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THIS ELECTION IS
WIDE OPEN

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INJURED IN CONVOY ATTACK

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STOCK MARKETS RISE FOR THIRD DAY
ON BUYING IN AUTO, METAL SHARES

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RAJASTHAN AIM
TO CLINCH PLAY
OFF BERTH
12 SPORTS

Smaller portion, lighter wallet



Wholesale inflation rose to 13 months high at 1.26 per cent in April

File Photo: The Pioneer

month that the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) has risen on a year-on-year basis, after seven months of deflation. On a month-on-month basis, the WPI was up 0.8 per cent with primary articles and food prices rising nearly 2 per cent in April, while manufactured products were up 0.5 per cent. As per the data, inflation in food articles rose to 7.74 per cent in April as against 6.88 per cent in March. In the fuel and power basket, inflation stood at 1.38 per cent in April, up from (-)0.77 per cent in the previous month. "Positive rate of inflation in April 2024 is primarily due to increase in prices of food articles, electricity, crude petroleum and natural gas, manufacture of food products, other manufacturing etc," Ministry of Commerce & Industry said in a statement on Tuesday. As per the data, manufactured products witnessed deflation of 0.42 per cent in April, as against deflation of 0.85 per cent in March. ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar said WPI inflation is heavily sensitive to global commodity prices which is undergoing an upturn year after year. According to ICRA, the wholesale food inflation, which is at a four-month high, will continue to be a cause for concern in May and June as heatwave is likely to jack up prices of perishable commodities. Although the impact of the high base of last year will play out in July and August, the impact of monsoon will determine the price conditions in the subsequent months. As per data released on Tuesday, the wholesale price index (WPI)-based food inflation was at a four-month high of 7.74 per cent in April. Retail food inflation also remained stubbornly high at 8.70 per cent in April 2024, as against 3.84 per cent in April 2023. Retail inflation data released on Monday showed that the consumer price index (CPI)-based inflation was at an 11-month low of 4.83 per cent in April, even though the prices of food and vegetables ruled high.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With India battling high inflation, which includes price rise as one of the dominant factors, the prices of food consumables could potentially skyrocket further amidst the Lok Sabha polls. India's wholesale prices rose to a 13-month high of 1.26 per cent in April from 0.53 per cent in March 2024. Due to an uptick in food inflation fuelled by rising prices of food articles, especially vegetables, wholesale food inflation will continue to be a cause of concern in May and June, as heatwaves are likely to push up prices of perishable commodities. The India Meteorological Department has predicted heatwave conditions during May and June, a period when

prices of vegetables and food items typically increase. Unemployment and inflation are the primary issues dominating among the voters during the discourse in India's general election 2024. The data released by the Ministry of Commerce highlighted that in the food articles basket, vegetable inflation is 23.60 per cent in April, up from 19.52 per cent in the previous month. Wholesale food inflation also increased to 5.52 per cent on an annual basis, while food inflation grew 1.94 per cent on a month over month (MoM) basis. The data shows a notable increase in onion prices which rose by 59.75 per cent in April, following a 56.99 per cent increase in March. The increase was attributed to a major shortage in onion supply until the next kharif crop, which is expected to be a reversal from the

current scenario. Inflation in potato jumped to 71.97 per cent in April from 52.96 per cent in March. In onion, it was 59.75 per cent in April, versus 56.99 per cent in the previous month. The Wholesale Price Index measures the change in prices of goods traded by wholesale businesses. Unlike the Consumer Price Index (CPI), which tracks prices of goods and services purchased by consumers, WPI tracks factory gate prices. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry releases WPI data on the 14th of every month, or on the next working day. Under the index, commodities are categorised into three groups — primary articles (which are further divided into food and non-food articles), fuel and power and manufactured products. April marks the sixth successive

Honouring the Labourers

- Will link truck, taxi, auto drivers and gig workers to beneficial schemes by registering them on the e-Shram portal
- Will develop modern facilities on national highways for truck drivers
- Will include hawkers in villages and towns and those selling goods on carts in PM SVANidhi Yojana

THIS IS MODI'S GUARANTEE

Right Intent Right Results

Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar

Press the lotus button Make BJP win

AAP admits to assault, Kejriwal promises to act

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The political landscape of Delhi is becoming murkier as senior AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh admitted on Tuesday to accusations of assault by his party colleague and Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal against Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's controversial PA, Bibhav Kumar, at the CM's official residence. However, a BJP leader pointed out that Singh missed the part in the PCR call where Maliwal mentioned that she was assaulted by Kumar at the behest of the AAP chief. In the first reaction from the AAP regarding the incident, which has



added further troubles for the party as it seeks to regain its footing since its chief's release from Tihar jail, Singh confirmed that the incident occurred in the drawing room of Kejriwal's official residence. Kejriwal is currently out of Delhi. According to sources in the AAP, senior leaders in the party are united to oust Kumar, who is widely referred to as 'Kejriwal's Man Friday', by pinning the blame on him. While addressing a Press conference, Singh said, "At the residence of Kejriwal an incident of misbehaviour took place with Swati Maliwal by his PA Bibhav Kumar yesterday."

Modi files papers for new beginning

RAMESH K SINGH ■ VARANASI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi filed his nomination papers as Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate for the Lok Sabha elections-2024 here on Tuesday, seeking a third term from the Varanasi Lok Sabha constituency. The event was attended by several NDA leaders, including Union Ministers and Chief Ministers in a show of strength. The PM submitted papers during the auspicious pushya nakshatra on the day of Ganga Saptami before the Returning Officer, S Rajalingam. Sporting a white kurta-pajama and a blue sadi, Modi reached the district collectorate after a busy morning, which included an aarti on the banks of the Ganga at the Dashashwamedh ghat and prayers



Prime Minister Narendra Modi files his nomination papers for Lok Sabha polls, in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, on Tuesday

at the city's Kaal Bhairav temple. Immediately after filing his papers, the prime minister headed for the Rudraksha Convention Centre to address local party

Athawale were among the leaders who flanked Modi as he emerged from the collectorate after filing his papers. Before he filed his nomination, Modi posted in Hindi on 'X', "My relationship with Kashi is amazing, inseparable and incomparable... All I can say is that it cannot be expressed in words!" Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, his Meghalaya counterpart Conrad Sangma, NCP leader Praful Patel, TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu, Jana Sena Party president Pawan Kalyan, Hindustani Awam Morcha-Secular founder Jitan Ram Manjhi and Rashtriya Lok Morcha chief Upendra Kushwaha among others accompanied Modi to the collectorate.

Uttar Pradesh Minister and NISHAD party chief Sanjay Nishad, Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party chief Omprakash Rajbhar, RLD chief Jayant Chaudhary, LJP (Ram Vilas) chief Chirag Paswan, PMK leader Anbumani Ramadoss, Tamil Maanila Congress chief G K Vasana, BJP leader Devanathan Yadav, BJS president Thushar Vellappally and Asom Gana Parishad president Atul Bora were also there. According to the BJP's Varanasi unit media co-in-charge Arvind Mishra, there were four proposers for Modi's nomination — Pandit Ganeshwar Shastri, long-time RSS functionary Bajjnath Patel, Lalchand Kushwaha and Sanjay Sonkar.

EC the arbiter resolves 400 of 425 complaints

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a rare feat aimed at swiftly resolving issues, the Election Commission of India has claimed to have addressed and resolved 400 grievances and complaints in record time out of a total of 425 major complaints received since the Lok Sabha elections began almost a month ago. The poll watchdog said approximately 170, 95 and 160 complaints were filed by Congress, BJP and other political parties respectively. "Most of these complaints have been acted upon. A few complaints of INC and BJP against each other are pending alleging violation of MCC inter alia broadly in the genre of divisive statements by top star campaigners on communal, caste, regional language divide, or on sanctity of Constitution of India," it said. "So far, 25 delegations from 16 political parties have met the commission to lodge their grievances/complaints on alleged violations of Model code. Apart from this, many delegations have met at the level of Chief Electoral Officer in the States," it said



TRUTH BE TOLD It's mostly fake during polls

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the rising concern over the proliferation of fake news and the "menace" of social media, a survey conducted on the youths of the national Capital, particularly eligible voters, has found that fake news and social media narratives influence the voting decisions of Gen Z (the second youngest generation, born between 1997 and 2012). A report titled 'Truth be Told,' by the communication consulting firm The 23 Watts, delves deep into the extent of impact this phenomenon has on the youths of Delhi, particularly Gen Z, revealing that 91 per cent of them say it can influence voting decisions. Not only that, 90 per cent of Gen Z, which includes first-time voters, observes a surge in the prevalence of "fake news" during national events like elections. What makes this data more concerning is that in the vast world of social media feeds, Gen Z is at the forefront of online news consumption. More than half of those who consume and share stories, news, and views online are under 25 years old,



making this data more relevant to study. Moreover, 80 per cent of the population change their perceptions and opinions based on the influence of fake news. This implies that the narrative-setting and idea-building that parties aim to accomplish during elections, by deploying various machinery to utilise social media platforms, have

an effect on the minds of even the youth. It only takes a click to share fake news with your followers and many influencers and media outlets use it to their benefit. More than 59 per cent of the Gen Z falls in trap to sensationalism leading them to share fake news. The report reveals that more than one-third of respondents shared fake news as an emotional reaction and desire to share something that is breaking. This stems from the paradox of this generation who want to share moments and memories which in turn is driving them to share news on the go. More than 62 per cent of the Delhi Gen Z believes that fake news not only misleads perceptions but also plays as a tool to damage reputations. Further, about half the respondents have shared unauthenticated news later found to be fake albeit 95 per cent claim to authenticate news. For authenticating a piece of information or news, the respondents rely on various tools and methods.



To retain voters, CUET exam delayed in Delhi



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Testing Agency (NTA) on Tuesday postponed the Common University Entrance Test, Undergraduate (CUET UG) 2024 for Delhi, due to 'manpower issues'. In postponing the exams within national Capital jurisdiction, NTA said the examination is scheduled on May 15, 2024 will be held as per earlier communicated

schedule in all other cities across the country (including Gurugram, Ghaziabad, Faridabad, and Noida) and abroad. "It is being informed to all the concerned candidates and stakeholders that due to unavoidable reasons, the test papers (Chemistry -306, Biology - 304, English - 101, and General Test - 501) which were earlier scheduled on May 15, 2024 stand postponed for the candidates appearing in

centres across Delhi only. The examination will now be held on May 29, 2024. The revised admit cards will be issued for candidates appearing in centres across Delhi," the NTA said in an official notice. It is pertinent to note that The Pioneer, in its May 13 edition, exclusively reported on how the advance holiday and vacation plans for the Delhiites could impact the voting patterns on the seven Lok Sabha seats which go to polls on May 25. This postponement comes a few hours before the exam begins for exam centres across the country on May 15. The NTA claims that the reason behind this postponement is manpower issues caused due to the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. "CUET UG is held at a large-scale and we had selected several exam centres, including Delhi which however will be busy with the elections in Delhi on May 25," said a senior NTA official.

