantly in all the three streams- science, arts and commerce and 100% students have passed the exams. Kushnuma Parveen a student of the science faculty was declared the school topper with 94 percent marks.

**FOOD CORPORATION OF INDIA REGIONAL OFFICE, RANCHI (JHARKHAND)**  
Ref. No.: RO-JH-18/0220.01/2022-Cont-RO JH Date: 13.05.2024  
**NOTICE INVITING TENDER**  
(to be submitted online through https://gem.gov.in)  
(TENDER NOTICE NO. - REGULAR/06/2024)  
For and on behalf of Food Corporation of India, General Manager (Region), Jharkhand invites Online tender under Two Bid system through GeM Portal (https://gem.gov.in) for appointment of **Regular Handling & Transport Contractor** for a period of two years for PWS Hazaribagh, PWS Latehar and PWS Chatra. For details & complete Tender documents, please log on to https://gem.gov.in or www.fci.gov.in.  
Sd/- Asstt. General Manager(Contract) For General Manager (R)

## PM Modi poll rallies in Giridih, Koderma today

PNS : RANCHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will arrive Jharkhand on 14th May and will address public meeting organized for Giridih and Koderma Lok Sabha constituency candidates Chandra Prakash Choudhary and Annapurna Devi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the public meeting organized at Pesham Arwad ground of Birni block under Giridih district from 1.30 pm.

A day after PM's visit to Jharkhand, Assam Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma will address public

meetings in Hazaribagh, Koderma and Dhanbad Lok Sabha constituencies on May 15.

Dr. Sarma will address a public meeting organized at Rajrappa DAV Ground in Ramgarh district from 11:00. On this occasion, Lok Sabha in-charge Shashi Bhushan Bhagat, NDA candidate Manish Jaiswal, Ramgarh District President Praveen Mehta, Hazaribagh District President Vivekananda Singh will also be present.

Assam CM will address a public meeting organized at Maidan-Deori block of Jamua Assembly in Giridih district

from 12:30 pm. On this occasion, Lok Sabha in-charge Vikas Pritam, NDA candidate Annapurna Devi, Giridih District President Mahadev Dubey, Koderma District President Anoop Joshi, Hazaribagh District President Vivekananda Singh will also be present.

Dr. Sarma will address the public meeting organized at 2.30 pm at the Labor Welfare Center located at Chirkunda, Nirsia in Dhanbad district. On this occasion, Lok Sabha in-charge Suresh Sahu, NDA candidate Dhullu Mahato, Dhanbad District President (Rural) Ghanshyam Grover,

Dhanbad Metropolitan District President Shrawan Rai Yadav, Bokaro District President Jaydev Rai will also be present.

Meanwhile, BJP State General Secretary and Rajya Sabha MP Aditya Sahu addressed a press conference on May 13 at the media center located on Harmu Road. He said that the first phase of voting has been completed in Jharkhand. In this, voting was held for four Lok Sabha seats. The people of Jharkhand voted with enthusiasm, expressing faith and trust in Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

# Plea in SC seeks review of EVM VVPAT verdict

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking review of its April 26 judgement by which it had rejected the demand for reverting to the old paper ballot system and the complete cross-verification of votes cast using EVMs with a Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT). The review petition was filed by Arun Kumar Agrawal, who had filed the PIL on the issue earlier, through lawyer Neha Rathi.

The review plea filed on May 10 said, "There are mistakes and errors apparent on the face of the impugned order... and as such there are sufficient reasons which require review of the impugned order/judgment... The petitioner respectfully seeks review on the following issues as have been dealt with in judgment dated April 26, 2024: i) Feasibility of count-

ing of all VVPAT paper slips in terms of time to be taken and additional manpower, ii) Vulnerability of SLU (symbol loading units) and iii) Percentage of VVPAT slips counted for tallying with EVM votes after C h a n d r a b a b u Naidu...Judgment."

The plea dealt with the feasibility of counting of all VVPAT paper slips in terms of time to be taken and additional manpower and referred to the relevant portion of the judgement.

"During the course of hearing, it was suggested that instead of physically counting the VVPAT slips, they can be counted by a counting machine. This suggestion, including the suggestion that bar-coding of the symbols loaded in the VVPATs may be helpful in machine counting, may be examined by the ECI," the top court had said in the judgement.

Seeking physical counting, the plea said the counting of all VVPAT slips can be done "accurately with a fraction of the employees and at a fraction of cost and within five to eight hours."

It said the VVPAT paper is of the same size as the thermal print out received when a credit or debit card is swiped on making a payment.

"The counting of the slips after they have been sorted candidate-wise, is in fact easier than counting normal paper because the VVPAT paper slip is slightly curled on account of being thermally printed from a roll. The curling makes the picking up of the paper slip from the surface of a table easy. Each slip can be counted while being picked to make bundles of 25 slips as mandated under instructions given in the ECI's Manual on EVM and VVPAT, 2023," the plea said.



It said EVMs do not allow voters to verify that their votes have been accurately recorded. "Furthermore, given their very nature, EVMs are especially vulnerable to malicious changes by insiders such as designers, programmers, manufacturers, maintenance

technicians, etc. Therefore, in light of the above there are apparent errors on the face of the impugned order dated April 26, 2024 and the impugned judgment, is liable to be reviewed," it said.

On April 26, a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta had termed the suspicion of manipulation of the EVMs "unfounded" and trashed the demand for reverting to the old paper ballot system.

The bench had said that the polling devices were "secure" and eliminated booth capturing and bogus voting.

However, the judgement had opened a window for aggrieved unsuccessful candidates securing second and third places in poll results and allowed them to seek verification of micro-controller chips embedded in five per cent EVMs per assembly constituency on a written request upon payment of a fee to the

poll panel.

It had directed that from May 1, the symbol loading units should be sealed and secured in a container and stored in a strongroom along with the EVMs for a minimum period of 45 days post-declaration of results.

By the judgement, the top court had dismissed the PILs which had also sought a direction to return to the ballot paper system.

"A voting mechanism must uphold and adhere to the principles of security, accountability, and accuracy. An over complex voting system may engender doubt and uncertainty, thereby easing the chances of manipulation. In our considered opinion, the EVMs are simple, secure and user-friendly. The voters, candidates and their representatives, and the officials of the ECI are aware of the nitty-gritty of the EVM system. They also check and

ensure righteousness and integrity," the bench had said. It had said the possibility of hacking or tampering with the agnostic firmware in the burnt memory of EVMs to tutor or favour results is "unfounded".

"Accordingly, the suspicion that the EVMs can be configured or manipulated for repeated or wrong recording of vote(s) to favour a particular candidate should be rejected," the bench had said. It had said the incorporation of the VVPAT, an independent vote verification system which enables electors to see whether their votes have been recorded correctly, fortifies the principle of vote verifiability, thereby enhancing the overall accountability of the electoral process.

The seven-phase Lok Sabha polls began on April 19 and will conclude with the announcement of results on June 4.

## SC notice to Himachal HC on plea of two district judges who question HC Collegium decision

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday sought a response from the Registrar General of the Himachal Pradesh High Court on a plea of two senior most district and sessions judges alleging that their merit and seniority were not considered by the High Court collegium in selection of names for HC judgeship.

A bench comprising justices Hrishikesh Roy and Prashant Kumar Mishra took note of the submissions of senior advocate Arvind Datar, appearing for the two district and sessions judges, that the judicial officers, who are junior to them, had been recommended for the high court judgeship under the inservice quota.

The petition was filed by Chirag Bhanu Singh and Arvind Malhotra, who are presently serving as the district and sessions judges at Bilaspur and Solan, respectively in the state, alleging non-consideration of their names by the high court collegium for the judgeship.

The senior lawyer referred to a collegium resolution of January 4, 2024 of the apex court and the subsequent communication of the Union Ministry of Law and Justice to the Himachal Pradesh High Court and said that as per these, the names of the petitioner judicial officers should have been considered by the high court collegium.

"The petitioners are the senior most judicial officers in the state and they have unblemished records," Datar said. The plea questioned the selection process of the judicial officers by the high court collegium for elevation to as HC judges and said their merit and seniority were ignored despite the issue being specifically referred to in the apex court collegium's resolution.

The plea said the apex court collegium's decision to send their names for reconsideration by the HC collegiums was followed by a communication from Union law minister to the Chief Justice of the high court urging him to reconsider the names of the petitioner judicial officers.

## Congress guarantees will change circumstances of people: Sonia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Monday assured people that the "guarantees" listed by the party in its Lok Sabha poll manifesto will change their circumstances in this "difficult time".

In a video message, which was shared by the Congress on social media, she said women of the country are facing tough times in the wake of a "severe crisis" and the party's 'Mahalakshmi scheme' for them will help change their lives.

"My dear sisters, women have made a huge contribution, from the freedom struggle to the creation of modern India. However, today our women are facing a crisis amid severe inflation. To do justice to their hard work and penance, the Congress has come up with a revolutionary guarantee," Sonia Gandhi said.

"The Congress 'Mahalakshmi' scheme guarantees that we will give Rs 1 lakh every year to a



woman from a poor family," she said in her message, an appeal to people voting in the ongoing fourth round of the seven-phase general elections to support the Congress.

Sonia Gandhi said the Congress' "guarantees" have already changed the lives of crores of families in Karnataka and Telangana, where it has also implemented the scheme. The Congress is in power in these two southern states.

"Be it MGNREGA, Right to Information, Right to Education or through schemes like Food Security, the Congress party has empowered millions of Indians. The 'Mahalakshmi' is the latest guarantee to take our work forward," Sonia Gandhi said.

"In this difficult time, I want to assure you that the hand of Congress is with you and this hand will change your circumstances. Thank you. Jai Hind," the former Congress president said, referring to her party's symbol.

Her appeal was shared by Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, former party president Rahul Gandhi and party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on their X handles.

Rahul Gandhi, while sharing his mother's message, said, "Women from poor families remember — your one vote is equal to Rs 1 lakh annually in your account." "The Congress' 'Mahalakshmi' scheme is going to be a lifesaver for women struggling amid terrible inflation and unemployment. With Rs 8,500 being deposited directly into bank accounts every month, women of India will become free from financial dependence and will be able to write their own family's destiny," he said.

"So vote and change your circumstances," Rahul Gandhi said while sharing Sonia Gandhi's message.

## Seventh edition of exercise Shakti between India, France begins in Meghalaya

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The seventh edition of the 'Exercise Shakti' between India and France began in Meghalaya on Monday with an aim to enhance joint military capability of both sides to undertake multi-domain operations in a sub-conventional scenario, the defence ministry said.

The joint military exercise also seeks to enhance the level of defence cooperation between the two friendly nations and boost their bilateral ties. Exercise Shakti, being held from May 13-26, will enable the two sides to share their best practices in tactics, techniques and procedures of conducting joint operations, the Ministry of Defence said in a statement.

Tactical drills to be practiced during the exercise will include response to a terrorist action of capturing a defined territory, setting up of a joint command post, establishment of an intelligence and surveillance centre, securing a helipad or landing



site, small team insertion and extraction, special heliborne operations, cordon and search operations besides employment of drones and counter-drone systems among others, it said.

Exercise Shakti is a biennial training event conducted alternatively in India and France. The last edition was conducted in France in November 2021.

The seventh edition of the exercise commenced on Monday at Umroi, in a fully developed and modern foreign training node in Meghalaya.

"The joint exercise will facilitate developing inter-operability, bonhomie and camaraderie between armed forces personnel of the two countries. This will also enhance the level of defence cooperation, further fostering bilateral relations between the two friendly nations," the statement said.

The opening ceremony of the joint exercise was attended by Thierry Mathou, Ambassador of France to India and Major General Prasanna Sudhakar Joshi, General Officer Commanding 51 Sub Area, the ministry said.

## Indian masterpieces find place in UNESCO register

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's literary masterpieces 'Ramcharitmanas', 'Panchatantra', and 'Sahdayaloka-Locana' have earned a prestigious place in UNESCO's Memory of the World Asia-Pacific Regional Register, a significant acknowledgment of their cultural and historical importance.

Authored by Kashmiri poet Acharya Anandvardhan, Pandit Vishnu Sharma, and Hindu saint and poet Goswami Tulsidas respectively, these trio iconic Indian literary works have left an enduring impact on readers and artists in India as well as worldwide.

In what is a proud moment for India, their inclusion in prestigious UNESCO register also adds a feather in the cap of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) which had played a crucial role in securing their inclusion at the 10th meeting of the Memory of the World Committee for Asia and the Pacific (MOWCAP) in Ulaanbaatar.

Significantly, this is the IGNCAs first achievement at



the Regional Register since its inception in 2008.

"Their inclusion in the register highlights their transcendent influence, which extends beyond borders and generations, shaping the moral fabric and artistic expressions of diverse cultures.

"This achievement highlights the timeless value and influence of these literary works, which have deeply impacted Indian

literature and culture," Professor Ramesh Chandra Gaur, Dean (Administration) and Head of the Department, Kala Nidhi Division at IGNCAs told The Pioneer. He had presented these three entries from India, effectively defending the nominations at the UllanBatar convention.

At the gathering in Ulaanbaatar 38 representatives from member states convened alongside

40 observers and nominees, said an official from the IGNCAs.

After undergoing rigorous deliberations and receiving recommendations from the Register Subcommittee, all three nominations secured inclusion, highlighting their significance in India's literary legacy.

Gaur added that their inclusion in UNESCO's register reaffirms India's rich literary heritage and underscores the importance of preserving and promoting such cultural treasures for future generations.

Authored by Goswami Tulsidas, 'Ramcharitmanas' is an epic poem that narrates the life of Lord Rama, a revered figure in Hindu mythology. It is written in the Awadhi dialect of Hindi, and is one of the most renowned works of devotional literature in India.

'Ramcharitmanas' is not only a religious text but also a cultural symbol, influencing art, music, and literature across India.

These we never had ... this is for the first time that Likewise, 'Panchatantra' which is tradi-

## Measles jab single dose 2.6 times more likely to be ineffective in kids born via C section: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A single dose of the measles vaccine is up to 2.6 times more likely to be completely ineffective in children born by C-section, compared to those born naturally, a study has said, emphasising the importance of tailoring vaccination strategies to address the differences in vaccine effectiveness based on birth method.

Measles is a highly infectious disease preventable by vaccines. However, failure of the jab can significantly increase the risk of an outbreak.

The study led by a team of researchers from the universities of Cambridge, UK, and Fudan in China, showed that a second measles jab is vital and induces a robust immunity against measles in children born via C-section.

The study, published in the journal Nature Microbiology, found that the vaccine's effect is linked to the development of the child's gut microbiome —



the vast collection of microbes that naturally live inside the gut. Vaginal birth is known to transfer a greater variety of microbes from mother to baby, which can boost the immune system." "We've discovered that the way we're born — either by C-section or natural birth — has long-term consequences on our immunity to diseases as we grow up," said Professor Henrik Salje in the University of Cambridge's Department of Genetics.

"Infants born by C-section are

the ones we really want to be following up to make sure they get their second measles jab because their first jab is much more likely to fail," he added.

At least 95 per cent of the population needs to be fully vaccinated to keep measles under control.

For the study, the team used data from previous studies of over 1,500 children in Hunan, China, which included blood samples taken every few weeks from birth to the age of 12.

## Over 9,600 children wrongly incarcerated in adult Indian prisons between 2016-2021: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

More than 9,600 children were wrongly incarcerated in adult prisons across India between January 1, 2016, and December 31, 2021, a new study has found. The data for the study -- "Incarceration of Children in Prisons in India" -- was obtained under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

The study by legal rights body iProbono sheds light on a deeply concerning issue affecting the juvenile justice system in India. The data indicates that at least 9,681 children were wrongly incarcerated in adult prisons between January 1, 2016, and December 31, 2021.

"This means an average of over 1,600 children were transferred out of prisons across the country every year," the study said, referring to the children identified by juvenile Justice Boards (JJB) and moved to juvenile homes from adult jails.

This figure was ascertained on the basis of responses to RTI requests by 285 district and central prisons out of a total of 570. "This also does not include the 749 other prisons from which we did not request data, including sub jails, women's prisons, open prisons, special prisons, borstal schools and other prisons. It also, as previously mentioned, only includes those who were successfully identified and transferred,

not all those who were juveniles at the time of their alleged offence, including those identified by prison visitors, families or through self-identification," it said. Several states failed to adequately respond to enquiries, with notable non-compliance from Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Nagaland and the Union Territory of Ladakh. Among the states that responded, the study said the figures reveal alarming patterns.

With a response rate -- jails that provided data -- of 71 per cent, Uttar Pradesh reported that 2,914 children were transferred from prisons to juvenile homes. However, the data indicates discrepancies, with some prisons showing



high numbers of detained children despite no visits from JJBs. In Bihar, where 34 per cent of prisons responded, 1,518 children were transferred out of adult jails. Instances were noted of more children being identified by JJBs than those transferred. Madhya Pradesh

provided no data despite repeated appeals under the RTI Act. West Bengal also provided no data. Responses from 35 per cent of prisons in Maharashtra revealed that only 34 children were transferred, significantly lower than those identified by JJBs. The study found that Delhi demonstrated a highly organised approach to juvenile justice, with clear directives from Delhi High Court aimed at preventing the incarceration of children in adult facilities.