Home Voting begins: Polling Teams reach elderly and disabled voters

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

With the Lok Sabha elections of 2024 in full swing, a significant initiative to facilitate voting for elderly citizens (85+) and those with disabilities has been launched – Home Voting. Masang Tudu from the Ghatshila block, assigned booth number 188, exercised his franchise through this novel method.

In a bid to ensure inclusiveness, voters aged 85 and above, as well as those with at least 40 percent disability, across all six assembly constituencies, will have the



opportunity to cast their votes through postal ballots via home voting. This process spans across the first phase from May 14 to 19 and the second phase from May 21 to

22. The commencement of home voting for the Jharkhand parliamentary constituency begins today, marking a pivotal moment in the electoral process. A total of 226 voters had applied for home voting, reflecting the significance of this initiative in empowering elderly and disabled citizens to exercise their democratic rights.

Polling personnel are diligently traversing neighborhoods, going door-to-door to facilitate the voting process for eligible individuals. This initiative underscores the commitment to ensuring that

every eligible voter, regardless of age or physical ability, can participate in shaping the democratic process.

The principles of inclusivity and transparency in the electoral process, the Election Commission's guidelines have paved the way for significant initiatives such as home voting. In Jharkhand district alone, 226 voters already applied for this service, underscoring its importance in ensuring that every eligible citizen can exercise their democratic right.

In a proactive endeavor to uphold fair electoral practices, District Election Officer

Ananya Mittal recently convened a pivotal meeting at the Collectorate Auditorium in Jharkhand. Attended by representatives from various political parties, the meeting addressed crucial aspects of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Accompanied by Deputy Development Commissioner Manish Kumar and PD ITDA cum Senior Officer Expenditure Cell Dipankar Chaudhary, Mittal provided comprehensive insights into the arrangements made at polling centers. Discussions encompassed facilitating home voting and postal ballot

services, as well as ensuring meticulous scrutiny of election expenditure registers.

A significant announcement during the meeting was the introduction of home voting provisions for a specific demographic. Mittal revealed that individuals aged 85 and above, along with those with a disability of at least 40 percent, would be eligible for home voting, in accordance with Election Commission guidelines. The substantial number of applications received underscores the significance of this initiative in fostering inclusivity within the electoral process.

SAIL ignites learning and development paradigm with innovative HR Strategies

R SHARMA : BOKARO

Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) has embarked on a pioneering journey towards fostering a culture of continuous learning and development within its organization. In a strategic move unveiled on May 14, 2024, SAIL introduced a series of progressive Human Resource (HR) initiatives aimed at empowering its workforce.

At the forefront of these initiatives is the groundbreaking "Work from Other than Workplace" (WoW) policy, inaugurated by Amarendu Prakash, Chairman of SAIL. This policy grants employees the flexibility to engage in prescribed self-development activities while working remotely. Chairman SAIL emphasized the policy's significance in enabling employees to assume more strategic

roles, fostering professional growth, and maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

KK Singh, Director (Personnel) at SAIL, underscored the organization's commitment to enhancing employee motivation and engagement through innovative HR practices. The WoW policy stands as a testament to SAIL's dedication to nurturing a dynamic and empowered workforce.

In tandem with the WoW policy, SAIL has entered into a strategic partnership with LinkedIn Learning Hub. This collaboration aims to empower employees with self-paced learning opportunities, enabling them to upskill and broaden their knowledge base across various domains.

The culmination of these efforts has resulted in SAIL achieving certification as a "Great Place To Work" by the



Great Place To Work Institute, India, for the period spanning December 2023 to December 2024. This prestigious recognition reaffirms SAIL's status as an employer of choice, dedicated to creating an inclusive and rewarding work environment for its employees.

PAS Bokaro students excel in CBSE Class XII Board Exams



PNS : BOKARO

In a resounding display of academic excellence, the Pentecostal Assembly School Bokaro has once again etched its name in the annals of success as the Class XII students outshine with remarkable results. Led by sheer perseverance and dedication, these young minds have raised the bar of achievement to new heights.

Priyanshu Pathak, emerging as the School Topper from standard 12/D, has set an impressive milestone with a staggering 97.2%. Preeti Mukherjee, excelling in the Arts stream, has secured the second posi-

tion with an outstanding 96.6%. Pushkar, the Commerce topper from grade 12C, shines brightly with a commendable 94.6%, while Laxmi Kumari from the Bio Science stream achieved a commendable 86.8%.

The exceptional performances extend beyond mere numbers, as Preeti Mukherjee and Pushkar Kumar manifest excellence by scoring perfect 100s in History & Political Science and Accountancy respectively, adding to the school's glory. Out of 195 students who appeared for the Class XII Board Examination, the school boasts a cent percent

success rate. Furthermore, 13% of students have scored above 90%, with a remarkable 60% earning a distinction, underscoring the institution's commitment to nurturing academic brilliance.

Principal Dr. Karuna Prasad commended the students, attributing their success to unwavering hard work, perseverance, consistency, and a passion for learning. The founders, Director Dr. D.N. Prasad, CAO Rita Prasad, Administrative Officer Daniel Michael Prasad, along with the dedicated teachers and supportive parents, share in the jubilation of this extraordinary achievement.

Modi to address election rally in Ghatshila on May 19

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to address an election rally at Ghatshila in East Singhbhum district on May 19, Sunday, in support of Bidyut Baran Mahato, the BJP candidate from the Jharkhand Lok Sabha seat.

The prestigious Jharkhand Lok Sabha seat is scheduled for elections on May 25, marking the Prime Minister's first rally in the constituency.

Preparations are underway with heightened security measures for the Prime Minister's rally. Senior admin-



istrative officials, including Deputy Commissioner of East Singhbhum, Ananya Mittal, and Senior Superintendent of Police, Kishore Kaushal, conducted a thorough review of security arrangements at the Moubhandar Football Ground, the venue of the rally, on Monday.

Inspecting the venue and the helipad site designated for

the PM's chopper landing, the officials ensured meticulous planning for the event. A meeting was also convened with district administration officials, representatives of Hindustan Copper Limited (HCL), which owns the football ground, and BJP leaders to coordinate arrangements effectively.

Further, district administrative officials are scheduled to revisit the rally venue today to oversee the finalization of security measures, underscoring the commitment to ensuring a smooth and secure environment for the Prime Minister's address.

Voter awareness event held in Bokaro sector 5 library ground

PNS : BOKARO

In a bid to increase voter turnout, a voter awareness event was organized by the district administration at Sector 5 Library Grounds. The event saw the participation of key officials including Deputy Development Commissioner, Sandeep Kumar, DPLR, Menaka, Nodal Officer of Swachh Bharat Mission, Prabhas Datta, Civil Surgeon Dinesh Kumar, District Public Relations Officer, Saket Kumar Pandey, along with other officials and staff from the Civil Surgeon's office and Anganwadi workers.

The event aimed to educate citizens about the importance of voting and to encourage them to exercise their democratic right. Various initiatives were discussed, focusing on voter registration, electoral participation, and the significance of each vote in shaping the future of the nation.

DDC Sandeep Kumar emphasized the pivotal role of voters in the democratic process, urging them to become active participants in shaping the future of their community and the nation at large.

DPRO Saket Kumar Pandey discussed the district administration's initiatives to facilitate voter registration and ensure a smooth voting process for all citizens.

The event concluded with a pledge by all attendees to actively promote voter awareness in their respective communities and to work towards achieving higher voter turnout in the upcoming elections.



DIC BSL assesses security protocols in SMS-2 wing

PNS : BOKARO

Bokaro Steel Limited's Director In-Charge, B.K. Tiwari, led a comprehensive review of security measures within the SMS-2 department. Joined by key officials including the Executive Director (P & A Works), Rajan Prasad, Chief General Manager (Technical) L. Das, and Chief General Manager (Security) B.K. Sartape, the assessment aimed to bolster safety standards.

During the walkthrough, DIC Tiwari engaged with SMS-2 personnel, stressing the imperative of adhering to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) protocols and safety guidelines. Additionally, he highlighted the significance of maintaining optimal housekeeping practices on the shop floor.



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. In an interaction with the toppers, Sarbendu

Sekhar Kar, the Principal of the school, commended their efforts, while the management and teachers lauded their hard work and dedication.

Expressing their heartfelt gratitude, the toppers of standard XII & X acknowledged the support and guidance of the entire teaching and non-teaching staff, attributing their success to the nurturing environment of D.A.V. Public School, Sec-IV.

Narayan energizes BJP's campaign for Dhulu Mahato

PNS : BOKARO

Bokaro MLA Biranchi Narayan spearheaded a spirited campaign in Dhanbad Lok Sabha constituency, throwing his weight behind BJP contender Dhulu Mahato. Venturing into the heart of Chas Nagar Uttar, Narayan canvassed in wards 14, 15, and 21, rallying citizens to endorse Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a historic third term.

With fervor, legislator Narayan stressed the pivotal role of Modi's stewardship in shaping the nation's destiny, urging constituents to fortify Modi's mandate by casting their votes in favor of Mahato. The campaign echoed a resounding call for progress, envisioning a future of comprehensive growth for India and its communities.

Joining the chorus were prominent leaders like Nagar Adhyaksh Pannalal Kandu and BJP District President Sanjay Tyagi, whose active involvement underscored the party's unified drive to galvanize support for Mahato's candidacy. This concerted effort signals a formidable push by the BJP to clinch victory in the upcoming elections.



Manoj Bhawuk represents India at 1st Bhojpuri Mahotsav in Mauritius

PNS : RANCHI

The first ever three-day International Bhojpuri Mahotsav was organized by the Ministry of Arts and Culture in Mauritius between 6th and 8th May, 2024.

Noted Bhojpuri writer and poet Manoj Bhawuk represented India at the festival. The event was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Mauritius, Pravind Kumar Jugnauth, while President Prithviraj Singh Roopun, concluded the event, which, besides India, had representatives from the Netherlands, South Africa, Suriname, Fiji, Nigeria, Singapore, the USA, and Nepal.

A discussion on the theme of "The Bhojpuri Cinema: Past, Present and Future" was held during the festival, in which Manoj Bhawuk presented a research paper. A documentary produced by him on the history of Bhojpuri Cinema was also exhibited at the festival,



which was widely appreciated. The Mahotsav was organized with the active efforts of Sarita Budhoo, President of the Bhojpuri Speaking Union, for the first time, and it was decided to organise it biannually in different countries. Manoj Kumar Singh,

popular as Manoj Bhawuk, is a Bhojpuri poet, actor, television presenter, screenwriter and Bhojpuri Cinema historian. Recently, he has been conferred with Filmfare & Femina Bhojpuri Icons 2023 Award. He has authored many award-winning books, and has been promoting Bhojpuri language, literature and cinema, for years. He has received the International 'Bhojpuri Gaurav Samman Mauritius' 2014 by Sir Anerood Jugnauth, the Prime Minister of Mauritius.

Bhawuk holds a diploma in theatre acting and has acted in TV shows, films and serials, and has held important positions dealing with Bhojpuri shows at important TV channels. His songs and ghazals have given a boost to Bhojpuri literature and language internationally. Earlier, he was working in London, but returned to India to serve Bhojpuri. He belongs to Raghunathpur of Siwan District in Bihar.

Modi promises strong action against Naxalism in third term

PM addresses poll rally in Koderma in support of Annapurna Devi and CP Chaudhary

PNS : RANCHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was once again in Jharkhand addressing a poll rally in support of BJP candidates Annapurna Devi and Chandraprakash Choudhary. Annapurna is contesting from Koderma, while Chandraprakash Choudhary is trying his luck for the third time from Giridih. Addressing a rally at Pesham under Birni block of Giridih district he claimed that the JMM-led Jharkhand government has been patronising infiltrators in the State.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a gathering during a public meeting for the Lok Sabha election in Giridih on Tuesday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

Naxalism not only caused a lot of damage to the country but also crushed many dreams of my country. Those sons, who were taking up guns in the path of Naxalism, have ruined themselves. Destroyed the family. Forced mother to keep crying throughout her life. The leftists baked their bread in this fire.

Modi regretted for being late saying that he was told that many of you had come and sat down at 8.30 in the morning. "I have brought the

blissings of Lord Vishwanath from Kashi. This is the first public meeting after I filed my nomination in Kashi today. I see that whether I am Kashi or Koderma or Giridih, only one thing is echoing, the Modi government once again. There are more people outside than are visible here. It is your love, blessings, your enthusiasm, I bow to you," Modi said.

"For Kashi, I am not PM but MP. People of Koderma and Giridih also have to cast their vote keeping this in mind. Modi is your MP. Modi is your PM. You will send sister Annapurna Devi from Koderma and colleague Chandraprakash Choudhary from AJSU from Giridih to Delhi by making them win with a huge majority," Modi echoed. Your every vote will form a strong Modi government for the third time in the country. Apart from these, you have to make Dilip Kumar Verma win from Gandey Assembly. When there is a strong government, she looks after the interest of the country first. It looks after the wel-



State BJP President Babulal Marandi presents a memento to Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a public meeting for Lok Sabha election in Giridih on Tuesday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

fare of the people of the country but if there is a weak government like Congress in the country, it also weakens the

country. Such a weak government can never do good to the countrymen.

Modi claimed Congress leaders had been making shameful statements about Ayodhya's Ram Temple. Modi claimed the Congress wants to

send Ram Lala back to the tent

Modi claimed Congress leaders had been making "shameful statements" about Ayodhya's Ram Temple.

"Shameful statements are being issued by Congress leaders over the Ram temple. Their leaders are plotting to send Ram Lala to the tent once again, and talk against the Supreme Court judgement," he said in Jharkhand's Giridih," Modi said.

PM Modi said INDIA bloc allies JMM and Congress were the biggest model of corruption, appeasement and dynastic politics. He vowed to rid the country of these "three vices".

Before the Ram temple was constructed, the old idol of Ram Lala was kept inside a tent-like structure at the disputed site. In 2019, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya's disputed site. It also ordered the administration to provide a separate plot of land for a grand mosque.

IMD- BIT Mesra join hands for Weather Research

PNS : RANCHI

In order to enhance weather monitoring and forecasting while focusing on severe thunderstorms, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Birla Institute of Technology (BIT), Mesra on May 10.

IMD was represented by Director General Mritunjay Mohapatra and from BIT, Mesra Vice Chancellor Dr Indranil Manna were present on the occasion. Senior scientist from the weather department as well as professors and experts from the institute were also present. The Meteorological



Centre, Ranchi has played a vital role in signing this MoU.

This agreement will help in promoting research and development as well as collaboration projects, student interaction and research on areas of common interest. This agreement will also pave the way for working on advanced technology

and methods to deal with the threat of lightning, especially in the Chotanagpur plateau region. For the two organisations, working as a team on the Thunderstorm test bed project will not only improve scientific capabilities but also ensure excellent weather services to the public at large. In the past also MET

Centre Ranchi has successfully organised scientific and technical discussions, guest lectures, educational tours and internships with BIT Mesra. The Meteorological Centre Ranchi initially started as a meteorological observatory in the BIT Mesra campus and was established on September 29, 1955. Post the establishment of Birsamunda Airport, it was shifted inside the airport premises under the jurisdiction of Meteorological Centre, Patna. After the formation of Jharkhand, the meteorological office was upgraded to Meteorological Centre, Ranchi under Regional Meteorological Centre, Kolkata on May 27, 2002.

Cong holds door to door pamphlet distribution programme

PNS : RANCHI

Under the leadership of former secretary of the Jharkhand Pradesh Professionals Congress, Meenakshi Singh, an election pamphlet distribution and door-to-door campaign was conducted today in Indira Nagar Colony, Kanke Road, Ranchi. The event saw the presence of former Union Minister Subodh Kant Sahay, Congress candidate Yashashwini Sahay, former president of Jharkhand Professionals Congress Aditya Vikram Jaiswal, and former Ranchi Lok Sabha president Bhuvnesh Thakur among others.

On the occasion, Jaiswal appealed to people to vote overwhelmingly in favour of the Congress candidate Yashashwini Sahay from the Ranchi Lok Sabha constituency, part of the INDI Alliance.

During the campaign, Meenakshi Singh provided detailed information to women about the benefits outlined in the "5 Nyay 25 Guarantee Manifesto." The door to door campaign included participants like Ankur Anil, Bhuwanes Thakur former Ranchi Metropolitan president of Professionals Congress Krishna Sahay, former rural president Sanjeev Mahto, Anil Singh, Gopal Pandey, Niranjana Paswan, Soni Nayak, Vandana Pathak, Hemant Sahay, Neelam Sahay, Ravi Chaudhary, Rashmi Chaudhary, Lalita Jhunjhunwala, Subhash Jhunjhunwala, Sudha Jhunjhunwala, Sunita Gopal Saraf, Pradeep Saraf, Naveen Saraf and many others.

Yashashwini Sahay intensifies poll campaign

PNS : RANCHI

Congress candidate from Ranchi Lok Sabha seat, Yashashwini Sahay, on Tuesday, said that the Modi Government, which came to power in 2014 on the basis of rhetoric, has given inflation and unemployment to the people of the Country during its 10-year rule. Yashashwini intensified a poll campaign and conducted a public contact campaign in many parts of Kanke region on Tuesday.

During the campaign Yashashwini said that PM Modi talks on every subject, but does not talk about the problems of the poor and inflation. She also appealed to the people to strengthen the hands of Rahul Gandhi and the India alliance by voting in favour of Congress.

Yashashwini Sahay was seeking support from people by doing public relations and padayatra in areas like Kanke, Thakurgaon, Sidrol, Budhmu, Chakme, Umedanda, Sarle, Mahuakhura, Sumo, Bamane, Rai, Jatratad, Churi Hochar, Khalari, G Type, Lapra, Nawadih, Dhamdhamia, Karkata, Barkitad, Jehalitat, KD Area, Mohan Nagar, Dakra Market, Churi and Rai and others. On the occasion, she inaugurated offices at



Ranchi Lok Sabha Congress candidate Yashashwini Sahay with Congress leader Subodh Kant Sahay during a campaign for Lok Sabha election in Ranchi on Tuesday. PNS

various places and appealed to the people to vote.

The party candidate held a campaign meeting in Budhmu, Thakurgaon, Umedanda under the parliamentary constituency. During this, she met Tana Bhagats at Tana Bhagat village in Sidrol, Thakurgaon and received their blessings. Former Union Minister Subodh Kant Sahay was present on the spot.

Meanwhile, taking a dig at the Prime Minister's visit to Jharkhand, State Congress Chief, Rajesh Thakur said that this fourth election meeting of the Prime Minister in Jharkhand was held in

Giridih, the people of Giridih completely rejected the Prime Minister's meeting. "The Prime Minister said many things in his election rally but like every time, this time also the issue was missing from the Prime Minister's dictionary. The people of the entire Country are troubled by unemployment and inflation. People are not able to run their houses. Lakhs of posts are vacant. Crores of youth are roaming around in the hope of employment. But the Prime Minister does not have the courage to talk about public issues and count his work of ten years," he added.

Temperature to increase in State from May 15

PNS : RANCHI

Temperature is going to increase once again in Jharkhand. According to the Meteorological Department, the maximum temperature in the state is likely to increase by 3 to 5 degrees Celsius in the next 5 days.

Also, from May 15 to 19, entire Jharkhand including the State Capital will be partly cloudy and the weather will be dry. On May 20, there is a possibility of light rain with thunder at isolated places in the north-eastern parts of the state.

There was light rain with thunder at isolated places in the northern

part of the State, Garhwa, Palamu, Chatra, Hazaribagh, Koderma, Giridih, Deoghar, Jamtara, Dumka, Godda, Sahibganj and Pakur on Tuesday. In the last 24 hours, there was light to moderate rain with thunder and storm at isolated places in the State.