Haryana -- where data was provided by 90 per cent of prisons -- transferred 1,621 children, correlating well with the number identified during JJB visits. In Rajasthan, 108 children were transferred,

according to data from 51 per cent of its prisons, with a notable lack of information on children identified during JJB visits.

Chhattisgarh transferred 159 children, data from 44 per cent of its jails showed, revealing disparities in JJB visitation patterns across prisons. Jharkhand transferred 1,115 children, also highlighting discrepancies in JJB visitations and identification practices, with 60 per cent of its prisons responding to RTI queries for the study.

Prisons in Odisha and Tamil Nadu demonstrated extremely low response rates to the queries, with no children reported to have been transferred from prisons to juvenile homes. The report relied

on data obtained under Section 6 of the RTI Act, which pertains to the Request for Obtaining Information. Between April 2022 and March 2023, 124 RTI applications were filed across 28 states and two Union Territories, primarily directed to Prison Headquarters, except for Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, where applications were filed in each district and central jail at the directions of the Prison Headquarters.

The data excludes the Union Territory jurisdictions of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu, and Lakshadweep due to the absence of district and central jails there.



# INDIA Bloc leaders scared of Pakistan's nuclear power: Modi

PTI ■ MUZZAFFARPUR/HAJIPUR/SARAN (BIHAR)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday lashed out at the opposition INDIA bloc, calling its leaders 'cowards' who were 'scared of Pakistan's nuclear power'.

wearing bangles. "If Pakistan does not wear bangles, we will make the country wear these. I knew they did not have foodgrains. Now, I come to know they do not even have adequate supply of bangles," the PM said.



the bloc's plan to have a different PM, every year, for five years, succeeds. However, they are a motley group that is bound to fail," he said.

"The current elections are for having a government that will give a further boost to the standing and clout enjoyed by the country," the PM said.

Modi also said the money recovered in raids against politicians "belonged to the country's poor."

criing hoarse against the action of agencies like the ED. During the previous Congress regime, the ED seized only Rs 35 lakh, which could be contained in a school bag. Ever since we took over, the agency has recovered Rs 2,200 crore, which would require 70 small trucks to be carried," said Modi.

rule in Bihar... NDA fights for social justice, 60 per cent Union ministers from OBC/SC/ST categories," he asserted.

apparent Tejashwi Yadav, mentioning neither by name, Modi referred to the fodder scam, the "land for jobs scam" and "attempts to take credit for work done by our ally (Chief Minister and JD(U) president) Nitish Kumar".

## Rahul did not visit Ram temple for fear of losing vote bank, says Shah

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi did not visit the Ram temple in Ayodhya as he feared losing his vote bank.



inauguration), but he did not visit because he feared losing his vote bank. The BJP does not have any such fear," he said.

Thackeray have to say about it?" he asked. "I also want a clarification from Uddhav Thackeray. One of the constituents of the opposition INDIA bloc is DMK led by M K Stalin, and his son Udhayanidhi Stalin has insulted Sanatan Dharma. Does Uddhav agree with them?" Shah sought to know.

Further targeting the Congress and the Wayanad MP, the Union minister said 20 attempts were made to "launch and relaunch" Rahul Gandhi as a leader.

## Congress holding PM responsible for Nehru's mistakes: Jaishankar on China issue

PTI ■ MUMBAI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday said the Congress holds Prime Minister Narendra Modi accountable for the mistakes made by first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru when making comments on China while believing the party has no culpability for the past acts.



casualties on both sides. Since then India-China relations have been in an "abnormal state", with both sides amassing its troops along the LAC.

Parliament in 1959," Jaishankar said. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and his party talk about a bridge being built by China in Pangong Tso in Ladakh but the bridge is being built at a place where the Chinese came in 1958 and then retook in 1962, Jaishankar asserted.

allowed by Nehru to be part of POK and the Pakistanis handed it over to China in 1963. The Congress party is holding Modi responsible for Nehru's actions in 1949 and for (Pakistani premier Zulfikar Ali) Bhutto's actions in 1963 but apparently they (Congress) have no culpability," Jaishankar said.

## Only Ramdrohis opposing Modi, claims Yogi



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Bhanu Prasad said Monday that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will again form the government, asserting that even Lord Ram wants his "ardent devotee" to win.

Pradesh chief minister asked, "What has the Congress done in 65 years (of rule)?" In Barabanki, Adityanath said under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, everyone, irrespective of their caste and community, benefitted from the development schemes.

## Electors cast vote fearlessly for first time at former Maoist hotbed Budha Pahad booth

PTI ■ BUDHA PAHAD (JHARKHAND)

Thirty-seven-year-old Halkan Kisan on Monday exercised his vote for the first time at his own booth at 'Budha Pahad'—a former Maoist hotbed, which falls under Palamu Lok Sabha constituency.

around 13 km from my village, due to impact of the Maoist in the locality. Very few voters used to go to vote in relocated place. Now, the area has become free from Maoist activity and people are enthusiastically exercising their votes," Kisan, a resident of Hesatu village under Bargarh block, told PTI.



Vikram Yadav, 50, another voter, told PTI, "I have given my vote without any trouble.

I came to the booth walking around 5 km from my village Saurat and I found no security issue even on the way as there are deployment of security forces.

Block programming officer, Bargarh, Md Hashim Ansari told PTI, "Several arrangements have been made for voters such as shed, drinking water and ambulance. Besides, vehicles have also been arranged for the elderly and physically challenged voters.

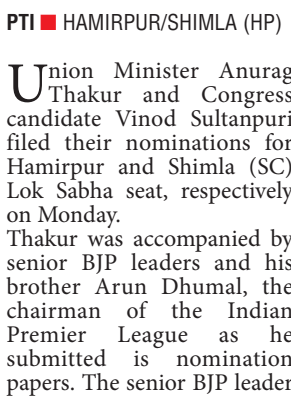
However, excluding booth no 420, other three booths in Budha Pahad have been relocated due to security reasons, a senior official said.

## Union Minister Anurag Thakur, Congress candidate file nomination papers in HP

PTI ■ HAMIRPUR/SHIMLA (HP)

Union Minister Anurag Thakur and Congress candidate Vinod Sultanpuri filed their nominations for Hamirpur and Shimla (SC) Lok Sabha seat, respectively on Monday.

Thakur was accompanied by senior BJP leaders and his brother Arun Dhumal, the chairman of the Indian Premier League as he submitted nomination papers. The senior BJP leader is seeking a fifth term in the Lok Sabha from the Hamirpur seat in Himachal Pradesh.



Satpal Raizada, a former MLA of Una, as its candidate against Anurag Thakur. In Shimla, sitting MLA from Kasauli Vinod Sultanpuri filed his nomination from Shimla (SC) Lok Sabha seat.

Minister Harshwardhan Chauhan, among others. Talking to media person after Sultanpuri submitted his papers, Sukhu said all four Congress candidates contesting Lok Sabha polls in the state have filed their nominations.

## EC suspends two polling officials for dereliction of duty in Odisha

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Election Commission (EC) has suspended two polling officials in Odisha for dereliction of duty, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Nikunjia Bihari Dhal said here on Monday.

One polling official from Narla assembly constituency in Kalahandi district and another polling official in Ganjam district have been suspended for dereliction of duty, he said.

"We are monitoring the poll process in our webcasting room. A minor group clash-like incident was reported from Chikiti area in Ganjam district. I have personally spoken to SP Berhampur and Ganjam Collector and asked them to ensure that the polling goes on smoothly in Berhampur LS constituency especially in the Chikiti area," Dhal told media persons.

Nabarangpur, and Kalahandi parliamentary constituencies along with 28 assembly segments within the jurisdiction of these Lok Sabha seats.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Frenemies

India seeks to neutralise China's economic hold but it beats US to become India's biggest trading partner

In the realm of global economics, the dynamics of trade relationships often override geopolitics. India's growing trade affinity with China is a living example of that: China has become India's largest trading partner in 2023-24. This development brings little joy to the nation aspiring to become an alternative to China and striving to bolster its manufacturing sector, with the Prime Minister's 'Make in India' call. Despite the Indian Government's rhetoric urging caution in dealings with China, economic imperatives seem to be reshaping the contours of bilateral trade. Their trade relationship has long been characterised by a mix of competition and cooperation. Both nations are regional powerhouses with vast consumer markets and burgeoning manufacturing sectors, though China is much ahead of India in terms of economy and infrastructure size. Over the years, China has emerged as a crucial supplier of goods to the world, including India, ranging from electronics and machinery to pharmaceuticals and textiles. Concurrently, India has also found a receptive market for its exports in China, particularly in sectors like raw materials, agricultural products and IT services. But the real problem is the lopsidedness of the trade. We are a net importer of Chinese goods, that too at the cost of our local industry.



Most traders take the easy import route, often sub-standard but cheap, and make decent profits. This leads to job losses and closure of several MSME manufacturing units. Besides, the nations are not the best of neighbours; relying on China in this scenario is indeed fraught with danger. But where wealth flows, interests follow and that explains India's rising trade ties with China. The trajectory of bilateral trade has been influenced by several factors. One, the sheer size and harmony of their economies create natural synergies to drive trade volumes. Despite occasional border disputes and geopolitical issues, economic pragmatism often prevails, fostering trade ties. Two, China's manufacturing prowess and cost competitiveness have made it an attractive destination for Indian importers, especially in sectors where domestic production struggles to meet demand. Moreover, the persistent trade deficit with China underscores India's reliance on their goods and highlights the challenges in achieving more equitable trade ties. The geopolitical dimension of India-China trade cannot be overlooked either. The Indian Government must emphasise the need for strategic autonomy and self-reliance in key sectors. Initiatives such as 'Make in India' and Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) must be given further fillip. Additionally, efforts to diversify trade partnerships by nurturing ties with countries like the US, Japan and Australia must be accorded priority and a diversified trade portfolio maintained. Achieving a fundamental rebalancing of India-China trade dynamics is a multifaceted challenge that requires nuanced handling and necessitates a calibrated and pragmatic policy approach.

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### PICTALK



Flamingoes at the Thol Bird Sanctuary in Mehsana district

**N**epal's late Foreign Minister Rishikesh Shah would say that Kathmandu is the rumour capital of the world and also the fount of speculation. Our own Madhuri Dikshit once hailed Nepal as a beautiful country adding: "We're lucky it is part of India". This created a furor but the story appeared with tasteful embellishments in Nepal. Delhi's Chief Minister Madan Lal Khurana waxed eloquent about the sterling qualities of Nepalis working in India and what great servants they made. This led to fireworks in Nepal and bush telegraphy produced several ugly distortions. Hrithik Roshan never said he did not like Nepalese but Indian films were banned and other collateral damage followed. India is usually at the receiving end of Nepal's woes and wrath. China has begun to feature negatively only recently. India-bashing was at its peak following the economic blockade in 2015 and the rekindling of border dispute when Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura were incorporated into Nepal's map after India included Kalapani in a new map. Chinese Ambassador Hou Yanxi who made her mark rough-shodding Nepalese politicians was targeted by the Indian media. Yanxi became central to a duel between Indian and Nepalese media. How poorly informed political class, celebrities and even the media about Nepal were apparent. This longish backgrounder is a necessary prelude to describe last week's rumour and speculation about another attempt at regime change in Nepal. The report about the split in JSP (N) took place when its supremo, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Health and Population Upendra Yadav was visiting the US. The story goes that NC leader Sher Bahadur Deuba attempted to topple the Left coalition led by Prachanda by drawing out Yadav (12 lawmakers) and Madhav Nepal of Unified Socialists (10 lawmakers). 20 plus lawmakers are necessary for the NC-led Democratic Alliance to make a comeback. The attempt failed as UML's KP Oli preempted the plan by splitting JSP(N) by



getting former colleague and lawmaker Ashok Rai to walk away from Yadav with seven of 12 lawmakers. The inside story is different: Yadav had plans to overwhelm numerically the Hill Nepalese with Madhesis in the approaching party national convention. This upset the Hill and Madhesis members unhappy with Yadav. Rai approached the Election Commission and registered a new party JSP sans N for Nepal. Yadav has decided to fight the Rai faction in court. Rai has pledged support for Prachanda. Reports about Deuba's deal vary: offering Yadav Premiership and/or a shared term with Madhav Nepal. This deal too fizzled out as Unified Socialists were already divided between two former PMs, Nepal and Jhalanath Khanal. India figured in the regime change as having backed Deuba. Operation Topple requires either RSP (21 lawmakers) or JSP(N) and Unified Socialists together to desert the ruling dispensation. The king-maker for this great game is the CPN Maoists with 31 lawmakers that both NC and UML would need to stay in power. The threat to the Prachanda-led coalition will lurk in the nooks and corners of Parliament posed by parties with double-digit strength. NC, the single-largest party is

MIND GAMES ARE REGULARLY PLAYED IN BOTH COUNTRIES AS UNILATERALISM HAS CREPT INTO NEIGHBOURHOOD DIPLOMACY. WHILE NEPAL HAS DONE A TIT-FOR-TAT OVER THE MAP, CHINA HAS UNILATERALLY CHANGED THE LAC

licking its wounds but will not declare a truce to infuse a modicum of political stability. It has been blocking parliamentary proceedings for more than a month over the cooperative fund fraud in which Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane, RSP is involved. It has demanded a parliamentary probe into the alleged wrongdoings of Lamichhane. Prachanda has agreed to an enquiry in which others involved in the scam are also investigated. Parliament resumed after a short recess but NC is not allowing it to function. The budget has to be passed shortly and maybe the government will be forced to take the ordinance route. In India too it is time for regime change but through the world's longest election process. The BJP excels in toppling opposition governments with Operation Lotus. India has played a pivotal role in introducing democracy and its restoration in Nepal. Foreign Minister Jaishankar who has become a rock star in the election campaign is sharing pearls of wisdom on every conceivable subject, especially India's Neighbourhood First Policy. He said that politics may go up or down in the neighbourhood but India is regarded as a friend by the people. Later, he admitted that in diplomacy as in business there are setbacks

— it's part of the game. The latest setback in India-Nepal relations is the resurfacing of the festering border dispute. Having incorporated it in its state emblem the government has ordered the new map to be printed on Rs 100 bank notes about which Jaishankar observed that Nepal unilaterally took some measures but they can't change reality on the ground, adding 'discussions are ongoing through an established platform'. As far as is known, no discussion has taken place. For Prachanda and Oli, nationalism is the magic mantra. When Prachanda came to India on an official visit last June during the joint press statement, PM Modi said that the border dispute would be resolved through a joint mechanism. Strangely this fact was not mentioned in the press release of the joint statement. Mind games are regularly played in both countries as unilateralism has crept into neighbourhood diplomacy. While Nepal has done a tit-for-tat over the map, China has unilaterally changed the LAC with India (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Every vote counts



Amidst the dynamic political landscape, where elections have been completed in some places and others are still pending, it's crucial to acknowledge that not all leaders hoist the banner of public welfare. Merely casting a ballot doesn't guarantee the orchestration of effective governance. Instead of succumbing to the illusion that voting alone resolves everything, let's dispel such notions. The real-

ity often reveals a different narrative, where power dynamics favour those with deep pockets and questionable tactics, leaving trust and resources in disarray. If you're still clinging to the belief that all politicians are solely motivated by altruism, it's a precarious innocence to maintain. However, rather than consigning voting to oblivion, let's approach it with discernment. Let's seek out candidates who sway to the tune of integrity and genuinely prioritize the welfare of the people. And let's not overlook the importance of advocating for electoral reforms, weaving a fabric of transparency, accountability, and fairness in the political sphere. Your vote, fellow citizens, carries weight, especially when interwoven with others who aspire to a more just and equitable society. Remember, in the intricate tapestry of democracy, every thread contributes to a brighter future for us all

Imdadullah | Hyderabad

#### KEJRIWAL'S ELECTIONEERING

Madam — This is with reference to your Editorial "Wild card" (May 13). The national convener of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Arvind Kejriwal will campaign in favour of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) candidates across the country, Sandeep Pathak, the party's national general secretary said in a statement on Sunday, 12 May. Kejriwal will campaign in Lucknow on May 15, in Jamshedpur on May 16 and in Mumbai on May 17, he added. Kejriwal, who came out of Tihar Jail earlier this week, said he will work tirelessly and campaign across the country to end the "dictatorship" of the Modi government at the Centre. All the INDIA bloc constituents want Kejriwal to visit their states and campaign for them. The Supreme Court has granted interim bail to the AAP leader to participate in the Lok Sabha poll campaigning.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

discriminatory, and tense event in its history. For this, we have to thank the security personnel of Sweden and the officials of Malmö city, who were ultimately successful in bringing this event to its destination. As a result, Swiss singer Nemo was declared the winner for his song 'The Code'. Otherwise, as soon as people came to know that Israeli singer Eden Golan had also been included in this competition, a round of protests started in the venue. It seemed as if Malmö, Sweden's third-largest city, had been divided into two parts, with 70 percent of people against Israel and 30 percent in favor of the Israeli singer. In the context of the ongoing war in Gaza, Dutch singer and contender Joost Klein was expelled from the competition due to a backstage dispute. The world seems to be deeply divided due to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Russian attack on Ukraine. England's daily 'The Telegraph' rightly ran the headline 'This is the most poisonous Eurovision in history'.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