Highest rainfall of 36.8 mm was recorded in Dhalbhumgarh (East Singhbhum). The highest temperature recorded in Daltonganj was 39.6 °C and the minimum temperature in Ranchi was 21.4 °C. Whereas in Simdega, Khunti, Bokaro and Jamshepur winds were strong ranging from 38 to 26 km per hour.



A girl uses a scarf to protect herself from the scorching sun on a hot afternoon in Ranchi on Tuesday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

Extravaganza at SBPS



The premises of Sarala Birla Public School, Ranchi reverberated with laughter and enthusiasm of the students participating in the summer camp - Extravaganza 2024. The event was inaugurated by the

Principal with the aim to foster an environment where students get the opportunity to unleash their skills. The school organized various creative and energetic art and sports integrated activities for the students aligned with NEP 2020 and NCF 2023. The centre of attraction of the entire event was a special workshop on Odissi dance conducted by Kavita Dwivedi who is a veteran in her field and is associated with SPIC MACAY. Brush & Beyond, which included art & craft activities, taught students the traditional art forms like Sohrai and Madhubani. The students learnt to make bookmarks, clay modelling, umbrella painting, making creative file covers, T-shirt painting etc. The Maths Magic guest faculty trained the students about the ways to enhance their skills and obtain easy solutions to tough problems in Mathematics. Robotics gained much popularity as students were given hands-on experience in the domain which aided human efficiency. The mentors trained the students in various activities like Cricket, Abacus, Coding, Taekwondo, Shooting, Yoga, Dance, Music etc. The teachers involved in the camp focused on the development of each and every child so that every individual could make the most out of it and enhance their skills, which is the need of the hour with the implementation of NEP 2020.

SCS students bring laurels to school

The students of Surendranath Centenary School (SCS) brought laurels to school by achieving cent percent results in the SSE (class X) 2024. All together 217 students had appeared for the Class X Board Exam, out of which 30 per cent students scored 90 plus. The Principal, Samita Sinha, congratulated all students and teachers on their great success and praised the efforts put by them. She also commented that persistent hard work and focus is the key to success. She added that an improved class average, more than 100 marks in various subjects is the testimony to the diligent work of parents, students and teachers. Toppers are Supriya Kumari with 98.2 per cent, Shivanshi Sharma with 97.6, Anuska Dubey with 97, Pratyush Pathak with 96.8, Anubhuti Priya 96.6 and Lavanya Priya with 96.60 per cent marks.

ED interrogates minister Alamgir in money laundering case

PNS : RANCHI

Congress leader and state rural development minister Alamgir Alam appeared before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) at Hinoo office on Tuesday for questioning in connection with a money laundering case.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) summoned Jharkhand rural development minister and Congress legislative party leader Alamgir Alam on May 14 in connection with the probe into alleged money laundering linked to the "tender-commission" scam.

Alam reached the ED office in time. Alam talking to media persons outside the ED office said, "I abide by laws... I am here to face questioning."

ED sources at Ranchi regional office said that the summons is in connection with the probe into the money laundering after the arrest of the minister's personal secretary (PS) Sanjiv Lal who has been suspended by the state government and the PS's domestic help Jahangir Alam last Monday following raids which led to the seizure of cash over ₹34.50 crore in

cash. Both are under judicial custody. Meanwhile, in another development, the wife of Sanjeev Lal, PS of minister Alamgir Alam, who was arrested in the tender commission scam, reached the ED office. Rita Lal reached the ED office



Rural Development Minister Alamgir Alam arrives at the zonal headquarter of Enforcement Directorate (ED) for questioning in connection with unaccounted cash recovered from his Secretary Sanjeev Lal's residence, in Ranchi, Tuesday. PNS

on Tuesday afternoon. On the other hand, ED's interrogation of Minister Alamgir Alam was going on. It is being

told that ED will interrogate Alamgir Alam, Sanjeev Lal and his wife Rita Lal by making them sit face to face. Earlier on May 9 also, ED had interrogated Sanjeev's wife Rita. During this, ED interrogated Rita about the Rs 35 crore recovered from Jahangir Alam's hide-out. In which Rita said that she does not know where the money came from. ED has taken information from Rita about her bank accounts. She has also been asked how much movable and immovable property is in her and her husband Sanjeev Lal's name. ED interrogated Sanjeev Lal and his assistant Jahangir Alam for a long time on the second day also. During this, both of them were questioned about the source of the money. Both were asked where the money came from and where the commission amount was distributed. According to the information received from the sources, both of them have admitted that which people had given them the money in exchange for what. Jahangir has said that he also went to many people on Scooty to collect money. It is being told that based on the inputs received during the interrogation, ED will soon take major action. ED has also got information about where the share in the commission went. ED is also preparing to summon some engineers of the Rural Development Department soon.

Preparations for polls in Ranchi at its peak

PNS : RANCHI

Voting for Ranchi parliamentary constituency is to be held on May 25. Preparations by the election machinery in the parliamentary constituency are at their peak. On Tuesday, a review meeting was held under

the chairmanship of General Observer DS Ramesh, Police Observer Dr Jalinder D Supekar and Expenditure Observer Virendra Kumar Singh regarding preparations related to voting in Ranchi Lok Sabha constituency. In a meeting, the District Election

Officer gave detailed information to the observers regarding the preparations being made for voting through PPT. The observers were informed about the work being done by personnel, vehicles, MCC C-Vigil, MCMC, material and other cells. Information was also

taken from the observers about the preparations and arrangements related to voting through postal ballot. Regarding the dispatch of polling parties, it was told by the District Election Officer that the cell is functional in Morhabadi ground.

CEO asks officials to work intensively to increase voting percentage

PNS : RANCHI

Chief Electoral Officer, Jharkhand, K Ravi Kumar today asked the officers and employees engaged in election work to prepare better for the upcoming phase of Lok Sabha elections. For good voting at the polling stations of the urban body by distributing voter information slip to every voter, tag the officials of the municipal body with the polling stations and club the family members of the voters. Besides, BLOs and supervisors should also go door-to-door and monitor the voter information slips being distributed among the voters. And activate them by holding small meetings with polling station awareness groups.

He asked to speed up the initiative to transport physically disabled voters to the polling booths. Work hard for better voting percentage. Kumar was reviewing the preparations for the fifth, sixth and seventh phase of Lok Sabha elections in Jharkhand with municipal officials through video conferencing on Tuesday.

The Chief Electoral Officer reviewed the district wise preparations. He said that a complete plan should be prepared to bring disabled and physically challenged voters to the polling booth and it should be implemented. Work to make people aware through jingles and songs released for election awareness on and before the voting day. Also ensure clarity through miking.

He asked to prepare a detailed action plan for miking, so that the voting percentage increases. He said that reaching out to voters through one-to-one voter contact will increase the voting percentage. He stressed on working on micro labels and instructed to provide complete transportation facilities to the voters who are unable to come to the polling stations and to do real time monitoring on the day of polling.

Senior officials of the election office including Additional Chief Electoral Officer Sandeep Singh and Dr. Neha Arora were present in the meeting along with the Chief Electoral Officer.



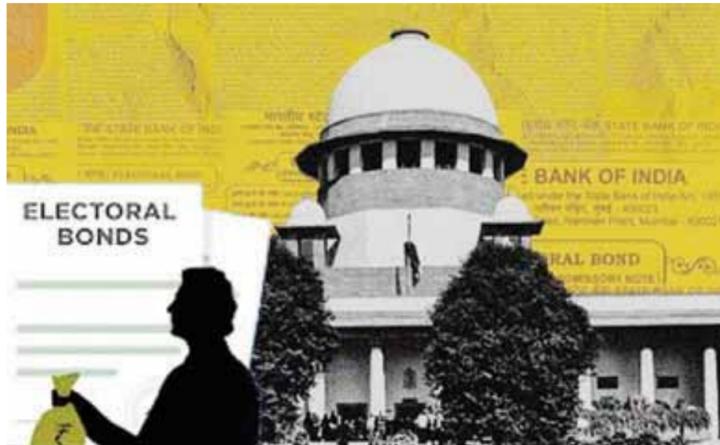
CEO, Jharkhand, K Ravi Kumar addresses media persons at his office in Ranchi on Tuesday. PNS

NGOs seek SC listing of PIL for SIT probe into electoral bonds scheme

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Two NGOs on Tuesday urged the Supreme Court to consider listing their PIL seeking a court-monitored probe by a special investigation team into alleged instances of "apparent quid pro quo" involving political parties, corporate entities and officials of investigative agencies in the electoral bonds scheme. A bench comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta took note of the submissions of lawyer Prashant Bhushan, appearing for NGOs 'Common Cause' and the Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL), that the plea needed to be listed for hearing at the earliest. "The CJ's office is seized of it. It will be listed," Justice Khanna told Bhushan. A five-judge Constitution bench had on February 15 scrapped the electoral bonds scheme of anonymous political funding introduced by the BJP government. Terming it a "scam", the plea

filed by the NGOs has sought a direction to the authorities to investigate the source of funding of "shell companies and loss-making companies" which made donations to various political parties, as has been disclosed by the data released by the EC. The petition has also sought a direction to the authorities to recover the money donated by companies as part of "quid pro quo arrangements where these are found to be proceeds of crime". Following the top court's judgement, the State Bank of India, the authorised financial institution under the scheme, had shared the data with the Election Commission (EC), which later made them public. The electoral bonds scheme, which was notified by the government on January 2, 2018, was pitched as an alternative to cash donations made to political parties as part of its efforts to bring in transparency in political funding. "The electoral bond scam has a money trail unlike the 2G



scam or the coal scam, where allocations of spectrum and coal mining leases were arbitrarily made, but there was no evidence of a money trail. Yet this court ordered court-monitored investigations in both those cases, appointed special public prosecutors and formed special courts to deal with those cases," the

plea said. The plea said in the "electoral bond scam, some of the country's main investigative agencies such as the CBI, Enforcement Directorate and the Income Tax department appear to have become accessories to corruption". It claimed that several firms which were under investiga-

tion by these agencies have donated large sums of money to the ruling party, to potentially influence outcome of probes. "Thus, the investigation in this case would not only need to unravel the entire conspiracy in each instance, which would involve officers of the company, officials of the gov-

ernment and functionaries of political parties but also the officers concerned of agencies like the ED/IT and CBI etc, who appear to have become part of this conspiracy," it alleged. The plea said this "scam" needs to be investigated by an SIT of sitting/retired investigating officers of impeccable integrity chosen by the apex court and working under the supervision of a retired judge of the top court. It has sought a direction for a "court-monitored investigation by an SIT into the instances of apparent quid pro quo between public servants, political parties, commercial organisations, companies, officials of investigation agencies and others, and other offences as highlighted in the present petition, as have been disclosed from the electoral bond data published by the Election Commission of India...". The petition has also sought a direction for investigating alleged violation of section 182(1) of the Companies Act,