#### ELECTION GUARANTEES

Madam — This election season in India is filled with a plethora of extended guarantees from different political parties and their renowned leaders. Initially, it was only PM Narendra Modi who extended oral guarantees termed as 'Modi ki Guarantee'. Now, to compete with him, recently released Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal has also presented his list of 10 guarantees to script a 'new India'. However, Mr. Arvind made it clear that he didn't want to be the Prime Minister of India. Nevertheless, his support for the INDIA bloc has grown stronger, especially after he was sentenced to Tihar Jail by the apex court. Elections have a historic relationship with political guarantees and promises. But we all already know how many of these guarantees are actually fulfilled. The irony is that people don't need guarantees to survive and ensure their well-being; instead, we need commitment and actions for the actual general welfare of every section of our society. Since Mr. Kejriwal is on interim bail until June 1st, considering the short duration of time he is outside the jail, he is trying his best to reach out to the maximum public with his statements, social media posts, press conference conversations, and other personal interactions with the countrymen to challenge the BJP in general and PM Modi in particular for his arrest during this peculiar time of elections. Now that it is a fight between the guarantees of the two biggest political parties, it is up to the people to decide whom they will choose in the tough fight of the Lok Sabha elections.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

#### CONTROVERSIAL CONTEST

Madam — The Eurovision Western Music Contest has been held in various countries across Europe for the last 68 years. The youth there enjoy this competition, and spectators and music lovers are often seen in a dancing mood throughout the event. However, this year's event, which concluded late on Saturday night, can be termed as the most political, controversial, chaotic-



AKSHAT KHETAN

## SC judgments have strengthened democracy

Democratic spectacle owes its strength and boldness to a series of landmark legal judgments that have fortified its foundations

**E**lections, serving as the cornerstone of democracy, offer a platform for citizens to voice their opinions, hold leaders accountable, and actively engage in shaping the future of their nation. In India, elections transcend mere political proceedings; they evolve into grand festivals, embodying the collective will and aspirations of over a billion people. India's electoral odyssey, marked by its vast scale, diversity, and intricacy, has been fortified by a series of seminal legal rulings. These decisions have been instrumental in shaping and reinforcing the democratic framework of India, ensuring fairness, transparency, and inclusivity in the electoral process. Among the plethora of cases that demonstrate the resilience of the legal system, five stand out as pillars that have fortified India's electoral journey.

**Fundamental Right to Vote:** At the core of India's electoral democracy lies the fundamental right to vote, enshrined in the Constitution. Over time, the judiciary has steadfastly upheld and safeguarded this right through



various legal pronouncements. In the landmark 1977 case of Mohinder Singh Gill v. The Chief Election Commissioner, the Supreme Court of India unequivocally affirmed that the right to vote is sacrosanct and any arbitrary deprivation of this right is unconstitutional. The crux of this case revolved around assessing the constitutional validity of electoral laws that might encroach upon the fundamental right to vote. **Electoral Reforms and Transparency:** Ensuring transparency and accountability in the electoral process has been an ongoing endeavour, guided by judicial interventions aimed at curbing malpractices and fostering electoral integrity. The 2002 case of Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India marked a significant milestone in this journey. This case presented the chal-

lenge of reconciling the right to privacy of political candidates with the public's right to information, necessitating a delicate balance between transparency in electoral processes and individual privacy rights. **Inclusive Representation and Minority Rights:** The diverse social fabric of India underscores the necessity for inclusive representation and safeguarding minority rights in the electoral arena. Legal judgments have played a pivotal role in upholding these principles and ensuring equitable participation for all segments of society. The 1991 case of Indra Sawhney v. Union of India, commonly known as the Mandal Commission case, stands as a testament to this commitment. This case grappled with the challenge of affirmative action and reservation policies, striking a balance between equitable representation of marginalised communities and the principles of meritocracy enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The landmark judgment underscored the commitment to inclusive representation, empowering

marginalised communities and fostering social justice in the electoral process. **Effective Electoral Disputes Resolution:** Efficient resolution of electoral disputes is indispensable for upholding the sanctity of elections and fostering public trust in the democratic process. This judgment bolstered the credibility of the electoral process, ensuring expeditious and impartial resolution of disputes. **Safeguarding Electoral Rights and Freedoms:** Preserving electoral rights and freedoms is paramount for the integrity of the electoral process. Legal judgments have been instrumental in protecting these rights and holding authorities accountable for any infringements. The 2015 case of Mohd. Sattar v. State of Rajasthan serves as a poignant example. The judgment reaffirmed the principle of universal suffrage, ensuring that every citizen's voice is heard. (The writer is corporate and legal advisor and founder of AU Corporate Advisory and Legal Services; views are personal)

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## FIRST COLUMN

## THE RISE OF ROBOTS

Robots are emerging as the next frontier, but can they replace humans?



SHAINY SHARMA

Various research and studies have shown that the next frontier in Artificial Intelligence is the Robots. Much more added to it are the big names- Jeff Bezos, Microsoft and many others who are investing in human robots according to people with knowledge of the situation, as part of a scramble to find new applications for the so-called AI Technology. Undoubtedly, robots have increasingly become an integral part of our lives in this century, impacting various aspects of society, industry and everyday activities. The robots have revolutionized in many key sectors be it industrial, healthcare, agricultural, transportation or any other. The science of robots is revolutionizing day by day and scientists are making innovations in robots. Research studies show that by 2050, robots will overcome human beings as they will develop strong intellects.

Many developing nations are involving the use of robots. In the industrial sector robots are performing the tasks such as assembling, welding, painting and packaging in factories thereby increasing efficiency, precision and productivity. In the healthcare sector, robots can perform tasks such as surgery, patient care, rehabilitation and medication dispensing with great precision and even provide support and assistance to elderly or disabled individuals. Talking about the automobile industry, autonomous vehicles- including cars, drones and delivery robots, are transforming transportation and logistics while self-driven car makers are promising to make transportation safer, more efficient and accessible to people who are unable to drive. In the agricultural sector, agricultural robots such as drones



and automated harvesters can help optimise farming practices by monitoring crops, applying fertilizers and pesticides precisely and thereby harvesting crops efficiently which ultimately improves yields, reduces labour costs and minimizes environmental impact. Not only these but the robots are doing jobs and servings in restaurants too. The robots have taken down the responsibility of the pizza boy in pizza shops and even are performing tasks such as customer service, cleaning, and inventory management. They enhance operational efficiency and provide novel experiences for customers.

Robots are indeed reshaping various aspects of everyone's lives, from how individuals work to how they interact with technology and each other. Today, educational robots are gaining an advantage in classrooms over teachers, engineering, and other STEM concepts in a hands-on manner.

Overall, robots are transforming the way we live, work and interact with the world around us. With advancements in robotics technology continuing to expand their capabilities and applications, the question of whether robots will replace humans in various tasks and roles is a complex one. While robots and automation have the potential to replace humans in some repetitive and routine tasks, they also create new opportunities and roles for humans in other areas. However, many tasks and roles require human creativity, empathy, and problem-solving skills, which are difficult for robots to replicate.

There is no denying the fact that the evolution of robots will profoundly impact society, offering new opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and improving quality of life. However, it will also raise the important ethical, social and economic considerations that must be carefully addressed with time. As robotics technology continues to advance, it will further transform society and open new possibilities for innovation and human-machine collaboration.

(The writer is an educator, views are personal)

## The plight of unwed mothers of Kolam tribe



TV KATTIMANI

The stigmatisation of 'Kumari Matas' in the Kolam tribe highlights their struggle for social acceptance and economic empowerment



Kolam, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) of the Dravidian race is known for its unique culture, language, indigenous knowledge and matrilineal society. They reside predominantly in the Yavatmal, Chandrapur, some parts of Amravati, Wardha and Nanded districts of Maharashtra and in some parts of Adilabad of Telangana. They have historical roots in Andhra Pradesh and later migrated to the regions of Vidarbha and Marathwada. This Proto-Australoid tribe is often highlighted for its unwed mothers. As per the reports of The Indian Express, there are at least 45 registered unwed mothers and over 450 unregistered unwed mothers only in the three blocks named Maregaon, Pandarkawada and JhariJamini of Yavatmal. Being a matriarchal society, the Kolams of Yavatmal have always celebrated womanhood. They celebrate the first mensuration of girls; they worship 'Gabhuri', the mother Goddess as their main deity to uphold their matriarchal societal roots.

However, the situation is changing. Though the unwed mothers have been renamed as the 'KumariMaata' due to their assimilation with mainstream society yet due to their rising inclination towards the male-dominated society, patriarchal tenets are growing in these traditions. Therefore, the position of women is also declining consequently and those unwed mothers who used to live a normal life previously are now considered 'Bad character women'. There are various case studies and stories of women of the Kolam tribe where the elite in the society or financially stronger like contractors, outsiders visit the areas for work purposes, establish physical interactions with the women in their communities and refuse to marry them when they are expecting a child. Women are frequently conned by marriage promises because they are socially, emotionally and economically vulnerable. The woman is held liable for the premarital pregnancy, whereas the responsible males are excluded

from this process.

Most of these Kolam women work as agricultural labourers, construction labourers and other low-wage activities due to which it becomes very easy for the traders and other outsiders to abuse them physically. For example, according to Deshpande (2016) "border districts of Maharashtra, such as Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Bhandara, Buldhana, Amravati, Nagpur and Gondia too have unwed mothers, the numbers in Yavatmal are higher because of its proximity to the chilli fields of Telangana, where work (for the poor) is available throughout the year. A number of unwed mothers say they were lured by neighbouring state's men who promise marriage but left when they became pregnant."



THE KOLAM TRIBE, CLASSIFIED AS A PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TRIBAL GROUP (PVTG), IS GRAPPLING WITH A SIGNIFICANT ISSUE OF UNWED MOTHERS, EMPHASISING THE URGENCY FOR INTERVENTIONS TO TACKLE THEIR COMPLEX SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL STRUGGLES

Some of them get pregnant while being a minor whereas others are due to their backwardness. Though in most tribal societies, giving birth to a child is a biological phenomenon and hence considered pious but yet due to the assimilation with the conventional societies they are also recognizing childbirth as a structural process where the consent of society, kin and kith is necessary. These structural changes are pushing unwed mothers toward various other socio-cultural and economic problems.

The most important among these is that unwed mothers are not accepted within the community nor do they find any other groom, as they are considered obscene. As a result, for the entire period of life, they serve as a single mother due to which the pressure of childbearing increases among them. The problems are more serious as being unwed mothers they often face disgrace in the newly constructed norms of patriarchal society. Sometimes they need to

leave the village and stay in the outskirts whereas in many cases the other women are not allowed to talk to them or join them for any occasion, as they are believed to be malignant due to their premarital physical relations. The consequences are economic and occupational also. As a daily wage labourer, their leisure time is very little but being single mothers they need breaks for breastfeeding and childcare due to which they face pay cuts. Sometimes they need to pay a fine to the panchayats also for their "misconduct".

These unknown pregnancies among the women of Kolam are a crucial issue.

These indicate the lack of awareness about contraceptive measures, education, economic weakness and social vulnerability that often attract these women to fake marriage conversations and other luring proposals. As per the report of Sant Gadge Baba Amravati University (2018-2019) in Yavatmal, "28.84 per cent Kumari Matas are in the age range of 26 to 30 years. 36 per cent Kumari Matas having education up to Fourth standard, 67.30 per cent Kumari Matas are belonging to 'Kolam' caste, 82.69 per cent are homeless. 51.09 per cent are pregnant due to outsiders, 82.07 per cent children of Kumari Matas are admitted in the school by furnishing the name of mother only, 92.30 per cent had delivery at home, 61.63 per cent getting help from Government schemes".

The subject is more critical as many of them are uncouted because most of them do not come forward to speak due to socio-cultural stigma and thus their stories remain untold. This has again a negative impact on them as their complete family details are not mentioned in the Government records like ration cards, Aadhar

cards, etc. which deprives them of getting the benefits of many Government schemes that can make their life easier.

As per the report of Pune Times Mirror, "a survey of such victims is conducted every year by a woman and child development (WCD) officer with the help of Anganwadi workers and a junior protection officer at the taluka level." Further, the Anganwadi workers help these unwed mothers by teaching them the methods of nutrition and hygiene. The Bombay High Court has already directed the state to the need for the rehabilitation of young unwed mothers among the Kolam tribe. The Government of Kerala is also running a similar kind of scheme called "Snehasparsham" which offers unwed mothers ₹1000/- per month to lessen the financial burden of these economically vulnerable unwed mothers. The need of the hour is to initiate some projects and schemes for them so the Kumari Matas of Yavatmal can be included in the parameters of Government benefits at a large scale.

The infrastructural facilities like schools and primary health care centres, are the basic needs of these regions. Endeavours should also be taken to open basic schools and training centres for vocational courses like sewing, beautician, etc. The awareness about Self-Help groups can make them financially independent through various micro-level businesses like horticulture, bee-keeping, jelly-making etc. Further, documentation of unwed mothers can give them a social identity and make them live a life of dignity and self-respect.

(The writer is Vice Chancellor, Central Tribal University of Andhra Pradesh; views are personal)

## Kejriwal's bail: Unveiling political prophecies post-release

The Delhi CM's release sparks controversy with ominous predictions and bold political statements, fuelling nationwide debate on democracy's future

Persons accused of criminal cases getting arrested and the courts granting them bail is nothing new. Even if the person happens to be the reigning chief minister of a State or a former union minister of finance, the bail does not absolve the accused of the charges. The Supreme Court order that released the Delhi Chief Minister on bail from the custody of the Enforcement Directorate says it is a provisional arrangement so that he could participate in the election campaign as the Lok Sabha poll comes once in five years.



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Temple and addressed a press meeting. What he said during the press meeting is shocking and capable of causing fear in the minds of the people. He said if the BJP wins the 2024 Lok Sabha election and comes back to power, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will send all Opposition leaders to jail. Kejriwal also claimed that Amit Shah is being groomed as the next Prime Minister as Modi is likely to retire in 2025

when he turns 75. Yet another disclosure made by the Delhi Chief Minister was that Yogi Adityanath would be removed as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh within two months of the BJP coming back to power.

The national and international media are celebrating Kejriwal's bail and his prophecies. A major section of the media forgot the fact that they were the ones to give running commentaries of Live events without joining the game as players. The media in Kerala and Tamil Nadu are on Cloud Nine reporting that there is going to be a change of Government at the Centre after 4 June 2024. Well, let's leave it to the voters who are in the process of electing their representatives. It is good to see

that doubts about tampering the electronic voting machines have taken a stage and the Opposition leaders have started working on the modalities of Government formation. Saturday's press meeting by the Delhi Chief Minister took one to 2019 when the same had claimed that if the BJP wins the General Election and returns to power, there would not be any more elections in India. "The 2019 General Election would be the last poll the country will see if Narendra Modi returns to power," these were the words of Kejriwal in 2019.

After the 2019 general election, Narendra Modi returned to power with a larger majority and the country saw regular elections to all the State assemblies that completed their

mandatory five-year tenure. Though the claim fell flat on all fours, neither the media that flashed Kejriwal's warning about the "last" general elections nor our political pundits remembered the same.

Once the results were announced and the BJP was returned to power, that became the news, and everything else was forgotten (at least till 2024).

Yet another battlefield has been opened by the Opposition and that is the One Nation, One Leader concept, the brand new slogan coined by Kejriwal. Wasn't it George Santayana, the Spanish-American philosopher who said in 1863 that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"? Narendra Modi, I am sure

does know this adage quite well and hence there is no possibility of following the slogan coined by Kejriwal. The entire media in the country is unanimous in their opinion that elections are the festivals of democracy. But the festivals will certainly lose their charm if they are fueled by half-lies and full lies. One is at a loss to understand the logic behind the claim by certain leaders that the BJP government would subvert the Constitution!

Who derailed the Constitution much against the order of the Supreme Court that the basic structure of the Constitution should never be tampered with. It was in 1976 that then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi altered the preamble of the Constitution by incorporating

the words secularism, socialism etc. India survived as a nation from 1947 to 1976 without the terms secularism and socialism in its Constitution. B R Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution, was totally against the inclusion of these terms when it was drafted for the first time. It was after the introduction of these terms that communal riots and terrorism peaked in India.

Accusations and allegations are fine because they add to the intensity of the campaigning. But baseless allegations rob the beauty of the election process. Interestingly, the leaders named by the Delhi chief minister as potential victims of the Modi regime are not saints or beatified ones. Reports from Delhi say that Kejriwal

was summoned eight or nine times by the ED for questioning in connection with money laundering. The Chief Minister chose to ignore the same with contempt. He might not know the truth that the reigning Prime Minister cooperated with the Supreme Court-appointed Special Investigation Team under the chairmanship of R K Raghavan, a former CBI director to grill him about the Gujarat riots. For 19 hours, the then Gujarat Chief Minister sat through the grilling and answered all the queries they asked. That is what we call honesty and integrity. People still hope that Kejriwal too is honest.

(The writer is special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

# Pro-Palestinian protests dwindle on campuses

## Some US college graduations marked by defiant acts

**AP ■ CHICAGO**  
A tiny contingent of Duke University graduates opposed pro-Israel comedian Jerry Seinfeld speaking at their commencement in North Carolina Sunday, with about 30 of the 7,000 students leaving their seats and chanting “free Palestine” amid a mix of boos and cheers.  
Some waved the red, green, black and white Palestinian flag. Seinfeld, whose namesake sitcom was one of the most popular in US television history, was there to receive an honorary doctorate from the university. The stand-up comic turned actor, who stars in the new Netflix movie “Unfrosted,” has publicly supported Israel since it invaded Gaza to dismantle Hamas after the organization attacked the country and killed some 1,200 people in southern Israel on October 7. The ensuing war has killed more than

35,000 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to Gaza’s Health Ministry, which doesn’t distinguish between civilians and combatants.  
The small student protest Sunday at Duke’s graduation in Durham, North Carolina, was emblematic of campus events across the US Sunday after weeks of student protests resulted in nearly 2,900 arrests at 57 colleges and universities.  
Students at campuses across the US responded this spring by setting up encampments and calling for their schools to cut ties with Israel and businesses that support it. Students and others on campuses whom law enforcement authorities have identified as outside agitators have taken part in the protests from Columbia University in New York City to UCLA. Police escorted graduates’ families past a few dozen pro-Palestinian protesters who tried to block access to Sunday



Smoke rises following an Israeli bombardment in the Gaza Strip as seen from southern Israel, Monday. AP/PTI

evening’s commencement for Southern California’s Pomona College.  
After demonstrators set up an encampment last week on the campus’ ceremony stage, the small liberal arts school moved

the event 30 miles (48 kilometres) from Claremont to the Shrine Auditorium in downtown Los Angeles. Tickets were required to attend the event, which the school said would include additional security mea-

sures. In April, police wearing riot gear arrested 19 protesters who had occupied the president’s office at the college with about 1,700 undergraduates.  
Demonstrator Anwar Mohmed, a 21-year-old Pomona senior, said the school has repeatedly ignored calls to consider divesting its endowment funds from corporations tied to Israel in the war in Gaza. “We’ve been time and time again ignored by the institution,” Mohmed said outside the Shrine on Sunday. “So today we have to say, it’s not business as usual.” At the University of California, Berkeley, on Saturday, a small group of pro-Palestinian demonstrators waved flags and chanted during commencement and were escorted to the back of the stadium, according to the San Francisco Chronicle. There were no major counterprotests, but some attendees voiced frustra-

“I feel like they’re ruining it for those of us who paid for tickets and came to show our pride for our graduates,” said Annie Ramos, whose daughter is a student. “There’s a time and a place, and this is not it.”  
This weekend’s commencement events remained largely peaceful.  
At Emerson College in Boston, some students took off their graduation robes and left them on stage. Others emblazoned “free Palestine” on their mortarboards. One woman, staring at a camera broadcasting a livestream to the public, unzipped her robe to show a kaffiyeh, the black and white checkered scarf commonly worn by Palestinians, and flashed a watermelon painted on her hand. Both are symbols of solidarity with those living in the occupied territories. Others displayed messages for a camera situated on stage, but the livestream quickly shifted to a

different view, preventing them from being seen for long. Chants during some of the speeches were difficult to decipher. Protests at Columbia University, where student uprisings inspired others at campuses across the country, led the school to cancel its main graduation ceremony in favour of smaller gatherings.  
The University of Southern California told its valedictorian, who publicly backed Palestinians, that she could not deliver her keynote speech at its graduation ceremony because of security concerns. It later cancelled its main graduation ceremony. At DePaul University in Chicago, graduation is more than a month away. But as the academic year closes, school leaders said they had reached an “impasse” with the school’s pro-Palestinian protesters, leaving the future of their encampment on the Chicago campus unclear.

### 3 charged under UK’s National Security Act

**London (PTI):** Three men in the UK have been charged under the National Security Act with assisting the Hong Kong intelligence service and foreign interference. All three will appear in custody at Westminster Magistrates’ Court later, the BBC reported on Monday. The Metropolitan Police said the Hong Kong investigation was not related to a separate case involving Russia.  
As part of the investigation, 11 people were detained under Section 27 of the National Security Act.  
The three men charged are Chi Leung (Peter) Wai, 38, of Staines-upon-Thames; Matthew Trickett, 37, of Maidenhead; and Chung Bui Yuen, 63, of Hackney, Commander Dominic Murphy, head of the Met’s Counter Terrorism Command, said, “I want to reassure the public that we do not believe there to be any wider threat to them.”

# Trump’s hush money trial arrives at pivotal moment

**AP ■ NEW YORK**  
The star prosecution witness in Donald Trump’s hush money trial, Michael Cohen, took the stand on Monday, and his testimony could help shape the outcome of the first criminal case against an American president.  
Cohen, Trump’s former lawyer and personal fixer, is by far the Manhattan district attorney’s most important witness in the case, and his appearance signals that the trial is entering its final stretch. Prosecutors say they may wrap up their presentation of evidence by the end of the week.  
Cohen is expected to testify about his role in arranging hush money payments on Trump’s behalf during his first presidential campaign, including to porn actor Stormy Daniels, who told jurors last week that the USD 130,000 that she received in 2016 was meant to prevent her from going public about a sexual encounter she says she had with Trump in a hotel suite a decade earlier. He also matters because the reimbursements he received form the basis of the charges — 34 felony counts of falsifying



business records — against Trump. Prosecutors say the reimbursements were logged as legal expenses to conceal the payments’ true purpose.  
Defence lawyers have tied up a bruising cross-examination of Cohen, telling jurors during opening statements that the fixer-turned-foe is an “admitted liar” with an “obsession to get President Trump.”  
The testimony of a witness with such intimate knowledge of Trump’s activities could heighten the legal exposure of the presumptive Republican presidential nominee if jurors deem him sufficiently credible. But politically, prosecutors’ reliance on

a witness with such a checkered past — Cohen pleaded guilty to federal charges related to the payments and to lying to Congress — could be a boon for Trump as he fundraises off his legal woes and paints the case as the product of a tainted criminal justice system.  
Either way, his role as star prosecution witness further cements the disintegration of a mutually beneficial relationship that was once so close that Cohen famously said he’d “take a bullet for Trump.”  
After Cohen’s home and office were raided by the FBI in 2018, Trump showered him with affection on social media,

praising him as a “fine person with a wonderful family” and predicting — incorrectly — that Cohen would not “flip.” Months later, Cohen did exactly that, pleading guilty to August to federal campaign-finance charges in which he implicated Trump. By that point, the relationship was irrevocably broken, with Trump posting on the social media platform then known as Twitter: “If anyone is looking for a good lawyer, I would strongly suggest that you don’t retain the services of Michael Cohen!”  
Cohen later admitted lying to Congress about a Moscow real estate project that he had pursued on Trump’s behalf during the heat of the 2016 Republican campaign. He said he lied to be consistent with Trump’s “political messaging.”  
Prosecutors are expected to elicit detailed testimony from Cohen about his past crimes in hopes of blunting the impact of defence lawyers’ questioning and showing that they’re not trying to hide his misdeeds. But it’s unclear how effective that will be, given that defence lawyers will be prepared to exploit all the challenges that

accompany a witness like Cohen.  
Besides painting Cohen as untrustworthy, they’re also expected to cast him as vindictive, vengeful and agenda-driven. Since their fallout, Cohen has emerged as a relentless and sometimes crude critic of Trump, appearing as recently as last week in a live TikTok wearing a shirt featuring a figure resembling Trump with his hands cuffed, behind bars. The judge on Friday urged prosecutors to tell him to refrain from making any more statements about the case or Trump.  
“He has talked extensively about his desire to see President Trump go to prison,” Trump attorney Todd Blanche said during opening statements. “He has talked extensively about his desire to see President Trump’s family go to prison. He has talked extensively about President Trump getting convicted in this case.”  
No matter how his testimony unfolds, Cohen is indisputably central to the case, as evidenced by the fact that his name was mentioned in the jury’s presence during opening statements more than 130 times — more than any other

person.  
Other witnesses, including former National Enquirer publisher David Pecker and former Trump adviser Hope Hicks, have testified at length about the role Cohen played in arranging to stifle stories that were feared to be harmful to Trump’s 2016 candidacy. And jurors heard an audio recording of Trump and Cohen discussing a plan to purchase the rights to a story of a Playboy model, Karen McDougal, who has said she had an affair with Trump.  
During a massive rally on Saturday in the southern New Jersey resort town of Wildwood, Trump revived his criticism of the case, wrongly blaming President Joe Biden for orchestrating the New York charges, calling the case a “Biden show trial.” That argument ignores the reality that the hush money case was filed by local prosecutors in Manhattan who do not work for the Justice Department or any other White House office. The Justice Department has said the White House has had no involvement in the two criminal cases against Trump brought by special counsel Jack Smith.

# False narratives being created about India in West: Barai

**PTI ■ WASHINGTON**  
Misinformation and false narratives are being created about Indian democracy in the West in the middle of an election cycle in India, a prominent Indian-American oncologist has said, observing that some people in the West continue to have a colonial mentality. Chicago-based Dr Baharat Barai, in an interview on Sunday, hit out at Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau for not taking action against Sikh separatists who are “openly planning and supporting violence inside India and Indian leaders.”  
“The Khalistan problem is only in Canada, maybe a little bit in the US. If the US government wants to give them a piece of land, let them be happy. After all, they’re foreign citizens. They’re either citizens of the US or citizens of Canada. What right do they have to interfere in what is happening in India?” Dr Barai told PTI in an interview here. “If they want a separate land for them, let (Canadian Prime Minister Justin) Trudeau give it to them. If the US thinks that that’s a good idea (let them do



so)...we are standing right in front of Abraham Lincoln (memorial in Washington DC). What did he do when the South (US) wanted to secede? We had a civil war. In Washington DC, he is being celebrated as the father of the nation,” he said. “This (Khalistan) is not a problem of India. Indian Sikhs don’t want to have anything to do with it. It is the foreign-born or foreign-living Sikhs and only a very tiny fraction of them,” Dr Barai said. Referring to the number of news articles and commentaries appearing in the Western press, including that of the US, raising questions about democracy, freedom of expression, and human rights in India,

# More bodies found after flash floods kill dozens in Indonesia

**AP ■ PADANG**  
Rescuers recovered more bodies Monday after monsoon rains triggered flash floods on Indonesia’s Sumatra Island, bringing down torrents of cold lava and mud, leaving 43 people dead and another 15 missing. The heavy rains, along with a landslide of mud and cold lava from Mount Marapi, caused a river to breach its banks.  
The deluge tore through mountain-side villages along four districts in West Sumatra province just before midnight Saturday. The floods swept away people and submerged hundreds of houses and buildings, while forcing more than 3,100 people to flee to temporary government shelters in Agam and Tanah Datar districts, said National Disaster Management Agency spokesperson Abdul Muhari.  
Cold lava, also known as lahar, is a mixture of volcanic mate-



rial and pebbles that flows down a volcano’s slopes in the rain. Rescuers on Monday recovered more bodies, mostly from villages that were worst hit in Agam and Tanah Datar districts, bringing the death toll to 43, Muhari said in a statement. At least 19 people were injured in the flash floods and rescuers were searching for 15 villagers reported missing, he said. Television reports showed relatives wailing as they

watched rescuers pull a muck-caked body from a devastated hamlet. It was placed in an orange and black bag and taken away for burial. Authorities struggled to get tractors and other heavy equipment to the area over washed-out roads after flash floods brought mud and rocks onto the hilly hamlets, said Abdul Malik, who heads the search and rescue office in Padang, the provincial capital.

# Judge lifts ban on video of church stabbing

**Melbourne (AP):** An Australian judge Monday lifted a ban on the social media platform X showing Australians a video of a bishop being stabbed in a Sydney church.  
The temporary ban was put in place April 22, but the judge rejected the application from Australia’s eSafety Commission to extend the court order that would have expired Monday. Australian Federal Court Justice Geoffrey Kennett said he would publish his reasons for imposing and lifting the order later.  
The decision was a win for the company rebranded by billionaire Elon Musk when he bought Twitter last year. X was alone among social media platforms in refusing to remove video of Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel being stabbed. Musk has argued that he is standing up for a freedom of speech principle. Australian lawmakers have accused him of arrogance and of lacking a sense of social responsibility.

“Not trying to win anything. I just don’t think we should be suppressing Australian’s rights to free speech,” Musk posted on X after the ruling.  
X is also taking a separate court action against eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant, a former Twitter employee, that challenges the validity of her notice requiring the platform to remove video of the April 15 attack in an Assyrian Orthodox church. The judge is expected to consider setting a hearing date Wednesday.  
Assistant Treasurer Stephen Jones said the government might consider changing Australian law after reading Kennett’s reasons for removing his order that required X to hide the video from users. “There’s a fundamental principle at stake and that is, if you’re a company or anybody operating in Australia, then you’ve got to abide by Australian laws,” Jones said.

# ‘Fires used as weapon of war in Sudan destroyed 72 villages’

**AP ■ CAIRO**  
Fires resulting from the fighting in Sudan destroyed or damaged 72 villages and settlements last month, a UK-based rights group said Monday, highlighting the use of fire as a weapon of war in the conflict in the African country.  
Investigators from Sudan Witness, an open-source project run by the non-profit Center for Information Resilience, say that more blazes than in any other month since the war started in mid-April 2023. The number also brings to 201 the total number of fires in Sudan since fighting broke out between Sudan’s military and the rival paramilitary force.  
The analysis didn’t provide any casualty figures from the fires. In the war in Sudan, the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces have often used fire, setting

entire villages ablaze, especially in Sudan’s western Darfur region. The war has wrecked the country and pushed its population to the brink of famine. More than 14,000 people have been killed and thousands have been wounded. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced.  
The Center for Information Resilience said the number of fires surged particularly in the north and west of el-Fasher, the capital city of North Darfur state that faces an imminent attack.  
El-Fasher saw intense fighting on Friday between the Sudanese military and the paramilitary RSF and their allies. At least 27 people were killed and dozens injured, said the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, or OCHA. More than 800 were displaced.  
Sudan’s military launched an

airstrike the next day that hit close to a pediatric hospital in el-Fasher, killing two children and a caregiver, according to Doctors Without Borders. In its analysis, the Center for Information Resilience estimated that 31 settlements — villages and towns — were affected by fires in April, with an over 50 per cent destruction rate. “We’ve documented the patterns of numerous fires and the continuing devastation to settlements around western Sudan, large and small,” Anouk Theunissen, Sudan Witness project director, said in a news release.  
“When we see reports of fighting or airstrikes coinciding with clusters of fires it indicates that fire is being used indiscriminately as a weapon of war. The trend is worsening and continues to lead to the mass displacement of Sudanese people,” Theunissen said.

# Amazon’s self-driving robotaxi under investigation

**Detroit (AP):** Amazon’s self-driving robotaxi unit is being investigated by the US government’s highway safety agency after two of its vehicles braked suddenly and were rear-ended by motorcyclists. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said in documents posted on its website Monday it will evaluate the automated driving system developed by Zoox. Both crashes happened during the daytime hours and the motorcyclists suffered minor injuries. In both cases, the agency confirmed that each of the Amazon vehicles was operating in autonomous mode leading up to the crashes.

# Thousands protest in Georgia

**AP ■ TBILISI**  
Georgia’s parliament green-lit a final vote on a proposed law that critics see as a threat to media freedom and the country’s aspirations to join the European Union on Monday, a day after police dispersed the latest protests against it. The bill would require media and non-governmental organisations and other non-profits to register as “pursuing the interests of a foreign power” if they receive more than 20 per cent of their funding from abroad.  
The opposition denounces the bill as “the Russian law” because Moscow uses similar legislation to crack down on independent news media, non-profits and activists critical of the Kremlin. The bill is nearly identical to one that the governing Georgian Dream party was pressured to



withdraw last year after street protests. Renewed demonstrations have rocked Georgia for weeks, with demonstrators scuffling with police, who used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds. The government says the bill is necessary to stem what it deems as harmful foreign influence over the country’s politics and to prevent unspecified foreign actors from trying to destabilise it.

Huge crowds marched through Europe Square in the capital, Tbilisi, on Saturday, with demonstrators wrapped in Georgian and European Union flags and chanting “Georgia!” On Sunday, the protesters gathered in front of parliament for an overnight rally and tried to block entrances into the building, where a committee of lawmakers were expected to discuss the bill once again on Monday.