2013 by companies which donated to political parties through electoral bonds within three years of their incorporation and for penalty to be imposed on such firms in terms of section 182(4) of the Act. The plea claimed the electoral bond data showed that the bulk of the bonds purchased by corporate entities appeared to have been donated as quid pro quo arrangements by corporates to political parties for getting contracts, licences, leases, clearances and approvals worth crores of rupees and securing other benefits from governments or authorities controlled by governments which were in turn controlled by political parties. It alleged that electoral bonds were given in close proximity to action by agencies like the ED, IT or CBI, raising suspicion about the donations being "protection" money to avoid or stall action by or in exchange for regulatory inaction by various regulators like the drug controller etc

and as a consideration for favourable policy changes. "Though these apparent pay offs amount to several thousand crores, they appear to have influenced contracts worth lakhs of crores and regulatory inaction by agencies worth of thousands of crores and also appear to have allowed substandard or dangerous drugs to be sold in the market, endangering the lives of millions of people in the country," it said. "That is why the electoral bonds scam has been called by many astute observers as the largest scam in India so far, and perhaps in the world," it claimed. It said data also showed that various loss-making companies and shell companies were donating huge sums to political parties through electoral bonds. "Data suggests that the introduction of electoral bonds led to the mushrooming of shell companies, which were used by corporate houses as conduits to launder illicit money," the plea alleged.

TMC approaches EC over poll code violations by BJP

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Trinamool Congress on Tuesday asked the Election Commission to stop "blatant violations" of the poll code by the BJP and its leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while alleging that the model code of conduct has been turned into "Modi Code of Conduct". After submitting a letter over the matter to the poll panel, the TMC's Rajya Sabha MPs Saket Gokhale and Sagarika Ghose addressed the media and expressed dismay over the "inaction" of the EC against PM Modi over Model Code of Conduct (MCC) violations. "(BJP chief) J P Nadda served a notice but there has been absolutely no action taken on our complaints. Instead, PM Modi has become more emboldened in his remarks. He is making promises he has no right to make during elections, announcing financial schemes which his party cannot enact as the ruling party. Yet, there seems to be a disregard for the model code of conduct,"



Gokhale told reporters outside the Nirvachan Sadan. Both Ghose and Gokhale claimed that PM Modi was not being held accountable for the violations of the poll code. "Under the watch of the Election Commission, the Model Code of Conduct has now become the Modi Code of Conduct. Any statement made by Modi goes unchecked and no action is taken against him. This undermines the fairness of our elections," Ghose said. Gokhale said, "We have written to the EC demanding that for the remaining phas-

es of the election, the Model Code of Conduct be strictly enforced, complaints be acted upon, and Prime Minister Modi not be given a clean chit every time he violates election rules." The TMC's letter to the Election Commission outlines specific instances of alleged violations by the BJP, including false and malicious allegations and appeals for votes based on religion, and divisive statements made by Prime Minister Modi in his rallies. "The brazen and unabashed comments made by Modi are

not only a deliberate attack on our secular republic but also against the ethos of free and fair electioneering," the letter stated. "Since many of these breaches of the MCC have been committed by Narendra Modi and the ruling party at the Centre, BJP, the Election Commission has refused to act strongly on the basis of such complaints. In fact, many are compelled to conclude that the MCC has been turned into the Modi Code of Conduct!" it said. The letter detailed instances where the TMC had lodged complaints against the BJP for allegedly violating the model code of conduct and urged the poll panel to take immediate and decisive action. "You are earnestly requested to put a stop to such blatant violation of the MCC by the BJP and its leaders under the aegis of Modi. Failure to address these concerns would not only undermine the credibility of the electoral process but also erode public trust in the ECI and ultimately violate the basic structure of the Constitution," it added.

PM, President, others condole death of former Bihar Deputy CM Sushil Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/PATNA

President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and several senior leaders cutting across the party lines condoled the death of senior BJP leader and former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Sushil Kumar Modi, who was suffering from cancer. Murmu said the sudden demise of Sushil Kumar Modi is an irreparable loss. "His gentle nature, contribution as an efficient administrator and integrity in public life were reflected in his personality and work. As Deputy Chief Minister of Bihar, Member of Parliament and Member of both the Houses of the State Legislature, Shri Sushil Kumar Modi upheld high ideals," she said. The prime minister said Sushil Kumar Modi has played an invaluable role in the rise and success of BJP in Bihar. "Strongly opposing the Emergency, he made a name for himself in student politics. He was known as a very hard-working and sociable MLA. He had a deep understanding of the issues related to politics. He also did a lot of com-



mendable work as an administrator. His active role in the passage of GST will always be remembered," PM Modi said in a social media post. He breathed his last at around 9.45 pm at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi and cremated in Patna in presence of top political leaders including Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and BJP president JP Nadda. Modi, 72, had served as the deputy chief minister of Bihar from 2005 to 2013, and again between 2017 and 2020. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar also expressed grief over the demise of Modi. In a statement, Kumar said, "It's a personal loss for me. We were

together during JP movement. His death has created a vacuum in the political arena of the country as well as in Bihar". Union Ministers Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Nitin Gadkari said the demise of Sushil Kumar Modi is an irreparable loss for Bihar and the country. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said she was sorry to hear about the sad demise of Sushil Kumar Modi and that their thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends. RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav also said he was extremely saddened to hear the news of Modi's death. He described Modi as "our guardian, struggling and hardworking leader". RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat and general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale too paid tributes to Sushil Kumar Modi and said that with his demise, the nation has lost an awakened social worker and a skilled political leader. Last month, the BJP leader took to social media to announce that he was battling cancer for the last six months and will not be able to campaign in the Lok Sabha elections. During his political career spanning over three decades, Modi held various positions, including MLA, MLC and member of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. He became an MLA for the first time in 1990 from Patna Central constituency and was made the chief whip of the BJP legislature party. From 1996 to 2004, he was the leader of the opposition in the state assembly. He became a member of Lok Sabha in 2004 from Bhagalpur. He gave up his Lok Sabha membership in 2005 and became a member of the legislative council, following which he was made the deputy chief minister while Nitish Kumar was the CM Modi was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 2020 and he retired earlier this year.

Congress attacks PM Modi over clean Ganga

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday asked Prime Minister Narendra Modi as to why he has abandoned the Varanasi villages adopted by him and why the Ganga has gotten dirtier despite spending Rs 20,000 crore. On a day PM Modi filed his nomination from Varanasi, Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh said the outgoing PM must answer for his "failures" in Varanasi. "Today's questions: After spending Rs 20,000 crore, why has the Ganga gotten dirtier? Why has the PM abandoned the Varanasi villages he had 'adopted'? Why is the PM determined to destroy Mahatma Gandhi's legacy in Varanasi," he asked in a social media post. Ramesh said when he came to Varanasi in 2014, Modi had said "Maa Ganga ne mujhe bulaya hain" and promised to purify the waters of the Holy Ganga, but soon after coming to power, rebranded the existing Operation Ganga as Namami Ganga. "Ten years later, the 'Namami Gange' project has cost the exchequer more than Rs. 20,000 crore. Here are the results: the number of Polluted River Stretches has increased from 51 to 66, 71% of monitoring stations have reported dangerous bacteria at up to 40 times more than safe levels, and antibiotic resistant bacteria have now been found in the waters. "Where has the 20,000 crore in taxpayer money gone? How much has been siphoned off in corruption and mismanage-



ment? How can the people of Varanasi trust a man who has given a jumla even to Ma Ganga," the Congress leader asked. He also said outside the city of Varanasi lie eight villages that the PM had "adopted", but a March 2024 ground report found that despite big promises of "smart schools", health facilities and housing, the villages have seen absolutely no progress in 10 years. Domri village has almost no pucca housing, he said, adding Nagepur village has extremely shoddy roads. Dalit communities in Jogapur and Jaypur have no toilets and no water, and the flagship Nal Se Jal Scheme seems to have missed Parampur village entirely, he claimed. "The condition of Modi's adopted villages tells us a lot about his sense of duty, or lack thereof, towards serving his constituents. Why has the PM abandoned his "adopted" villages? Is this the true face of "Modi ki guarantee" he asked. Ramesh also alleged that "It is well known that the outgoing

PM's ideology is that of Godse, not Gandhi". "He has taken his malicious hatred of the Father of our Nation to the extent of destroying the Sarwa Sewa Sangh, started by Acharya Vinobha Bhave, and associated with personalities like Dr Rajendra Prasad, Lal Bahadur Shastri, and Jayaprakash Narayan," he said, adding it has been rendering extraordinary public service to the nation since 1955. "It had been operating on 13 acres of land, close to the Varanasi Railway Station, for which it had full possession papers. It was evicted from its iconic campus in August 2023, and the land was taken over by the Indian Railways. Only one corner of the campus, occupied by the Gandhi Vidya Sansthan, remains untouched because it had already been captured by the RSS. "Why does the PM persist in his hypocrisy of praising Gandhiji abroad, while destroying Gandhian institutions at home? Can he openly admit his admiration for Godse over Gandhi," Ramesh asked.