# Cellphones of Indian crew on board seized as part of probe: Non-profit organisation

**PTI ■ NEW YORK**  
The FBI has seized the cellphones of the mostly Indian crew on board a crippled cargo ship in Baltimore as part of the investigation into the deadly bridge accident in the US city, a non-profit organisation in touch with the personnel said. The 2.6-km-long, four-lane Francis Scott Key Bridge over the Patapsco River came crashing down on March 26 after the 984-foot ship ‘Dali’ collided against it. The crew on board Dali included 20 Indians and one Sri Lankan. The crew has been on the ship since the accident and has been cooperating with the investigation. Executive Director of the Baltimore International

Seafarers’ Centre The Rev. Joshua Messick told PTI that he is working with all of the relevant organisations to make sure the crew has what they need and that their rights are being upheld. “They are well cared for with the sole exception that their cellphones were seized as part of the FBI’s investigation and have not been returned,” he said. Messick said he is in “contact with the crew to purchase some SIM cards for them and to plan trips ashore when they are able to have shore leave”. The Baltimore International Seafarers’ Centre is a non-profit organisation serving seafarers that call on the Port of Baltimore from all over the world. The mission of the organisation is to “facilitate the well-being of crew

members by offering transportation ashore,” according to information on its website. Last month, US authorities opened a criminal investigation into the Baltimore bridge collapse incident that killed six construction crew workers, who were repairing potholes on the bridge when the collision occurred. The Washington Post had said that the FBI opened the criminal investigation “focusing on the massive container ship that brought down the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore last month — a probe that will look at least in part at whether the crew left the port knowing the vessel had serious systems problems”. The Key Bridge Response Unified Command is sched-

uled to use precision cuts made with small charges to remove a large section of the Francis Scott Key Bridge wreckage from on top of the Dali. For safety reasons, the controlled demolition to remove the bridge section resting on the deck of the Dali has tentatively been scheduled for Monday. Due to weather conditions producing lightning within 10 miles of the M/V Dali, remaining daylight, and rising tide, Unified Command has moved the demolition to Monday. The Key Bridge Response Unified Command said in a statement that the safest and swiftest method to remove the bridge piece from on top of the Dali is by “precision cuts made with small charges.”



# Situation remains tense in PoK as strike enters fourth day

## Pak PM allocates Rs 23-bn grant to quell protests

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The situation remained tense in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir as the total strike against high prices of wheat flour and inflated electricity bills and taxes entered its fourth day on Monday, forcing the Pakistan government to allocate Rs 23 billion for immediate release to the region to quell a simmering unrest.

The disputed region witnessed clashes on Saturday between the police and activists of a rights movement, leaving at least one police officer dead and injuring over 100 people, mostly policemen. A complete strike has also been observed in the territory since Friday, bringing life to a halt.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who said he was “deeply concerned” about the situation, on Monday approved Rs 23 billion for immediate release to the region after the negotiations between the protesters and the regional government ended in a deadlock. Ruffled by the unexpected protest and its sensitivity, Prime Minister Sharif chaired a special meeting here on Monday which was attended by PoK “prime minister” Chaudhry Anwarul Haq, local ministers, and top political leadership, the PM’s Office (PMO) said in a statement.

Prime Minister Sharif approved the immediate provision of Rs23 billion to solve the problems of the people of PoK, it said. Federal ministers and leaders of the coalition parties also took part in the meeting, where a detailed review of the situation was taken, it added. Kashmir leaders and all participants appreciated Shehbaz for his decision, the PMO said.

The protest is led by the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC), which has traders at the forefront in most parts of the region, who have been seeking the provision of electricity as per hydropower generation cost in the region, subsidised wheat flour and an end to the privileges of the elite class.

A long march led by the JAAC



The situation remained tense as strike in PoK entered fourth day

left for Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, on Monday as the wheel-jam strike entered its fourth day.

The movement announced its march on Muzaffarabad after the talks between the JAAC core committee and Chief Secretary of the region Dawood Bareach ended in a stalemate. A protest leader from Rawalakot accused the government of resorting to evasive tactics.

Protestors have already staged sit-ins, closing Kohala-Muzaffarabad Road at several locations, the Dawn newspaper reported. The road stretches 40 kilometres and links Kohala town with Muzaffarabad in PoK. Heavy contingents of police have been posted at roundabouts and sensitive locations. Markets, trade centres and educational institutes remain closed, while transport is suspended, reports said. The so-called government called in the Rangers after clashes between the police and protesters erupted in Mirpur during demonstrations on Saturday.

Expressing deep concern over

the violent clashes between the police and the protesters, Prime Minister Sharif on Sunday said that there should be “absolutely no tolerance for taking the law into one’s own hands”.

“I urge all parties to resort to a peaceful course of action for resolution of their demands. Despite the best efforts of detractors, the matter will hopefully be settled soon,” he said. As part of his efforts to calm down tensions, President Asif Ali Zardari urged all the stakeholders to exercise restraint and resolve the issues through dialogue and mutual consultation.

He stressed that the political parties, state institutions and the people of the region should act responsibly so that hostile elements do not exploit the situation to their benefit. The president highlighted that the demands of the people in the region should be addressed as per law, adding that he would take up their grievances with Prime Minister Sharif to find a way out of the current situation. The president regretted the current situation and offered condolences over the unfortu-

nate death of the police officer and prayed for the swift recovery of all those who were injured in recent clashes.

On Saturday, the violent protesters damaged multiple vehicles, including a magistrate’s car on the Poonch-Kotli road. Moreover, markets, trade centres, offices, schools, and restaurants remained closed across the region.

Police also launched a crackdown against the protesters after the violence, arresting dozens of individuals in Muzaffarabad.

A day earlier, the government also suspended mobile phone and internet services in different parts of the region. According to a report by Dawn, on May 9 and 10, around 70 activists were arrested by police in a bid to prevent a long march - announced by the JAAC to press the government to comply with an agreement reached between the two in February this year - triggering serious clashes in Dadyal and a “shut-down strike” call.

In light of the protests, government offices and educational institutions remained closed on Monday.

# Dar set to meet top Chinese leaders in Beijing

**Beijing (PTI):** Pakistan’s newly-appointed Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar on Monday reached here for a four-day official visit during which he will meet top Chinese leaders and co-chair a bilateral strategic dialogue between the two all-weather friends. Dar, who is also the foreign minister, was received by Director General Ambassador Wang Fu Kang and Pakistan’s Ambassador to China Khalid Hashmi, state-run Associated Press of Pakistan reported. Dar will meet top Chinese leaders and comprehensively review bilateral relations, including the upgradation of the multi-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, Pakistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement before his visit. He will co-chair the 5th Pakistan-China Foreign Ministers’ Strategic Dialogue with his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, it said. The two foreign ministers are expected to discuss the possibility of Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif’s visit to Beijing.

# Shehbaz quits as PML-N chief; Nawaz set to assume post

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday resigned as the President of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), paving the way for his elder brother and former premier Nawaz Sharif to retake the helm of the ruling party amid internal strife.

In his resignation letter addressed to the PML-N secretary general, Shehbaz cited the tumultuous events of 2017, which resulted in the “unjust” disqualification of Nawaz from the Prime Minister’s Office and the presidency of the party, and said he was entrusted with the responsibility of assuming the presidency of the party. Shehbaz said that his brother had entrusted him with the responsibility of assuming the party presidency in the face of adversity and added that it was a duty he had “upheld with utmost dedication and sincerity”.

“However, I am cognisant that this role has always been viewed as a trust ... bestowed upon me by our revered leader,” the 72-year-old said. Nawaz, 74, returned to Pakistan in October last year, ending nearly four years of self-imposed exile in London.

“I am heartened by recent developments that have exonerated our leader with dignity, affirming his unblemished integrity and commitment to the service of our nation,” he said, referring to the Islamabad High Court ruling on November 29 that acquitted Nawaz in the Avenfield reference. The next month, on December 12, the PML-N supreme was acquitted in the Al-Azizia reference by the high court.

“In light of these developments and the steadfast guidance of our beloved leader, I believe the time has come for Mohammad Nawaz Sharif to resume his rightful place as the president of the PML-N,”

Shehbaz said. “It is with a deep sense of duty and reverence for our party’s principles that I tender my resignation as the president,” he said.

In 2017, the Supreme Court disqualified Nawaz as premier and party president for his alleged corruption in cases related to the Panama Papers revelations about his illegal wealth stashed abroad.

He relinquished his position within the party following his disqualification, which also led to his departure from the prime minister’s office. Nawaz was all set to become prime minister for the fourth time but his party failed to get a clear majority in the National Assembly on its own in the February 8 general elections. In a surprise move, he allowed his younger brother and the incumbent party president Shehbaz — who is considered the favourite of the military establishment — to lead a six-party coalition government at the Centre.

# India extend USD 50 million budgetary support to Maldives as goodwill gesture

PTI ■ MALE

In a goodwill gesture, India has decided to extend vital budgetary support to the Maldives with the rollover of a USD 50 million Treasury Bill for another year at the Maldivian government’s special request, it was announced on Monday.

The State Bank of India has subscribed for one more year to the USD 50 million Government Treasury Bill, issued by the Ministry of Finance of Maldives, upon maturity of the previous subscription, the High Commission of India said in a brief statement on Monday.

The Indian government took this decision despite the bilateral ties experiencing turbulence since Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu, a pro-China leader, assumed office six months back. These Government Treasury Bills are subscribed by SBI under government-to-government, a

unique arrangement at zero cost (interest-free) to the Government of Maldives. The continuation of subscription has been made at the special request of the Government of Maldives to secure budgetary support from the Government of India, the statement said.

Under the terms of special government-to-government arrangement, SBI has been subscribing to these government treasury bills at zero cost to the Maldives government. This means the Maldives incurs no interest expense on the borrowed amount, the Edition.my news portal reported. The first treasury bill, valued at USD 50 million, matured in January 2024, which the Maldives had repaid. The second treasury bill, also valued at USD 50 million, is set to mature in May 2024. In response to a special request from the Maldives, SBI has opted to extend its subscription for another year. The third treasury bill is due to

mature in September, the report said. The Maldivian government on Monday thanked India for its support. “I thank EAM @DrSJaishankar and the Government of India for extending vital budgetary support to the Maldives with the rollover of USD 50 million Treasury Bill. This is a true gesture of goodwill which signifies the longstanding friendship between #Maldives and #India,” Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer tweeted.

The Government of India has provided budget support of USD 50 million to the Maldives. The support was in the form of a rollover of USD 50 million Treasury Bill, for an additional year, through the State Bank of India, Male’, from May 13, 2024, the Maldivian Foreign Ministry said in a statement. “Government of India’s decision to rollover the T-Bill came following a request to that effect made by Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer to India’s External Affairs Minister

Dr S Jaishankar, during the official bilateral visit to India from May 8-10, the statement said. The Government of Maldives is highly appreciative of the generous support that the Government of India has been providing to the Maldives in the form of budgetary support. A large number of infrastructural developmental projects and High Impact Community Developmental projects are underway with assistance from the Government of India, which consists of a notable part as grant assistance, the statement said. The Government of Maldives looks forward to continuing this collaborative partnership for the mutual benefit and prosperity of their people, it said. Zameer after coming back from the visit said that significant strides have been made in expediting India-assisted projects in the Maldives, as he underscored the government’s commitment to prioritising the resumption and completion of these projects.

# Putin replaces Sergei Shoigu as defence minister

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday replaced Sergei Shoigu as defence minister in a Cabinet shakeup that comes as he begins his fifth term in office.

In line with Russian law, the entire Russian Cabinet resigned Tuesday following Putin’s glittering inauguration in the Kremlin, and most members have been widely expected to keep their jobs, while Shoigu’s fate had appeared uncertain.

Putin signed a decree on Sunday appointing Shoigu as secretary of Russia’s Security Council, the Kremlin said. The appointment was announced shortly after Putin proposed Andrei Belousov to become the country’s defence minister in place of Shoigu.

The announcement of Shoigu’s new role came as 13 people were reported dead and 20 more wounded in Russia’s border city of Belgorod, where a 10-story apartment building partially collapsed after what Russian officials said was Ukrainian shelling. Ukraine hasn’t commented on the incident.

Belousov’s candidacy will need to be approved by Russia’s upper house in parliament, the Federation Council. It reported Sunday that Putin introduced proposals for other Cabinet positions as well but Shoigu is the only minister on that list who is being replaced. Several other new candidates for federal ministers were proposed Saturday by Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, reappointed by Putin on Friday.

Shoigu’s deputy, Timur Ivanov, was arrested last month on bribery charges and was ordered to remain in custody pending an official investigation. The arrest of Ivanov was widely interpreted as an attack on Shoigu and a possible precursor of his dismissal, despite his close personal ties with Putin.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Sunday that Putin had decided to give the defence minister role to a civilian because the ministry should be “open to innovation and cutting-edge ideas.” He also said the increasing defence budget “must fit into the country’s wider economy,” and Belousov, who until recently served as the first

deputy prime minister, is the right fit for the job. Belousov, 65, held leading positions in the finances and economic department of the prime minister’s office and the Ministry of Economic Development. In 2013, he was appointed an adviser to Putin and seven years later, in January 2020, he became first deputy prime minister.

Peskov assured that the reshuffle will not affect “the military aspect,” which “has always been the prerogative of the Chief of General Staff,” and Gen Valery Gerasimov, who currently serves in this position, will continue his work.

Tatiana Stanovaya, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, said in an online commentary that Shoigu’s new appointment to Russia’s Security Council showed that the Russian leader viewed the institution as “a reservoir” for his “former” key figures — people who he can’t in any way let go, but doesn’t have a place for.” Figures such as former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev have also been appointed to the security council.

Medvedev has served as the body’s deputy chairman since 2020.

Shoigu was appointed to the Security Council instead of Nikolai Patrushev, Putin’s long-term ally. Patrushev is taking on another role, and promised to reveal details in the coming days. Shoigu has been widely seen as a key figure in Putin’s decision to send Russian troops into Ukraine. Russia had expected the operation to quickly overwhelm Ukraine’s much smaller and less-equipped army and for Ukrainians to broadly welcome Russian troops.

Instead, the conflict galvanized Ukraine to mount an intense defence, dealing the Russian army humiliating blows, including the retreat from an attempt to take the capital, Kyiv, and a counteroffensive that drove Moscow’s forces out of the Kharkiv region. Before he was named defence minister in 2012, Shoigu spent more than 20 years directing markedly different work: In 1991, he was appointed head of the Russian Rescue Corps disaster-response

agency, which eventually became the Ministry of Emergency Situations. He became highly visible in the post. The job also allowed him to be named a general even though he had no military service behind him as the rescue corps absorbed the militarised Civil Defence Troops.

Shoigu does not wield the same kind of power as Patrushev, who has long been the country’s top security official. But the position he will take — the same position that Patrushev worked to transform from a minor bureaucratic role to a place of sizable influence — will still carry some authority, according to Mark Galeotti, head of the Mayak Intelligence consultancy. High-level security materials intended for the president’s eyes will still pass through the Security Council Secretariat, even with changes at the top. “You can’t just institutionally turn around a bureaucracy and how it works overnight,” he said. Thousands of civilians have fled Russia’s renewed ground offensive in Ukraine’s northeast that has targeted towns and villages with a

barrage of artillery and mortar shelling, officials said Sunday. The intense battles have forced at least one Ukrainian unit to withdraw in the Kharkiv region, capitalising more land to Russian forces across less defended settlements in the so-called contested gray zone along the Russian border.

By Sunday afternoon, the town of Vovchansk, among the largest in the northeast with a prewar population of 17,000, emerged as a focal point in the battle. Volodymyr Tymoshko, the head of the Kharkiv regional police, said that Russian forces were on the outskirts of the town and approaching from three directions. An Associated Press team, positioned in a nearby village, saw plumes of smoke rising from the town as Russian forces hurled shells. Evacuation teams worked non-stop throughout the day to take residents, most of whom were older, out of harm’s way. At least 4,000 civilians have fled the Kharkiv region since Friday, when Moscow’s forces launched the operation, Governor Oleh Syniehubov said in a social media statement.

# Ukraine army locked in ‘fierce’ border battles amid Russian assault

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian troops are locked in intense battles with the advancing Russian army in two border areas, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, while the death toll from a Russian apartment building collapse blamed on Ukrainian shelling rose to 15.

Zelenskyy said “fierce battles” are taking place near the border in eastern and northeastern Ukraine as outgunned and outnumbered Ukrainian soldiers try to push back a significant Russian ground offensive. “Defensive battles are ongoing, fierce battles, on a large part of our border area,” Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address on Sunday.

The Kremlin’s forces are aiming to exploit Ukrainian weaknesses before a big batch of new military aid for Kyiv from the US and European partners arrives on the battlefield in the coming weeks and months, analysts say.

That makes this period a window of opportunity for Moscow and one of the most dangerous for Kyiv in the two-year war, they say.

The new Russian push in the northeastern Kharkiv region, along with the ongoing drive into the eastern Donetsk region, come after months when the about 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line barely budged. In the meantime, both sides have used long-range strikes in what largely became a war of attrition.

The Kharkiv incursion may be

an attempt to create a “buffer zone” to protect Belgorod, an adjacent Russian border region battered by Ukrainian attacks. Russian emergency services on Monday finished clearing the rubble in the region’s capital city of Belgorod, where a section of a residential building collapsed following what authorities said was Ukrainian shelling. Fifteen bodies were pulled from the rubble, Belgorod regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said, and 27 other people were wounded. Another three people in the city of Belgorod were killed by shelling late Sunday, he said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Sunday replaced Sergei Shoigu as defence minister in a Cabinet shakeup. Shoigu was widely seen as a key figure in Putin’s decision to send Russian troops into Ukraine in February 2022. Russia had expected the operation to quickly overwhelm Ukraine’s army and for Ukrainians to broadly welcome Russian troops.

Zelenskyy said fighting in the Donetsk area is “no less intense” than in Kharkiv. He said the Kremlin aimed to “spread our forces thin” by opening a second active front in Kharkiv. He described the area around Pokrovsk region, just inside the Ukrainian border in Donetsk, as “the most difficult”. Pokrovsk was a town of around 60,000 people before the war and was until recently a two-hour drive from the front line. Now it is less than half that.

# Pillai named state minister in Singapore PM Wong cabinet

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Indian-origin Member of Parliament Murali Pillai will be appointed the Minister of State for Law and Transport in the new incoming cabinet of Singapore’s new Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, it was announced on Monday. Pillai, 56, will be appointed and sworn in on July 1, according to a report by The Straits Times newspaper while others will be sworn in on May 15. Pillai, a member of the ruling People’s Action Party, is a lawyer.

Among other Indian-origin politicians, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan will remain as Foreign Affairs Minister, K Shanmugam will continue as

Minister of Home Affairs and Law, and Indraneel Rajah as the Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office.

The new cabinet line-up was announced by the Singapore Prime Minister’s Office on Monday.

It will be led by Wong, who will be sworn into the highest executive office on Wednesday after incumbent Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, 72, announced that he will step down on Wednesday after leading the country for 20 years.

Gan Kim Yong, 65, will be promoted to Deputy Prime Minister as part of a cabinet reshuffle and will remain as Trade and Industry Minister. He will be the acting prime minister in the absence of the

prime minister. He will also take over as the chairman of the Monetary Authority of Singapore, the de facto central bank, and assume responsibility for the strategy group within the Prime Minister’s Office.

Currently, Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat, 63, will continue in his role. Heng was first named to succeed Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong but he has declined to take up the position.

Wong, 51, also announced other promotions and appointments on Monday, but there were no major changes to the ministers helming each ministry in this reshuffle. For example, Wong will remain at the helm of the Finance Ministry.

# Nepal DyPM quits in setback to Prachanda-led govt

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal’s Deputy Prime Minister and senior Madhesi leader Upendra Yadav on Monday tendered his resignation and his party pulled out of the government, a setback to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda-led coalition government.

Yadav, also the Minister for Health and Population, submitted his resignation to Prime Minister “Prachanda” on Monday morning, according to sources close to the Madhesi leader. Along with Yadav, Minister of State for Forest and Environment Dipak Karki, from the same party, has also submitted his resignation. The resignation by Yadav, the

Chairman of Janata Samajwadi Party Nepal (JSP-Nepal), comes a week after his party split into two groups with senior leader Ashok Rai forming a new party named Janata Samajwadi Party. The new party has been recognised by the Election Commission. “This morning, I submitted my resignation to Prime Minister Dahal. Given the current political situation, I find it untenable to continue my cooperation with the government,” Yadav said.

The JSP-Nepal had altogether 12 lawmakers in the House of Representatives (HoR). Now the party’s strength has been reduced to 5 in the HoR as Rai and six other lawmakers and 30 central committee members joined the new party.

The ruling coalition led by Prime Minister Prachanda still holds a majority with 77 seats of the CPN-UML, 32 of the Maoist Centre, 21 of the Rastriya Swatantra Party, seven of the newly formed Janata Samajwadi Party and 10 seats of the CPN-Unified Socialist (CPN-US). The coalition requires at least 138 seats in the 275-member House of Representatives to prove a majority.

“The party’s pull out from the government will not have an immediate impact on the Prachanda-led coalition government,” said Sunil Manandhar, former environment minister and central committee member of the ruling CPN-Maoist Centre.

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Admission Notice for BPT, BMLT & B.Sc Medical (APB) Courses, session 2024  
Online applications through University website alongwith requisite registration fee are invited w.e.f. 14.05.2024 to 26.05.2024 from eligible candidates for admission to Bachelor of Physiotherapy, Bachelor in Medical Laboratory Technology & B.Sc Medical (Anatomy, Physiology & Biochemistry) Courses, session 2024. The Last date for submission of Online Fee through payment gateway is 27.05.2024. For Eligibility/Prospectus/Schedule / Details/Updates visit the University website i.e. www.bfuh.ac.in. **REGISTRAR**  
00/12/23/8/2023/34064 Dated CHD :- 5/13/2024

# Stock markets rebound on last hour buying

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex and Nifty staged a dramatic rebound on Monday to settle higher following buying in HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank and Tata Consultancy Services.

Helped by buying at the fag-end, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed higher by 111.66 points or 0.15 per cent at 72,776.13. The index opened lower and plummeted further 798.46 points or 1.09 per cent to hit a low of 71,866.01 in day trade. The NSE Nifty rose by 48.85 points or 0.22 per cent to 22,104.05. The 50-issue rebounded around 310 points from the day's low of 21,821.05 and hit a high of 22,131.65.

From the Sensex basket, Asian Paints, Sun Pharma, HDFC Bank, Tata Consultancy Services, Axis Bank, Tata Steel, JSW Steel,



Larsen & Toubro, ICICI Bank and Power Grid were the major gainers.

Tata Motors dropped over 8 per cent despite reporting over three-fold jump in consolidated net profit at Rs 17,528.59 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2024.

NTPC, Bharti Airtel, Titan, State Bank of India and Nestle were the other major laggards. Vinod Nair, Head of

Research, Geojit Financial Services said, "Though the market reversed from the day's low and ended up with a marginal gain, investors remain concerned over the progressing general election and high valuation."

An absence of major positive triggers and the flight of FIIs from the domestic market will keep the short-term trend weak, Nair added. "The week kicked off with market volatility, but by the

end, it managed to eke out marginal gains. Initially bearish sentiments gave way to a recovery, particularly among key heavyweights, which not only erased losses but also propelled the index to close near the day's peak," said Ajit Mishra — SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd. Experts said that market volatility was high amid the ongoing Lok Sabha polls. As many as 96 seats went to polls in the fourth phase of elections on Monday.

"VIX's rise from record lows to above 20 now, has unfolded in just a fortnight's time. So, while recent history points to more room for upside in VIX and thereby volatility, the abruptness in the rate of change of VIX, may lead to a cool off, perhaps even before the electoral results," Anand James, Chief Market Strategist, Geojit Financial Services said.

# Rupee falls 1 paisa to close at 83.52 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled for the day lower by 1 paisa at 83.52 (provisional) against US dollar on Monday, as the support from positive domestic equities was negated by strong American currency. Forex traders said with foreign investors buying US dollars and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) selling the greenback, the USD/INR pair is expected to remain range-bound with a bit of a weakness bias.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit traded in a narrow range. It opened at 83.51, and touched an intraday low of 83.53 during the day. The domestic unit finally settled for the day at 83.52 (provisional), down 1 paisa from its previous close. On Friday, the rupee closed at 83.51 against the American currency. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on the strong US dollar and



Rs 83.30-83.80, Choudhary added. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was at 105.27, marginally lower by 0.02 per cent.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.12 per cent to USD 82.89 per barrel. On the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex advanced 111.66 points, or 0.15 per cent, to close at 72,776.13 points. The broader NSE Nifty settled 48.85 points, or 0.22 per cent higher, at 22,104.05.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Friday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,117.50 crore, according to exchange data. Meanwhile, after three consecutive weeks of drop, India's forex reserves increased USD 3.668 billion to USD 641.59 billion for the week ended May 3, the RBI said on Friday.

weakness in the domestic markets. Continued selling by FIIs may further pressure the rupee. However, any bond-related dollar inflows may support the rupee at lower levels," said Anuj Choudhary Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Traders may take cues from India's inflation data. Investors may remain cautious ahead of inflation data from the US this week. USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of

# Google Cloud to offer cloud solutions to Airtel customers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Google Cloud and Bharti Airtel have collaborated to deliver cloud solutions to the latter's customers, according to a joint statement issued on Monday.

The long-term partnership will offer cloud solutions from Google Cloud to fast-track cloud adoption and modernisation for Airtel's customers, the statement said. "The two companies will bring together their unique strengths of connectivity and AI technology to develop industry-leading AI/ML solutions that Airtel will train on its large data set," it said. The two entities will work together on a "joint go-to-market", combining Airtel's connectivity and distribution channels with Google Cloud's AI technologies. Airtel will provide cloud-managed services to its customers, which include both large enterprises and emerging businesses.

These solutions will include geospatial analytics solutions with advanced location intelligence, voice analytics solutions, and marketing technology solutions to forecast consumer behaviour, perform tailored audience segmentations, and streamline content creation with high-precision contextual ads at reduced costs. "As India accelerates its digital transformation, cutting-edge cloud and AI solutions will be at the heart and centre of this change. "We are happy to partner with Google Cloud and jointly address this market opportunity with secure and scalable Cloud solutions for government, enterprises, and emerging businesses," Bharti Airtel Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Gopal Vittal said.

# Banks' risk appetite through higher loan growth to be key in determining creditworthiness: Fitch

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fitch Ratings on Monday said Indian banks' risk appetite through higher loan growth will remain a key consideration for their creditworthiness despite improved financial performance.

It said asset quality pressures from the previous credit cycle are subsiding, creating a favourable business environment. This has bolstered banks' potential and appetite for growth.

Bank loans grew by 16 per cent in the financial year ended March 2024, similar to

FY23, exceeding the 8 per cent CAGR (compound annual growth rate) over FY15-FY22.

Retail loans constitute around 10 per cent of system loans, and grew at a 20 per cent CAGR since FY21, fuelled by a shift towards unsecured credit to expand margins, the US-based rating firm said.

Large private banks gained significant market share in the last credit cycle and continue to grow rapidly; state banks also returned to brisk growth but lagged large private banks, Fitch said in a report titled "Risk profile weighs on Indian banks' viability ratings despite improved performance."

Fitch said India's household debt is among the lowest in the world, despite rising to around 40 per cent of GDP from 38 per cent in FY23. "Nonetheless, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has expressed concerns regarding the fall in the household savings rate, early delinquencies, higher loans per borrower (43 per cent of consumption loan borrowers had three live loans), and surge in consumption loans, even though secured loans dominate banks' loan books," Fitch said.

# Zomato posts Q4 consolidated net profit at ₹175 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Online food delivery firm Zomato Ltd on Monday reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 175 crore in the March quarter on the back of higher revenue.

The company had posted a consolidated net loss of Rs 188 crore in the same quarter last fiscal, Zomato Ltd said in a regulatory filing.

Consolidated revenue from operations stood at Rs 3,562 crore. It was Rs 2,056 crore in the year-ago period, it added. Total expenses were at Rs 3,636 crore. The company posted its total expenses at Rs 2,431 crore in the corresponding period a year ago, it said.

For the fiscal ended on March 31, 2024, the consolidated net profit was Rs 351 crore. It had posted a consolidated net loss of Rs 971 crore in the previous fiscal ended on March 31, 2023, the filing said.

In FY24, consolidated revenue from operations stood at Rs 12,114 crore. It was at Rs 7,079 crore. The results for the year ended March 31, 2024, are not comparable with the year ended March 31, 2023, due to the acquisition of Blink Commerce Pvt Ltd (formerly known as Grofers India Pvt Ltd) in June 2022, the filing said. Zomato said its margin expansion continues in both

food delivery and quick commerce. The quick commerce business, Blinkit, reached an adjusted EBITDA break-even mark for the month of March 2024.

The company said a rapid store expansion is underway in the quick commerce business and it is aiming for 1,000 stores by March 2025.

In a letter to shareholders, Zomato Managing Director & CEO Deepinder Goyal said the food delivery GOV (gross order value) growth continues to be strong at 28 per cent year-on-year despite the softness in the overall restaurant industry due to the "convenience and predictability layer" that Zomato has built on top of the

services offered by restaurants.

"We believe that we can continue to grow faster than the overall restaurant industry (and therefore power a significant part of the growth of the restaurant industry) if we continue to innovate using our customer-first principles, while creating value for all our other stakeholders our restaurant partners, and our delivery partners," he added.

On Blinkit, which has become a larger shareholder value driver than the food delivery business in less than two years after the acquisition, Goyal said, "...The bet that we took on Blinkit worked out just fine..."

# Share of North East in total MF assets more than doubles in four years

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The share of North East in overall mutual fund assets in the country more than doubled in the last 4 years to Rs 40,324 crore in March 2024, spurred by increased awareness and growing interest among retail investors to invest in equities, a report by ICRA Analytics said.

Also, this signals a growing appetite among investors from smaller towns and cities to invest in mutual funds.

The combined share of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura rose to 0.73 per cent of the total average asset under management (AAUM) of the mutual fund industry, which stood at Rs 55.01 lakh crore in March 2024. The share was around 0.67 per cent in March 2020, when the industry's AAUM was at Rs 24.71 lakh crore. Data for Sikkim was not provided. In March 2020, these states had an asset base of Rs 16,446 crore as compared to Rs



40,324 crore in March this year.

"Though the contribution of these states to the total AAUM of the industry is still small in percentage terms, there has been a steady and consistent growth in mutual fund inflows in these states backed by increasing awareness among people and the growing interest among retail investors for investing in equities through the mutual fund route," Ashwini Kumar, Senior Vice President and Head Market Data, ICRA Analytics, said. With an AAUM of Rs 29,268

crore, Assam was the leading contributor among Northeastern states, accounting for nearly 73 per cent of the total AAUM of Rs 40,324 crore of these states in March 2024. AAUM of Assam grew nearly 159 per cent from Rs 11,298 crore in March 2020. Meghalaya accounted for 9 per cent of the total AAUM at Rs 3,623 crore in March 2024 as compared to Rs 1,714 crore in March 2020. Tripura accounted for 5 per cent of the total asset base at Rs 2,174 crore in March this year, up from Rs 1,155 crore in March

2020. Further, Nagaland contributed 4 per cent of the total asset base at Rs 1,668 crore, way higher than Rs 965 crore in March 2020. Arunachal Pradesh contributed 3.8 per cent at Rs 1,532 crore in the period under review, up from Rs 525 crore in March 2020. Manipur's share was 2.9 per cent at Rs 1,152 crore, an increase from Rs 403 crore in March 2020 and Mizoram accounted for 2.25 per cent at Rs 907 crore, up from Rs 386 crore in March 2020, it added.

"There has been a steady increase in awareness about the various investment options among people, primarily from smaller towns and cities. This, coupled with growing financial literacy and the surge in interest among retail investors for investing in equities through the mutual fund route, all contribute to a good growth in AAUM in towns and cities beyond the top 30. "The investor awareness campaigns conducted by AMCs (asset management

companies) in the northeastern region have also helped build awareness among people," Kumar said. However, he pointed out that mutual fund penetration still continues to be low in the country and there is a lot of scope for growth. The burgeoning middle class and a rising financial literacy is likely to prompt more and more people to resort to financial planning so as to accrue savings and this is expected to shore up mutual fund investments in northeastern states moving forward. Overall, the Indian mutual fund industry continues on its growth momentum with an increase in inflows across both debt and equity-oriented schemes in April 2024. The net AAUM of the industry, which posted 35 per cent growth in 2023-24, continued to register a stellar performance in April 2024 as it surged by nearly 38 per cent year-on-year to Rs 57.26 lakh crore as compared with Rs 41.62 lakh crore in April 2023.

# Exim Bank FY24 profit jumps 62 per cent to ₹2,518 crore

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Export-Import Bank of India on Monday reported 62 per cent jump in FY24 net profit at Rs 2,518 crore, primarily helped by a sharp improvement in the asset quality. In FY23, profit stood at Rs 1,556 crore.

Amid souring of ties with the Maldives, Exim Bank said it has disbursed USD 450 million to the island nation, and the entire exposure is performing well, a senior official said.

The bank's overall loan book grew 17 per cent during the fiscal year and it is aiming for at least 10-12 per cent growth in FY25, managing director Harsha Bangari told reporters here.

When asked for the reasons for the lower growth aim for FY25, she said the bank had a similar target for FY24 as well but the asset growth came in higher than expectations.

The bank does not feel the need to go for any equity raising in FY25, she said, adding that it will be borrowing up to USD 3.5 billion in foreign currency and around Rs 35,000 crore from rupee-denominated borrowings.

The bank has a commitment to repay USD 1.2 billion coming up in FY25, she said. The commercial book grew at 49 per cent, much faster than the policy business in FY24, which helped deliver the higher loan growth. The overall contribution of commercials in the overall book has reached 56 per cent business now.