41 civil servants from Sri Lanka undergo training in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Centre for Good Governance (NCGG) has started training 41 civil servants from Sri Lanka to help them gain insights into India's transformative policies such as right to service, housing for all and leveraging digital technology among others, according to an official statement issued on Tuesday. The third capacity building programme for senior civil servants of Sri Lanka organised by the NCGG from May 13 to 24 at Mussoorie, it said. The programme is being attended by 41 senior civil servant officers from Sri Lanka from the PM Office, Presidential Secretariat, Department of National Police Commission, Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption, National Audit Office, Department of IT management and Ministry of Finance among others, the statement said. The NCGG, an autonomous institution under the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG), is mandated to work in areas of public policy, governance, reforms and capacity building. NCGG's efforts align with the Indian philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' i.e. "The world is one Family" and emphasises strengthening bilateral ties and fostering cooperation with other countries, said the statement issued by the Personnel Ministry. V Srinivas, Director General of the NCGG and Secretary of the DARPG, inaugurated the ses-



sion and highlighted the significant milestone achieved with the participation of fourteen senior civil servant officers from Sri Lanka in the first capacity building programme led by Secretary to the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Anura Dissanayake. In his address, Srinivas emphasised the commonalities between India and Sri Lanka in governance practices and the potential for mutual learning. He emphasised on fostering closer ties between the government and its citizens. "Central to this vision is the concept of 'maximum governance, minimum government', emphasising digitally-driven governance with a citizen-centric approach," the statement said. The programme delves into specific policy areas such as Skill Development, Agriculture, Disaster Management, and healthcare initiatives like the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana. Participants will gain insights into transformative policies such as right to service, housing for all and the Digital India initiative, it said. Moreover, the programme offered ses-

sions on planning eco-friendly smart cities, Aadhaar as a tool for good governance, and gender and development, among others, the statement said. "Emotional intelligence, land record management and national security were also explored in detail. Additionally, sessions on election management in India and Indo-Sri Lanka relations enriched participants' understanding of strategic governance areas," it added. The programme also features immersive field visits to prestigious institutions including the Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy (IGNFA) and the Forest Research Institute (FRI) in Dehradun, providing practical exposure to governance mechanisms, the statement said. The NCGG in partnership with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has imparted training to civil servants of 17 countries, viz. Bangladesh, Kenya, Tanzania, Tunisia, Seychelles, Gambia, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Laos, Vietnam, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Cambodia, it said.

Over half million displaced due to floods, earthquakes, storms in 2023 in India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Deadly floods last year left behind a trail of destruction in the Himalayan states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand last year while glacial lake outburst flood in Sikkim led to the collapse of a hydroelectric dam, killing more than 100 people, and affecting more than 88,000. In Delhi, identified as a "flood displacement hotspot", the Yamuna River overflowed after heavy rains on July 9, 2023, leaving at least 27,000 displaced, according to a report by the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) said around 27,000 displacements in the national capital, according to a global report released on Tuesday. India experienced over half a million internal displacements due to floods, storms, earthquakes, and other disasters in 2023, a sharp dip from around 2.5 million displacements in 2022. On July 9, Delhi recorded 153 mm of rainfall in just 24 hours, the highest single-day rainfall since July 25, 1982. Overall, South Asia reported around 3.7 million internal displacements in 2023, with disasters causing 1.6 million, the lowest figure since 2018. Researchers attributed the decline in displacements due to disasters partly to the El Nino event, which brought below-average rainfall during the monsoon and a weaker cyclone season.

However, floods and storms continued to displace people, often in the same areas. At 3,52,000, India's flood displacement figure was the lowest since 2008, with the largest event triggering about 91,000 displacements in Assam in June, affecting 20 districts. Cyclone Biparjoy, which formed in the Arabian Sea in early June, led to widespread flooding across Gujarat and Rajasthan, causing 105,000 displacements as it moved inland. Cyclone Mocha, the largest disaster displacement event of 2023 in South Asia, triggered 1.3 million displacements in Bangladesh, mainly in Cox's Bazar district. Forecasting and early warnings allowed authorities to initiate emergency procedures before Mocha's landfall, aiding pre-emptive evacuations from densely populated areas. The IDMC said South Asia's cyclone season was less intense in 2023 than in previous years because of El Nino, but storms still triggered 1.8 million movements, about half of the region's disaster displacements. Government-led pre-emptive evacuations accounted for at least three-quarters of this figure. According to the report, disasters triggered 26.4 million displacements in 2023, the third highest annual total in the last 10 years. No country is immune to disaster displacement, said Alexandra Bilak, the director of IDMC.



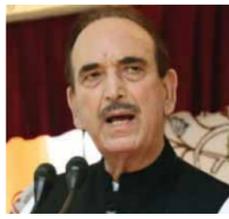
Azad, Mufti differ over Srinagar Lok Sabha polls voter turnout

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

Reacting to the voter turnout in the Monday polling at the Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency, while DPAP chief Ghulam Nabi Azad remarked that the figures are not high enough to know whether the people are happy or angry with the abrogation of Article 370 and bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir into two union territories, PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti said it is a message that the people have not accepted the Centre's decisions.

The Srinagar constituency in Jammu and Kashmir (J-K) witnessed 37.98 per cent voting on Monday in the first Lok Sabha election in the valley since the scrapping of Article 370 in 2019, with the Election Commission (EC) stating that it was the "highest turnout in decades".

Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) president Azad Tuesday said, "I had hoped that Kashmir will witness 80 to 90 per cent turnout in view of what has been happening in



the past seven to eight years. Article 370 was removed, statehood was snatched. So I thought the turnout will be high, like 90 to 95 per cent. "The increase of a few per cent hardly matters as it happens in every constituency of India. That way, we can not know whether the people are angry or happy (with the abrogation of Article 370 and snatching of statehood). It is a new thing for me," Azad told reporters while campaigning for his party candidate in Kulgam district.

About the rise in poll percentage in the militancy-infested areas like Tral town of Pulwama, Azad said the increase of a few per cent in the turnout is normal after



every election across India. "There were some pockets affected by militancy. After 1994-95, the militancy started waning. Today the militancy is next to nothing. The areas affected by militancy also witnessed 30-40 per cent votes and the areas which were not affected, also had similar turnout," he added.

On the other hand, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) president Mufti Tuesday said the "high" voter turnout in the Srinagar Lok Sabha constituency polls is a message to the Centre that people have not accepted the abrogation of Article 370 and other decisions regarding Jammu and Kashmir that followed.

"Polling yesterday was good because the people wanted to send a message to Delhi that the decision taken in 2019 and afterwards with regard to our land and state subjects and jobs are not acceptable to the people of Jammu and Kashmir," Mufti told reporters at Qazigund in Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha constituency.

The PDP president is contesting the Lok Sabha polls from the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat where polling is scheduled to be held on May 25.

"However, I would like to tell the Election Commission that wherever the footfall of voters was higher in favour of the PDP, the polling was deliberately made slow. I want the people of Rajouri-Poonch-Anantnag-Kulgam-Wachi to make sure that they vote even if it means standing in the queue for 10 hours," she said.

The former chief minister said the "good" voter turnout in the Srinagar Lok Sabha seat will have a positive impact in the Anantnag-Rajouri constituency as well.

Hope I get to file nomination from Choti Kashi in future as well, says Kangana Ranaut

PTI ■ SHIMLA

Actor Kangana Ranaut on Tuesday filed her nomination from the Mandi Lok Sabha seat as a BJP candidate and hoped she would keep getting the opportunity to file nominations from the constituency in the future as well.

"I hope this is not the first and last time for me and I get more opportunities to file nominations from Choti Kashi (Mandi) in the future as well," Ranaut told PTI.

The Leader of Opposition in Himachal Pradesh Assembly Jai Ram Thakur and state BJP chief Rajiv Bindal accompanied the actor to the nomination centre.

The BJP cadres carried placards of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and shouted slogans in support of Ranaut as she headed to the election office.

Mandi, an abode for over 300 temples with about eight temples dedicated to Lord Shiva, is popularly known as Choti Kashi.

"Today is a very fortunate day for me as Prime Minister Narendra Modi is filing his



nomination from Kashi (Varanasi) for the third time and I am filing nomination from Choti Kashi," the BJP nominee said as she exuded confidence that Modi would be re-elected as the country's prime minister for the third time.

"I am thankful to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP for fielding the daughter of Mandi from here, enhancing the prestige of the state," she said.

Her mother Asha Ranaut told PTI, "Our blessing is with our daughter and God is also listening to our prayers, Kangana is getting good response wherever she goes and would win with a huge mandate."

Will carve separate State of Bundelkhand if come to power, says Mayawati

PTI ■ JHANSI (UP)



Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Tuesday said if her party is voted to power, it will carve a separate state of Bundelkhand — the region that straddles the states of Uttar Pradesh Madhya Pradesh.

Addressing an election rally in Jhansi, Mayawati said, "There have been demands for carving a separate Bundelkhand state. If our government is formed (at the Centre), then we will take positive steps in this regard. Bundelkhand will definitely be made a separate state."

Bundelkhand is a hilly region spread across 13 districts in southwest Uttar Pradesh and northern Madhya Pradesh. Seven districts in Uttar Pradesh — Banda, Mahoba, Hamirpur, Lalitpur, Jhansi, Jalaun, and Chitrakoot — and eight districts in Madhya Pradesh — Datia, Tikamgarh, Chhattarpur, Sagar, Damoh, and Panna — come in this region. The BSP chief also claimed that it "would not be easy" for the current BJP-led NDA to return to power, provided "the elections are free and fair," and the EVMS are not tampered with.

"For the past few years, the BJP and its allies have been in power at the Centre in most of the states. Owing to the casteist, capitalist, narrow, and vindictive policies and their style of working, and due to the significant difference in their actions and words, it now seems that it would not be easy for them to

return to power at the Centre, provided these elections are free and fair," she said.

People are fed up with the theatrics and rhetoric and they won't work anymore for the BJP in this election, she said.

Mayawati alleged that the BJP has "politicised" all central agencies under it, just as its predecessor, Congress, had done.

Urging her party workers to stop the BJP, the Congress, and their allies from coming to power at the Centre, she told them "not to get misled by the opinion polls and surveys," and warned them against the "saam, daam, dand, bhed" tactics of political parties.

The former UP chief minister criticised the free ration policy of the Centre, saying the dole alone cannot be a permanent fix to problems of the poor.

"The free ration, which is being given to you, the BJP and RSS is not giving them out of their own pockets. It comes from the tax which is paid by the public and not out of the beneficence of the BJP and the RSS. You don't owe them anything," said the Kanshiram protege.

Jhansi will vote in the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha polls in the state on May 20. The BSP has fielded Ravi Prakash from the constituency.

The BJP has fielded Anurag Sharma, its sitting Lok Sabha MP, while the Congress has given ticket to former Union minister Pradeep Jain 'Aditya'.

Mamata's offer to cook food for Modi stirs controversy

PTI ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's offer to "cook food" for Prime Minister Narendra Modi elicited mixed responses from different political parties, with the BJP terming it a "political agenda" and the CPI(M) dubbing it as an "understanding" between the TMC and the saffron party.