Net interest margin declined sharply to 2.06 per cent in FY24 as against 2.29 per cent a year ago, which was attributed to the composition of assets wherein over 88 per cent are from the low-yielding investment grade and also hardening of rates across the world.

Bangari said a NIM of over 1.75 per cent is good for the bank as a bulk 93 per cent of the expenses for it revolve around interest repayments. Gross non-performing assets ratio improved to 1.93 per cent as on March 31, 2024, from 4 per cent in the year-ago period, primarily because the slippages went down.

As a result of that, the overall provisions went down to Rs 2,600 crore from Rs 4,700 crore in FY23. Bangari said the governments of Ghana and Zambia paid USD 200 million of dues which also helped reduce provisions.

When asked about the Maldivian experience, a senior bank official said the bank has a commitment of USD 1.3 billion through a line of credit arrangement of which USD 450 million has been disbursed. Bangari stressed that all the exposure to the Maldives is performing well.

# Assam: Mid segment businesses hit hard by high tax, inflation, absence of schemes

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Businessmen, traders and contractors in Assam are keeping their fingers crossed as they hope that crucial issues such as high taxes, exclusion from financial schemes and inflationary pressure that are affecting the mid-segment businesses will be resolved by the new dispensation at the Centre after the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

They felt that there would be an adverse impact on the economy if the mid-segment businesses continued to reel under pressure, despite being one of the biggest employment-generating sectors after the railways. While interacting with PTI, businessmen and traders, who are from Marwari and Bengali communities in the state, also alleged that the government has "totally neglected" the medium segment of businesses across sectors.

"In the present scenario, the government is focussing on industrialisation. But the

medium size businesses are not progressing. The government has not rolled out any scheme targeting the medium scale units," Sivasagar-based garment trader Rupchand Karnani said.

The government claims that many schemes are launched, but when traders go to banks and financial institutions to avail of these facilities, too many documents are sought and finally, they become a failure, he said.

Karnani, also the Sivasagar District Secretary of All India Marwari Federation, claimed that the sales of every trader were down, as compared to the previous years, during the recent Rongali Bihu, which is the main festival of Assam.

"The government also imposed a lot of taxes on us and every year, the rates are increasing. Municipality tax, property tax, licence fee — all are rising. Rents are also skyrocketing. Staff wages are rising along with the prices of goods. Where from will we pay for these?" he asked.



With voting for Lok Sabha elections in Assam coming to an end, the mid-segment business community is optimistic that a new government at the Centre will look into their problems for long-lasting solutions. Stating that the outgoing government was "only concerned about the rich and small businesses", Karnani hoped that the new government at the "Centre

would encourage all sections of businessmen and only then India progress".

"You have to look after the middle-class citizens as well as the business community. The highest sale is in this middle segment. All people do not go to high-end malls for shopping," he said, adding that online businesses have also impacted the traders to a large extent. Telecom contractor Suresh

Kumar Berlia seconded him and claimed that the mid-segment businesses are "deprived" of a beneficiary scheme. "When we go for a loan, they (financial institutions) ask for more collateral than the borrowing amount. If they give us a Rs 50 lakh loan, collateral or mortgage worth Rs 1 crore is needed," he claimed.

Expressing disappointment over the current situation, Berlia alleged that the government waived loans amounting to crores of rupees for big industrialists, but "loan accounts of mid-segment businesses are termed as non-performing assets (NPA) even if a single instalment is misused".

"Trading by the mid-segment businesses is the biggest industry after the railways as per my estimation. If the segment gets weakened, everything surrounding these businesses will suffer. Unfortunately, we have never got the due recognition and respect for our service," he added.

However, Berlia does not have much expectation from the new dispensation at the Centre as "all governments go for populist schemes and ignore the mid-segment business community".

Gopal Ghosh, who runs a sweet-meat shop at Borjuri in Golaghat district of Assam, lamented that he has applied to several state-sponsored schemes to expand his eatery but has not received any positive response.

"High inflation is affecting my business. With prices of all raw materials rising regularly in the last few years, the rates of tea and sweets have also increased accordingly. Sales are also affected," he said.

Guwahati-based hardware trader Sandeep Sharma said online businesses are creating hurdles, which, in a way, are weakening the trade prospect as his shop does not sell products through digital platforms. "Taxation is a big issue here. The government says everything should be sold with GST, but customers don't

want to pay the indirect tax due to increasing rates," he said.

Prices of construction materials have increased manifold in the last few years, but consumers want cheaper rates and are not keen on paying the GST component, the trader said. "However, we bought the goods from dealers by paying GST. So, it's a tricky situation for us. Customers want to buy the goods without paying GST, and it's a loss to us," he added.

Sharma hoped that the new government, after the Lok Sabha elections, would try to rationalise the Goods and Services Tax (GST) along with the enhancement of individual income tax slabs which will provide more purchasing power to the people.

He, however, lamented that the government has never looked after the mid-segment business class, and it did not receive any support even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Vivek Sharma, who looks after

his father's restaurant at Titabar in Jorhat district, said carrying out developmental work is a basic duty of any elected government and it should continue irrespective of the party in power.

"The government should work more in controlling the prices. In recent times, increasing prices of medicines and all other commodities are hurting all sections of people, and it is affecting the purchasing power," he said. Sharma hoped that inflation would be brought down to a minimum so that poor and middle-class families could survive, and also help them spend for different goods.

The young businessman also pointed out that labour problems are a challenge and his business faces scarcity of workers sometimes. The voting of 14 Lok Sabha seats in Assam took place in three phases — April 19, 26 and May 7.

The counting of votes will be on June 4 after completion of the entire seven-phase elections across the country.

# NEERAJ CHOPRA, KISHORE JENA TO COMPETE DIRECTLY IN FED CUP FINALS

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Star Indian javelin throwers Neeraj Chopra and Kishore Jena have been given direct entry into the Federation Cup finals here on May 15, having already bettered the minimum qualification mark of 75m multiple times in their careers. Olympic and world champion Chopra is coming off a fairly good outing at the Doha Diamond League last week where he finished second with a throw of 88.38m. Asian Games silver-winner Jena's Diamond League debut, however, ended in disappointment as he was eliminated after three rounds with 76.31m being his best. DP Manu, who finished sixth in the 2023 World Championships and who is looking to qualify for the upcoming Paris Olympics by breaching the 85.50m mark, will also compete directly in the finals. "All those who have crossed 75m will not compete in the qualifying round on Tuesday.

There are nine of them from among those who had made entries, including Neeraj and Jena. They will directly compete in the final on Wednesday," Indian athletics head coach Radhakrishnan Nair said, quoting the Athletics Federation of India's qualification rules. "The remaining who have below 75m mark will compete in the qualifying round and the top three will join the nine above-75m throwers in the final."

The AFI is quite looking forward to 26-year-old Chopra's first home competitive outing in three years. "The AFI is not at all surprised at Neeraj taking part in the Federation Cup. His participation in domestic event is no doubt a very good thing for Indian athletics," a top official of the AFI told PTI. It is learnt that the AFI wanted Chopra to compete in a domestic event after he won gold in Tokyo Olympics and before the Paris Games. He did not take part in any



domestic event in 2022 and 2023 as he was training or competing abroad. His last domestic event was the Federation Cup in March 2021. It is learnt that Chopra has reached India from Doha but will land here only on Tuesday. Asian Games medalist Jena is arriving here later on Monday. Nair played down the injury to men's 4x400m relay squad member Rajesh Ramesh who pulled out midway during the second leg of the first round qualifying heat in Bahamas earlier this month. Ramesh was replaced by Arokia Rajiv, who was also not fully fit, in the second round of the Olympic qualifying heat and the Indian team booked a Paris ticket. "Ramesh's injury is not a hamstring pull, it's related to tendon in thigh. So, it is not a major injury. He is expected to start training in 10-15 days. Rajiv will also be alright soon," Nair said. "There should not be any problem in Olympics preparation." A total of 19 track and field

athletes have qualified for Paris and Nair said the team will train in Spala in Poland for four weeks before travelling to Paris for the Olympics. Track and field events starting on August 1. "The team will train in Spala before Olympics and we will reach Paris three or four days before the competition starts," he said. Indian athletes have trained in Spala many times in the past. Nair also said the AFI is still hopeful of the mixed 4x400m relay team's Paris qualification despite its failure in Bahamas during the World Relays. Only two slots remain up for grabs. "Our mixed 4x400m team will take part in the Asian Relays (May 20-21 in Bangkok) and we can qualify for Paris if we run below 3 minutes 14 seconds and we feel can do that."

Meanwhile, it is learnt that the AFI will shortly come out with a strategic plan with the target of winning multiple medals in the 2036 Olympics. The target is irrespective of India winning the right to host the Games.



## Shyaamnikhil ends 12 years wait, becomes India's 85th GM

PTI ■ DUBAI

Shyaamnikhil became India's 85th Grandmaster by completing his third and final GM norm in the just-concluded Dubai Police Masters chess tournament, ending a 12-year wait for the player who took to the sport as an eight-year-old. Shyaamnikhil needed just one win and eight draws to complete the long-overdue GM title which he achieved in the tournament. The 31-year-old conjured the requisite 2500 ELO rating points, the minimum requirement to be a GM, way back in 2012 with two Grandmaster norms but for the third one, he had to wait for 12 years. "I started playing at the age of eight, my parents taught me but I could not play any tournament for three years. Winning the under-13 State championship opened up opportunities for me as I could play Asian and age group world championship," recalled Shyaamnikhil. Hailing from Nagarcoil in Tamil Nadu this was not an easy ride for the player, who was known as one of the finest talents of his time. "He shifted his base to Chennai to pursue chess despite coming from a modest background and stayed with me," said his former coach K Visweswaran. Making his first GM norm in

Mumbai Mayors Cup 2011 and the second one some time later during the Indian championship as a 19-year-old, Shyaamnikhil completed the rating requirement in early 2012. It was Dubai open in 2012 where Nikhil missed a big chance to score his final norm and then a series of missed opportunities led to a long draught in his career. "It was only in 2017 that I played tournaments in Europe, till then I was trying to play in Vietnam or UAE trying to make the final norm but these places are not so easy as the tournaments are very strong," he said. The 2022 Commonwealth champion said that he had come here prepared and missed a norm again in a tournament in France just before the Dubai Police Masters. "I needed a win in the last round but I drew again and missed the norm again," he said when asked about how he felt about three missed opportunities. "I wanted to play Chess as enjoyment, I like Mikhail Tal and Garry Kasparov. I would like to dedicate this to my parents, who have waited a long time for this title, my trainer Visweswaran sir also helped a great deal," Shyaamnikhil added. "Now that the title is done, I can play more freely," he concluded.

## Whoa Nelly! Rose Zhang wins Founders Cup to end Korda's record tying LPGA Tour winning streak

AP ■ CLIFTON (US)

Great things have been expected from Rose Zhang from the moment the two-time NCAA champion won in her professional debut last year and joined the LPGA Tour the following week. The 20-year-old finally delivered again Sunday, birdieing four of the final five holes to win the Cognizant Founders Cup. She beat Madelene Sagstrom by two strokes while putting an official end to Nelly Korda's record-tying LPGA Tour winning streak. "I was able to grow so much throughout the journey in this past year," Zhang said. "I don't know, it's crazy to come out here. Didn't have any expectation of having to win because I realize that it's all just noise and I really just have to be able to work at it myself and try my best to put myself in positions like this."



going. Would not have imagined myself being who are now, especially after 12. Sagstrom birdied that hole to take a three-shot lead and things did not look good for Zhang. It got better in the event that honors the 13 founding members of the tour. Zhang, who shot a 6-under 66, birdied Nos. 14, 15, 17 and 18 at Upper Montclair Country Club, while Sagstrom bogeyed the 16th in finished two back. Korda, who struggled the final two days after playing magnificently in winning the five straight events she entered, began the day 11 strokes back and shot her second straight 73 to tie for seventh at 7 under. She had no regrets. She hopes someone will join her and Hall of Famers Nancy Lopez and Annika Sorenstam in winning five straight or even more. "But just to do that with all the competition out here is super, super

rewarding with how much work that I've put in," the 25-year-old Korda said. "So I think to get a streak like that in any sport in general is amazing with the amount of talent that I feel like every athlete has in their sport. Just an amazing feeling and hopefully one day it'll sink in." It was a heart-breaking end for Sagstrom, the 31-year-old Swede who started the day with a one-shot lead and was looking for her first victory since 2020 and second overall on tour. "I struck it so nicely this week. I've worked really hard for a long time," Sagstrom said. "I putted incredibly. It's really high up there. That's probably why it hurts more. Nothing against Rose. She played incredible. I kind of wish I gave myself a few more chances at the end there. Didn't want it to end that way. This is probably the best golf I played in years." Sagstrom led by three after 13, but Zhang curled in a birdie putt at 14 and made an 8-footer on the next to draw within one. They were tied after 16, with Sagstrom missing a 10-foot par putt after a bad chip from the back fringe. After Sagstrom saved par at the par-3 17th with a fast, downhill 25-footer, Zhang took the lead with a short birdie putt and she closed things out on the final hole with Sagstrom waiting to make a birdie attempt. Zhang, who won last year at nearby Liberty National in her pro debut, finished at 24 under 264. Rookie Gabriela Ruffels of Australia was third at 9 under, her best finish. She shot 71. Peiyun Chien of Taiwan and Ruoning Yin and Xiyu Lin of China tied at 8 under.



## Wanted to be a doctor but opted for athletics due to father passion: Olympic bound Jyothika

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

An academically-inclined child is a dream realised in most Indian households and that's why Olympic-bound runner Jyothika Sri Dandi aspired to be a doctor before she realised that her father would be happier seeing her excel in sports. The 23-year-old from Tanuku town in West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh, secured 97 per cent in Class X while studying at the Montessori School at her home town. But, her father Srinivasa Rao, a body-builder in his younger days, nudged her into taking interest in sports as he wanted to see her in the Olympics some day. That dream is going to be a reality in less than three months' time. Jyothika was part of the Indian women's 4x400m relay team that qualified for the Paris Olympics during the World Relays in Bahamas earlier this month. "I got 97 per cent in class X and when I was in school I actually wanted to be a doctor. But, once I started doing sports, I could not go back and think about becoming a doctor," Jyothika, who is taking part in the Federation Cup here, told PTI in an interview. "My father felt I have the talent to do well in athletics and bring laurels for the country in the Olympics. Seeing his sacrifice and passion to mould me into a successful athlete, I decided to follow his dreams. "I did not tell him that I wanted to be a doctor because I want to make him happy. Till 2017, I did not have interest in sports but around 2020 I began taking interest."

Her mother is a home-maker and she has an elder sister who got married recently. "My father was a bodybuilder when he was young but stopped as there was no support from family. Now he is a businessman. He is very much interested in sports and he pushed me a lot and he wants me to be in the Olympics. "Because of him, I did not have to struggle much. He takes care of everything. So, now I want to fulfil his dream of seeing me do well in the Olympics," said Jyothika who has a personal best of 52.73 seconds in individual 400m. It all started after Jyothika won races in school meets and that was when her father realised the talent of his daughter. "I used to finish first in annual school sports competitions in 200m and 400m and even in some races organised by clubs. "He took me to the school PET teacher when I was in seventh class (around 12 years of age). I ran on the mud tracks at a college ground in my place. I started taking part in district and state meets when I was in ninth class in 2014." Between 2014 and 2021, Jyothika trained under Sports Authority of India coach Vinayak Prasad in Vijaywada. In 2021, she trained under Ramesh Nagpuri, current national junior team head coach, in Hyderabad for one year during which she ran her then personal best of 53.05 seconds after which she was called for the national camp. "I got national medals, I went to World School Games and Asian Youth Championships but interest in sports, I did not have. Till 2017, I did not have interest in sports.

## Wonder goal for Ella Toone as Manchester United wins Women FA Cup with 4-0 rout of Tottenham

AP ■ LONDON

Manchester United won its first major trophy by routing Tottenham 4-0 in the Women's FA Cup final at Wembley. Ella Toone's stunning long-range strike in first-half stoppage time set up victory for Marc Skinner's team. United cruised to victory after the break through two goals from Lucia Garcia and another from Rachel Williams. United quickly made up for defeat to Chelsea in last year's final by lifting the trophy 12 months on. Toone's wonder goal broke Tottenham's resistance when she curled the ball into the top corner from around 20 yards (meters) in the third minute of time added on in the first half.



Williams doubled United's lead with a powerful header nine minutes after the break. United effectively sealed victory three minutes later, this time through Garcia, who was named player of the match. Seizing on a weak clearance from Spurs goalkeeper Becky Spencer, Garcia pounced to score from close range. She added her second and United's fourth in the 74th minute by lifting a shot into the top corner from inside the

box. It is the first time since Birmingham's victory in 2012 that the cup hasn't been won by one of Arsenal, Chelsea or Manchester City. Victory eases the pressure on Skinner, who guided the club to second place in the Women's Super League last season but has endured a difficult campaign this time round with United set to finish fifth. Skinner's contract is set to expire this summer. Asked if he expected to carry on next season, the 41-year-old Skinner said: "I hope so ... But we've created history and I have got to live in that moment. "I believe in myself fully and I am still only a baby in terms of my career."