Taking a jibe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his recent allegation that RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav last month had fish during a period when some Hindus abstain from having non-vegetarian food, Banerjee on Monday said she was ready to "cook something for him



(Modi) if he wanted though she was not sure whether he would eat what she cooked. Banerjee, at an election rally here, had made the remarks while taking a dig at the BJP for allegedly interfering with the food habits of the people and had said she would be happy to cook food for Modi but is not sure "whether the PM will be ready to savour my



cooked meal." "I have been cooking since my childhood days. People have praised my cooking. But will Modi ji accept my food? Will he trust me? I will cook whatever he loves," she had said.

The TMC supremo had said, "I love both vegetarian foods like Dhokla and non-veg foods like macher jhol (fish

curry). Different communities, and different sects among Hindus have their own unique rituals and eating habits. Who is BJP to impose a diktat on an individual's dietary habits? It shows the BJP leadership has little idea and concern about the diversity and inclusivity of India and its people."

Banerjee's offer to cook for the prime minister, who is a vegetarian, drew sharp reactions from the saffron camp.

"Mamata Banerjee wants to feed Modi ji with fish and rice cooked by her. Good proposal. But before that, why doesn't she first offer pork chop to her lieutenant Firhad Hakim? It will serve three

purposes, secularism will be asserted, it will show charity begins at home and the fritters will also be praised," former BJP state president and ex-Tripura Governor Tathagata Roy posted on X.

BJP leader Sanku Pandu claimed Banerjee had deliberately invited Modi knowing well that he is a strict vegetarian.

"This is nothing but her ploy to trap the PM. She knows on the one hand the PM will never eat fish or any non-veg item. If she believes everyone should be allowed to eat what he/she loves to eat, then why is she twisting Modiji's comments about one's dietary habits? She is insulting devout Sanatani Hindus" he added.

Reacting to Banerjee's comments, CPI(M) leader Bikash Bhattacharya said, "Being Dada-Bon (brother and sister), Mamata didi can certainly offer to cook meals for the prime minister, do not know if it is to placate him."

Bhattacharya was referring to the jibe — "Didibhai-Modibhai" that the Left and the Bengal Congress unit use to refer to the alleged tacit understanding between the BJP and the TMC.

He said such comments in the backdrop of her public posturing against "Modi's politics and divisive speeches show an apparent contradiction" in what she publicly says and preaches in private.

Went to support my friend: Allu after being booked for alleged election code violation

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Days after he was booked for allegedly violating the Model Code of Conduct in the run-up to Lok Sabha polls, popular Telugu actor Allu Arjun on Tuesday said he went to the Nandyal district to support his friend and YSRCP constituency candidate S Ravi Chandra Kishore Reddy but isn't affiliated to any political party.

On Saturday, the "Pushpa" star waved to a large crowd from a balcony with the YSRCP candidate and also posted a message on X in his favour. The Andhra Pradesh Police booked a case against the "Pushpa: The Rise" star on Saturday under IPC Section 188 the same day.

Arjun said he remains neutral and supports "my people" including Janasena Party founder and actor-uncle Pawan Kalyan, regardless of their political affiliations.

"Firstly, I want to clarify that I'm not affiliated with any



political party. I remain neutral and support my people, regardless of their political affiliations. This includes my uncle Pawan Kalyan, whom I'll always stand by, along with my friend Ravi and my father-in-law, Mr. Reddy," the actor said in a statement.

The National Award winner, who cast his vote in Hyderabad on Monday, said he went to Nandyal district to support his friend Ravi.

"I made a promise to my friend, Mr. Ravi, to support him, but I couldn't fulfill it last time. To keep my word, this

time I went to Nandyal to support him," he further said. In a post on X on Saturday, Arjun thanked the people of Nandyal for a "warm reception".

"Thank you, Silpa Ravi Reddy (YSRCP candidate) garu, for the hospitality. Wishing you the very best in the elections and beyond. You have my unwavering love and support," he had posted.

Janasena, TDP and BJP are NDA alliance partners, who are taking on Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSRCP in the elections. Andhra Pradesh went to the polls on Monday.

Hearing in 2018 defamation case against Rahul on May 27

PTI ■ SULTANPUR

Hearing in a 2018 defamation case against Rahul Gandhi over his alleged objectionable remarks targeting Union Home Minister Amit Shah has been fixed for May 27 following the appointment of a new judge to the special court.

The defamation complaint against Gandhi was filed by BJP leader Vijay Mishra six years ago.

The plaintiff's advocate, Santosh Pandey, said the matter would be heard on May 27. Gandhi's lawyer Kashi Prasad Shukla said the case could not be taken up during the day due to the non-appointment of a judge of the MP/MLA court. The judge was transferred a month ago and a new judge is yet to be appointed.

Last December, the court issued a warrant against Rahul Gandhi. Subsequently, Gandhi halted his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Amethi on February 20, appeared in the court and was granted bail.



The complaint was filed here on August 4, 2018, against Rahul Gandhi for his alleged objectionable comments against Shah made at a press conference in Bengaluru in May of that year during the Karnataka elections.

The complainant referred to Gandhi's comment that the BJP claims to believe in honest and clean politics but has a party president who is an "accused" in a murder case. Shah was BJP president when Gandhi made the comment.

About four years before Gandhi's remark, a special CBI court in Mumbai discharged Shah in a 2005 fake encounter case when he was a minister of state for home in Gujarat.

Sometimes a film is so bad people leave midway: Thakur's sally against HP CM

PTI ■ DHARAMSHALA/SHIMLA

BJP leader Anurag Thakur on Tuesday, in an apparent response to Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu, who said he will complete his term and go for another, said "sometimes, a film fails so bad that the viewers leave it before interval." The Union Information and Broadcasting Minister made the remark while speaking to reporters after the filing of nomination of BJP candidate Sudhir Sharma from the Dharamshala assembly seat.

Thakur said it would be a difficult enough task for Sukhu to complete his current term, let alone getting elected to another.

Polling for the four Lok Sabha seats and bypolls for six assembly seats will be held on June 1 in Himachal Pradesh. "I still remember when Sharma contested his first election, BJP leader Prem Kumar Dhumal wanted him to be in the BJP and today we are strengthened as he has joined the party. The BJP



workers will ensure his victory," Thakur told reporters.

Sudhir Sharma is one of the six Congress rebels who had voted in favour of the BJP in the Rajya Sabha polls held on February 27. These six MLA were disqualified for defying a whip to be present in assembly and vote for the government.

Later, all six joined the BJP and were given tickets from their respective assembly seats.

Sukhu, after the filing of nomination by Congress candidate Devinder Jaggi from Dharamshala assembly seat, told media, "We have fielded an honest candidate against

the leader of the Congress MLAs who sold themselves in the political market. The people of Dharamshala would give a befitting reply to him on June 1." On Tuesday, actor Kangana Ranaut also filed her nomination from the Mandi Lok Sabha seat as a BJP candidate. She was accompanied by leader of the opposition Jai Ram Thakur and state BJP chief Rajiv Bindal.

The BJP cadres carried placards of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and shouted "Mandi ka sansad kaisa ho, Kangana Ranaut jaisa ho" as she headed for the election office.

Drugs big problem in Punjab; politicians only interested in mudslinging: SAD (A) nominee Sidhana

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Gangster-turned-social activist Lakha Sidhana, who is testing political waters from the Bathinda parliamentary constituency, claims that his rivals are shying away from speaking about real issues like the drug menace and are only happy slinging mud. Forty-five-year old Sidhana, who is the Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar) candidate, says he is getting an overwhelming response and the people have told him they would be giving him a chance, having tried all other major political parties.

Popularly known as Lakha Sidhana, Lakhvir Singh hails from Sidhana village of Bathinda district. He had unsuccessfully contested the 2022 assembly

polls from Maur assembly seat as an Independent. Though lost, he had an impressive outing garnering 28,091 votes. In the 2012 assembly polls, he unsuccessfully contested from the Rampura Phul seat on the symbol of the People's Party of Punjab, which was formed by the state's current Finance Minister Manpreet Singh Badal after quitting the Shiromani Akali Dal.

"Drugs are a major issue. The situation is so bad that 'Chitta' (a synthetic drug) is easily available. In many villages like Manna, Raikhe Kalan, Kattianwali, several youths perished due to drug addiction," Sidhana told PTI.

"It is a very serious issue and it is not being discussed at all as rival political leaders fear that they will be questioned by



people about the steps taken to contain it when they were in power," he added.

Earlier, the Congress had promised to wipe out drugs and after it, AAP vowed to end it, he said, adding to the list of issues afflicting the state, unemployment and corruption.

"Real issues of Punjab are not being raised in these elections. They are missing. Only politics is being done. Political leaders are just indulging in mudslinging and criticising each other," he said.

Mounting state debt, a stagnation in MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee) wages, and revival of the old pension scheme for government employees are some of the issues Sidhana said

he is campaigning for. He said the people are "disappointed" with AAP's performance in the state.

"Mann had said that his government would do so much work that there would not be any need to seek votes as people will vote themselves. Now what is the need to seek votes? People of Punjab are thoroughly disappointed. They have seen governments of all parties, SAD-BJP alliance, Congress regime and now AAP is ruling in the state. People had voted for 'badlav' and they had high expectations but nothing happened," Sidhana claimed.

Asked about his prospects, he said, "People are silent... There will be a surprising result." Sidhana said he is also working towards promoting Punjabi language and has formed a

'Punjabi Maa Boli Satkar Jathebandi' for the purpose. "We are not against any language but there cannot be a compromise on our mother tongue."

In 2002, Sidhana was booked under various sections of the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act for defacing English text on the sign boards installed at a toll plaza in Barnala.

A postgraduate in history from Punjab university, Sidhana is currently facing 13 criminal cases, according to his poll affidavit.