# Djokovic follows Nadal to early exit at Italian Open in first match after being hit by water bottle

AP ■ ROME

Novak Djokovic's performance was so poor that even the 24-time Grand Slam champion admitted it was "concerning." Djokovic put on one of his worst displays at one of his favorite tournaments as he was upset by 29th-seeded Alejandro Tabilo in the third round of the Italian Open. It was Djokovic's first match since accidentally getting knocked on the head by a water bottle while signing autographs after his opening win on Friday. "I managed to sleep okay. I had headaches. The next day or yesterday was pretty fine, so I thought it's okay. Maybe it is okay. Maybe it's not," Djokovic

said. "I mean, the way I felt on the court today was just completely like a different player entered into my shoes. Just no rhythm, no tempo, no balance whatsoever on any shot. It's a bit concerning." Djokovic started off with a double-fault and it didn't get much better for the six-time Rome champion. The top-ranked Djokovic lost his first two service games and went on to lose the match 6-2, 6-3 in just 68 minutes, handing Tabilo the victory when he double-faulted - his fifth of the match - amid boos at the Foro Italico. "I'm trying to soak it all in and wake up right now," Tabilo said after the biggest win of his career. "I was just trying to keep my nerves in and keep

swinging. Towards the end my arms were getting tired but I was trying not to think about it." "It's crazy, I just can't believe what's happened. I can't believe it right now. I don't think anyone can believe it." The third-round loss marked Djokovic's worst performance at the Italian Open. He had lost only once before to an opponent outside the top 10 in Rome, where he had never gone out before the quarterfinals. Djokovic followed Rafael Nadal to an early exit after the record 10-time Rome champion lost his third-round match to Hubert Hurkacz 6-1, 6-3 on Saturday. While Djokovic had said he was "fine" after the water



bottle incident, it was an unusually off-key performance from the Serb as he tries to step up his game on clay before attempting to defend his title at the French Open, which starts on May 26. "I was going for kind of easy training yesterday. I didn't feel anything, but I also didn't feel the same," Djokovic said. "Today under high stress, it was quite bad - not in terms of pain, but in terms of this balance. Just no coordination. Completely different player from two nights ago ... I don't know. I have to do medical checks and see what's going on." Djokovic had 12 unforced errors to Tabilo's four and produced 14 winners to his opponent's 22. It was also a rare occasion when he had

zero break point chances. He was broken four times in the match, including in the final game, and Djokovic could only shake his head when another unforced error handed Tabilo match point. Djokovic is still without a title this year - the first time he's reached May without a trophy since 2018, when he was returning from a right elbow injury. Tabilo next faces 16th-seeded Karen Khachanov, who beat Francisco Cerundolo 6-2, 6-4. Third-seeded Alexander Zverev advanced after the 2017 Rome champion beat Luciano Darderi of Italy 7-6 (3), 6-2. Grigor Dimitrov and Thiago Monteiro also advanced, while Taylor Fritz beat American compatriot

Sebastian Korda 6-3, 6-4. Another American, Ben Shelton, lost to Zhang Zhizhen. In the women's tournament, second-seeded Aryna Sabalenka eased through to the fourth round with a 6-4, 6-2 win over Dayana Yastremska. American Sofia Kenin, who won the Australian Open in 2020 and also reached the final at Roland Garros the same year, was upset by Slovakian qualifier Rebecca Sramkova 6-4, 4-6, 6-4. American Danielle Collins is safely through after beating Caroline Garcia 6-3, 6-3. Also advancing in third-round matches were Maria Sakkari, Irina-Camelia Begu, Jelena Ostapenko, Victoria Azarenka and Elena Svitolina.



# Focus on KL Rahul as LSG face DC in playoff battle

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Focus will be on skipper KL Rahul as a struggling Lucknow Super Giants look to keep their slim IPL playoff chances alive when they face an equally desperate Delhi Capitals in a must-win game here on Tuesday. There has been a lot of speculations about Rahul's future as LSG skipper after his "public reprimand" by team owner Sanjiv Goenka following their 10-wicket hammering by Sunrisers Hyderabad last Wednesday. Speculations are rife that Rahul may step down as captain or perhaps he will do his duties for the remaining two games before leaving LSG. In either case, the India batter would look to answer with his bat and end things on a high. Rahul hasn't been in the best of form and it's not only cost him a place in India's T20 squad but also left LSG at the seventh spot with 12 points with RCB

and DC, who are fifth and sixth respectively. Five days is a lot of time to introspect and Rahul and Co. Will look to come out all guns blazing when they face DC, who are also on 12 points and are coming into the match after a loss against RCB on Sunday night. Besides Rahul, Quinton De Kock's poor form this season has left LSG struggling in the powerplay, putting pressure on the likes of Marcus Stoinis and Nicholas Pooran, who haven't got the freedom to unleash their big shots. Although Pooran and Ayush Badoni managed to rescue the team in the last match, the bowlers failed miserably against the formidable SRH pair of Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma, who racked up 167 in 9.4 overs, a T20 record by any team. The loss of tearaway pacer Mayank Yadav to injury has left a big hole which Yash Thakur and Naveen-ul-Haq haven't been able to fill. Also



Mohsin Khan picked up an injury and didn't play last match. The spin duo of Krunal Pandya and Ravi Bishnoi too have been to do a lot of soul

searching after being punished by SRH. Delhi Capitals, on the other hand, will hope the return of skipper Rishabh Pant after a one-match suspension due to slow overrate against

Rajasthan Royals will help them to end things on a high. Delhi sans Pant paid the price for their fielding lapses as those drop catches and misfields came back to haunt them

against RCB on Sunday night. While the bowlers let RCB off the hook after a good start, the batting once again came unstuck as they lost four wickets inside 4 overs to be bowled out for their lowest innings score this IPL. But this is the same team which scored four 200 plus totals this season and they will have to find their mark in their last game to salvage any slim hopes of a top four. Jack Fraser-McGurk, with 330 runs from seven matches at an impressive strike-rate of 237.41, has been their most impactful batter. While Abhishek Porel (269, 156.39), Pant (413, 156.43) and Tristan Stubbs (321, 185.54) too have been among runs this season. In the bowling department, the spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav (15) and Axar Patel (10) have shared 25 wickets, while pacers Khaleel Ahmed (16 wickets) and Mukesh Kumar (16) too have got them the breakthroughs.



## Going forward, players will be selected in playing XI on basis of impact and not averages: Miller

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

For someone who has the ability to deliver maximum impact, South African batter David Miller reckons averages in T20 cricket will gradually lose relevance and strike rate will be the only barometer of success. Over the past couple of years, Miller has performed the finisher's role with distinction both for Gujarat Titans and his national team. With seven scores in excess of 250 plus this IPL season, the batters have taken the power game to the next level, fuelling the strike rate debate. "We've seen some high scores this year. And it's been incredible batting by a few teams and few individual players in this IPL. And look, I always see everyone judges a batter on the average," Miller told PTI Videos. "But in T20 cricket, it can be difficult to judge someone purely on that. The top three batters, definitely you can because of the number of overs they get to bat. When it comes to the middle order, it has always been the strike rates and what kind of impact the batter has had in the game. "I suppose as we move forward, it becomes more and more about impact. How impactful are you in the game? Depending on the situation. If we're needing 15 an over, can you do it? And that's, I think, what guys are going to have to select teams on their match-winning ability," said the 34-year-old. Talking about the T20 World Cup next month, Miller is looking forward to intense battles with likes of Jasprit Bumrah. "There are so many good Indian players. But me being a batter facing the bowlers, Bumrah is bowling well at the moment. And he has been a world-class bowler for many years. He's a threat to me, as well as every other batter in the World Cup," said the southpaw. He also showered praise on fellow Titans' batter Sai Sudharsan, who is in the middle of his most productive season in the IPL. "He's an incredibly talented player. Still got a long career ahead of him. I've enjoyed watching him play. I love the way that he preps. And just the build-up to games and how he goes about it. He's a very level-headed young boy that's got a lot of talent," said Miller. "The World Cup in the Americas will provide Miller and South African opportunity to get their hands on an elusive global trophy. The hard-hitting batter is excited about the challenge. "This team that we have at the moment has played a lot of cricket together the last couple of years and has a lot of confidence and a lot of success. "We've got a lot of experience, guys that have been under pressure before and come through successfully. So, putting all the individuals together in a T20 World Cup, I have no doubt that we most certainly going to give it our best shot. We have the players to do it, the skill to do it." On his own performances in ICC events, Miller added: "I love World Cups, I must be honest. I feel like I've done well at World Cups, personally. And I just want to continue the momentum. "For you to say, finally, Killer Miller coming to life, I think I've done pretty well at previous World Cups."

## RCB have demonstrated ability to deliver when it counts: Moody

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Royal Challengers Bengaluru have shown the ability to perform when it matters most, said former Australian all-rounder Tom Moody after their fifth straight win in the IPL. Languishing at the bottom of the points table 10 days ago, Virat Kohli and Co have found their mojo back. Their winning streak has given them a fighting chance to make the knockout stage. "Once again, RCB has demonstrated their ability to deliver when it counts, setting the stage for what promises to be a thrilling encounter between the two teams," Moody said on Star Sports. They will take on MS Dhoni's Chennai Super Kings, who are also in contention for a playoff berth, in their final league game at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium on Saturday. "It's iconic for the entire IPL, truly. You've got two colossal names in cricket here in India and in world cricket-Dhoni



and Kohli. "They're both dominant figures, leaving a huge legacy wherever they've been. And the interesting thing is anything can still happen on that table. Barring Kolkata Knight Riders, who have already qualified, as many as seven teams are still in contention for a playoffs berth. "After the weekend, I was assuming that a couple of games results will sort of fall the way they should fall and then we'll have a clear idea who's going to end up in that top four. "Yet, it's still anyone's game. Any team could clinch a spot

in that coveted top four," Moody said. After a sedate start to the season, RCB batter Rajat Patidar has found his groove, scoring five fifties in the last seven innings at a quick pace. "Patidar, in particular, has been a revelation in the past five or six games, notching up several quick-fire half-centuries. "His aggressive approach has consistently put pressure on the opposition's bowling attack, making it incredibly challenging for them to get back into the contest," Moody added.

## PBKS' Livingstone returns to England to address knee niggle ahead of T20 WC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Punjab Kings' all-rounder Liam Livingstone on Monday returned to England from the ongoing IPL to undergo a knee recuperation ahead of the next month's T20 World Cup. The Kings are already eliminated from this IPL after managing just four wins from 12 matches and they are currently at the bottom of the table with eight points. "IPL done for another year, had to get my knee sorted for the upcoming World Cup," Livingstone wrote on his Instagram wall. "Thanks once again to the Punjab Kings fans for all their love and support. Disappointing season as a team and personally, but as always, I loved every minute of playing in the IPL," he added. Hence, Livingstone will not be available for PBKS' last two matches of the tournament against Rajasthan Royals (May 15) and Sunrisers Hyderabad (May 19).



The injury is not of serious nature but the England management, as per ESPNcricinfo, decided to give him more time to get it treated prior to their home T20I series against Pakistan, beginning on May 22. After that series, the defending champions will travel to the West Indies for their T20 World Cup engagements, starting on June 4 against Scotland in Bridgetown,

Barbados. Livingstone had a lean IPL this season, scoring 111 runs from seven matches and took just three wickets. Meanwhile, other England players in the IPL who are part of their World Cup squad - Moeen Ali (CSK), Sam Curran, Jonny Bairstow (PBKS), Jos Buttler (RR), Will Jacks, Reece Topley (RCB) and Phil Salt (KKR) - will be home-bound the coming weekend.

# We have switched on the attacking mode: RCB pacer Dayal

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Pace bowler Yash Dayal attributed the renaissance of Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the second half of the IPL to them "switching on the attacking mode." After six consecutive defeats, Royal Challengers won five matches on the bounce to remain in contention for a playoff berth. In the last game, RCB defeated Delhi Capitals by 47 runs here on Sunday to leap to fifth spot on the table with 12 points from 13 matches. "Our performances have markedly improved in the last few matches. I think we have switched on that attacking mode in the last few matches. It has been a big positive for us," said Dayal, who took three for 20 against DC, during the post-

match press meet. The left-arm quick said even while RCB were going through a losing streak, the dressing room remained a thickly-knit unit. "When you lose matches continuously, like it happened with us, morale will come down a bit. But we took it in our stride and bounced back well. "But even when we were losing, fingers were not pointed at anyone. We have remained positive throughout the season," he added. The resurgence of RCB is directly linked with the improved performance of their bowling unit, which was all over the place in the first half of the season. Dayal credited team bowling coach Adam Griffith for that turnaround. "The credit goes to our bowling coach. He engages us in specific drills,



visualising particular opposition batsmen and we discuss this a lot. "When I go out to bowl, I just think about how to get the batter out or save some runs. All of us think the same way," he added. "GAVE TOO MANY RUNS": James Hopes, the DC bowling coach, said dropped catches allowed RCB to add a few more runs and reach an over-par total. Rajat Patidar, who made a quick fifty, and Will Jacks, who scored a fluent 41, were dropped multiple times on Sunday. "They got one too many and we dropped four catches and had we taken them we could have probably restricted them to 160-165. "But that's fine and if you are not going to put it together with the bat you are not going to win too many games in this

tournament," said Hopes. The Delhi side now has 12 points from 13 matches and it now needs a massive win over Lucknow Super Giants on Tuesday to keep their playoff hopes alive. The former Australian all-rounder was confident of achieving it in their home ground. "We have to win big now. But fortunately, we are going back to Delhi where big scores have been the norm for the season. "So, we are going to ask them to put a big score on the board and keep them a fair way below us to have any chance to advance in this tournament," he said. However, Hopes rued the missed opportunity against RCB. "But today was our chance to really get into the mix for playing finals, and now we've left it up to fight, which you don't really want to do in this tournament."

### OTHER SPORTS

## Satwik, Chirag look to regain competitive edge as Thailand Open begins

PTI ■ BANGKOK

Star shuttlers Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will look to regain their competitive edge as they spearhead the Indian challenge at the Thailand Open Super 500 tournament, beginning here on Tuesday. The top seeded Indian pair, who are one of the favourites to win a gold at the Paris Olympics, found it a tad difficult to negotiate the variety of serves dished out by the Indonesians and Chinese at the Thomas Cup. Both shuttlers will look to address the slight drop in their

level this week when they begin their campaign against Malaysia's Nur Mohd Azriyn Ayub Azriyn and Tan Wee Kieng. With the Olympic-bound shuttlers looking to fine-tune their skills ahead of the Paris Games, the BWF world tour events will offer the perfect platform for them to test those new strokes or tweaks that they make to their games. India's top player in singles, HS Prannoy, a world championships and Asian Games bronze medalist, too will have to find his best footing after being troubled by health issues this season.



His win over Indonesia's Anthony Ginting was a confidence booster but the loss against China's Shi Yuqi will trouble him as he needs to close out such narrow games to

get into the best mental shape ahead of the Olympics. Kiran George and Sathish Kumar Karunakaran are also in fray, while Lakshya Sen and PV Sindhu had pulled out before the draw was announced last week. While Kiran will face China's Australia Open winner Weng Hong Yang, Sathish, who had claimed the Odisha Masters title last December, takes on a qualifier in their respective opening matches. In Sindhu's absence, Ashmita Chaliha, Malvika Bansod and Aakarshi Kashyap will look to keep India's flag fluttering with a solid show in women's singles.

## Atletico Madrid moves closer to securing Champions League spot after beating Celta Vigo

AP ■ MADRID

Atletico Madrid moved closer to securing the fourth and final Champions League spot with a 1-0 win over Celta Vigo in the Spanish league. Rodrigo De Paul scored an 84th-minute winner for Atletico, which opened an eight-point gap to fifth-place Athletic Bilbao with three rounds remaining. Athletic was held at home to a 2-2 draw with Osasuna on Saturday. "You know me, we have to keep improving until the end," Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone said. "We have to keep fighting no matter what." It was the third win in a row for Atletico, which is three points behind third-place Barcelona. The Catalan club hosts seventh-place Real

Sociedad on Monday. Celta, which has lost three of its last five games, dropped to 17th place and five points above the relegation zone. Rayo Vallecano moved to 16th, also five points from danger, after a 0-0 draw at eighth-place Valencia. BETIS WINS: Real Betis beat last-place Almeria 3-2 at home to move to sixth place and strengthen its hold on the European qualifying spots. Pablo Fornals, Isco and Ayoze Pérez scored for Betis, which has won four of its last five matches. Almeria was coming off only its second win of the season in the league, at Rayo Vallecano. CADIZ HOPEFUL: Cadiz, sitting in 18th place, kept alive its hopes of escaping demotion with a 1-0 win against midtable Getafe.