He is pitted against SAD candidate and three-time MP Harsimrat Kaur Badal, AAP's Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer, BJP's Parampal Kaur Sidhu, and Congress's Jeet Mohinder Sidhu.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Bitter ballot battle

Poll rivals are rarely known for praising one another, but the current discourse has hit rock bottom

If the choice were for selecting the more entertaining option between the ongoing IPL or Lok Sabha elections, the latter — with its innovative taunts, snide remarks, branding family members with dirty accusations, obnoxious campaigning and mudslinging — would win hands down. With this election turning out to be more brutal and bloody than normal, social media is agog with videos of politicians that would put streetside rowdies to shame. A case in point: BJP's Mandi candidate, Kangana Ranaut, took a barrage of abuses, some too explicit to be printed. Disturbingly, even star campaigners are merrily throwing decency to the winds. The recent exchange between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and leaders of the Opposition, particularly the Congress, encapsulates the bitter nature of debate. Modi accused the Opposition leaders of being "cowards, scared of Pakistan", and the Congress shamed him by calling a corporate stooge, besides warning ominously that if he won this time too, India will see no more elections. This exchange not only underscores the intense political polarisation, but also highlights the alarming decline in campaign standards. Modi's accusation resonates with the BJP's narrative to project itself as the sole guardian of national security. Such remarks, while appealing to a certain segment of the electorate, contribute to toxic polarisation of the polity. By insinuating that the Opposition is soft on Pakistan, Modi attempts to discredit his rivals and consolidate support by tapping into jingoistic sentiments.

On the other hand, the Congress response reflects the prevalent perception of the BJP Government's policies favouring big business owners. The Opposition's strategy of portraying Modi as a representative of corporate interests seeks to appeal to the concerns of the common man. However, such charges, without substantial evidence, contribute to the erosion of trust in democratic institutions and further polarise the electorate. Besides, the Opposition has time and again accused him of being autocratic without any basis. What is particularly disconcerting is the way these accusations are delivered: Personal attack, character assassination and inflammatory rhetoric have become commonplace. Instead of engaging in substantive debates on policy issues and governance, the parties resort to sensationalism and vitriol. The falling standards of campaigning are symptomatic of deeper structural issues plaguing the democratic process. The influence of money power, the proliferation of fake news and misinformation, and the erosion of institutional checks and balances have created an environment conducive to negative campaigning and polarisation. Moreover, the advent of social media has amplified the reach and impact of divisive rhetoric. Unfortunately, the Election Commission has been rather ineffective in controlling these foul-mouthed leaders. That said, it is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that the leaders do not cross the 'Laxman Rekha'. We all can ensure that by pressing the blue button on voting day.

PICTALK



Smoke rises from a forest fire, in Shimla

This election is wide open

Amidst predictions of a third-term triumph for Prime Minister Modi, internal rifts, defections and dwindling voter turnout inject an element of unpredictability

Like many other countries, political parties in India often claim victory during elections even before official results are announced. It is part of their politics. The ongoing polls are not just another political event; they are of paramount importance, as well as the fate of several political party leaders. They have profound and far-reaching implications. In the current scenario, the ruling BJP has declared victory that the results will meet its expectations. However, the actual outcome remains uncertain, adding a layer of suspense to the political landscape. Four of the seven-phase polling have already occurred and the remaining three will occur on May 20, 25 and June 1. The outcome of these could significantly impact the election results, which will be revealed on June 4.

According to recent opinion polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is predicted to secure an unprecedented third-term win in these elections. There is a debate about whether the BJP tally will increase or decrease its tally. BJP leaders, including Narendra Modi, claim the NDA, led by the BJP, will win over 400 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha. Home Minister Amit Shah says NDA will secure 200 of the 283 seats in the first three phases. The Congress party won over 400 seats only once in 1984. Political players need a game-changing strategy as there is no apparent wave of support. To gain an advantage, the BJP has implemented five key strategies: Celebrity Candidates Fighting Polls, strengthening the Hindu base, appealing to minority groups, exploiting redrawn boundaries to maintain the Hindu vote in areas controlled by the opposition and projecting Modi magic. The Congress and its allies are making a strategic move, attempting to consolidate the Hindu subaltern. The ongoing election witnessed a decline in voter turnout and it is still being determined whether it will recover or continue to decline. The Election Commission of India (ECI) expressed disappointment with the turnout in some metropolitan



KALYANI SHANKAR

cities, highlighting the rigid voter apathy in high-tech cities. This underscores the significance of each voter in shaping the election results. CP Joshi, former Chief Minister of Rajasthan, lost an election by one vote. His wife and daughter missed voting while praying for his victory. This shows how even one vote can significantly impact election results. This anecdote emphasises the potential impact of even one vote on the election results. High temperatures in some parts of India may reduce election turnout. However, low turnout can sometimes harm the ruling party, as local issues can sway the outcome.

BJP aims to improve in six Indian States: West Bengal, Odisha, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. However, it could face challenges from regional parties, which have the potential to sway State elections and impact overall results. During a recent rally, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi spoke about the uncertainties in predicting election results. Congress President Mallikharjun Kharge posted a message in Hindi on



THE BJP AIMS TO IMPROVE IN SIX INDIAN STATES: WEST BENGAL, ODISHA, TELANGANA, ANDHRA PRADESH, TAMIL NADU AND KERALA. HOWEVER, IT COULD FACE CHALLENGES FROM REGIONAL PARTIES, WHICH HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO SWAY STATE ELECTIONS AND IMPACT OVERALL RESULTS

X, saying the Prime Minister attacked his friends, indicating that Modi's chair is shaking. SP leader Akhilesh Yadav tweeted that the BJP's condition will worsen after the first two voting phases. The Congress party's strategy primarily concerns social welfare and economic empowerment. This all-encompassing approach aims to address the primary concerns of the voters and has the potential to connect with a vast section of the electorate. It could significantly impact the election results if it garners the voters' support. The Congress Party's challenge is to keep its members united. Since Modi's rise, many politicians, including State leaders, have defected to the BJP. The BJP has given tickets to some of them. How voters treat these turncoats remains to be seen. Internal disputes within Congress are currently a significant concern. Allegations of connections with rival parties raise questions about loyalty. They could affect the party's unity, which could, in turn, impact their performance in the upcoming elections. Therefore, it is crucial to close-

ly monitor any developments within the party to gain a more accurate understanding of their prospects in the polls. Political leaders' connections with rival parties have raised concerns about their loyalty. Between 2016 and 2020, 170 Congress MLAs and 7 Rajya Sabha members switched parties, causing an impact on Indian politics. It has created confusion and doubts about their loyalty. The allegations could influence voters' perception of these leaders and their parties. India's Satta Bazaar predicts the BJP will win between 330 and 335 seats at Re. 1, 350 seats at Rs. 3 and 400 seats at Rs. 12-15. The odds for the NDA to win 400 seats are Rs. 4-5. The predictions reflect the market perception of election outcomes that could impact politics. India's stock benchmarks fell by 1.5% on Tuesday as investors cut their bets, expressing concern that the BJP may not get as many seats as projected. The voters will decide the winner of the election on June 4.

(The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MALIWAL'S ALLEGATIONS

Madam — Apropos the news article "Kissa Kursi Ka: Why Maliwal was thrashed," published on 14 May, this is my response. The unfolding drama surrounding Swati Maliwal's allegations against Arvind Kejriwal's personal assistant paints a troubling picture for the AAP. As a daily reader, it's concerning to witness such internal strife within a political party. The lack of formal complaints and the delayed response from all parties involved only adds to the murkiness of the situation. The fact that senior AAP leaders are already entangled in legal troubles exacerbates the issue, hinting at deeper rifts within the party. The swift condemnation from opposition leaders underscores the gravity of the accusations. Additionally, the involvement of the National Commission for Women (NCW) signifies the broader societal implications of such incidents. It's crucial for authorities to conduct a thorough investigation to ensure justice is served and perpetrators are held accountable. Overall, this episode serves as a stark reminder of the complexities and challenges inherent in the realm of politics and the importance of transparency and accountability in governance.

Avani Chawla | Pune

EMPOWERING MOTHERS

Madam — Apropos the news article "Empowering working mothers financially," published on 13 May, this is my response. Mother's Day is a poignant reminder of the extraordinary women who shape our lives. Yet, amid their selfless dedication, the need for securing their financial future often goes unaddressed. Despite the strides in insurance awareness, women remain underrepresented in safeguarding their loved ones. Whether as working professionals or homemakers, mothers are the backbone of many households, balancing myriad responsibilities with grace. However,

Legal pillars of democracy



Apropos the news article "SC judgments have strengthened democracy," published on 14 May, this is my response. India's journey through elections is a testament to the strength of its democratic framework, fortified by landmark legal rulings. These decisions not only uphold the sanctity of the electoral process but also embody the nation's commitment to fairness, transparency and inclusivity. The fundamental right to vote, upheld in cases like Mohinder Singh Gill v. The Chief Election Commissioner, forms the bedrock

of India's electoral democracy. Judicial interventions, such as those seen in Association for Democratic Reforms v. Union of India, ensure transparency while balancing individual privacy rights.

Inclusive representation, as highlighted in the Indra Sawhney v. Union of India case, underscores the importance of equitable participation, especially for marginalised communities. Concurrently, efficient resolution of electoral disputes, as emphasised in various judgements, safeguards the credibility of the electoral process. Moreover, cases like Mohd. Sattar v. State of Rajasthan reaffirm the principle of universal suffrage, ensuring every citizen's voice resonates in the democratic chorus. These legal pillars not only shape India's electoral landscape but also serve as guiding lights, illuminating the path towards a more robust and inclusive democracy.

Arjun Banerjee | Chandigarh

amidst the daily chaos, ensuring financial protection can be overlooked. Term insurance emerges as a vital tool in providing comprehensive coverage against life's uncertainties. For working mothers, it acts as a safety net, guaranteeing their family's well-being in their absence. Its flexibility allows customisation to meet specific needs, offering peace of mind amidst life's unpredictability. With retirement planning gaining importance, term insurance with maturity benefits becomes crucial. As women embrace diverse roles, securing their financial future becomes imperative. It's time for mothers to prioritise their financial security, ensuring a stable tomorrow for their loved ones.

Sanvi Reddy | Hyderabad

THE SONGSAREK HERITAGE

Madam — Apropos the news article "Vibing to the dance of a 100 drums," published on 12 May, this is my response. Exploring the lesser-known West Garo Hills of Meghalaya unveils a cultural tapestry woven with the

ancient traditions of the Songsarek people. In the face of modernity and religious conversions, their practices stand as guardians of a fading era. The partnership between Royal Enfield and UNESCO emerges as a beacon, spotlighting these intangible treasures. Wangala dances, Chubitchi rituals and matrilineal societal norms narrate stories of resilience and identity. The meticulous documentation not only honours these customs but also amplifies their significance, ensuring their legacy transcends generations. As custodians of heritage, it's our collective duty to cherish and safeguard these cultural jewels nestled amidst the Himalayan foothills. Through respectful engagement and awareness initiatives, we pave the path towards a future where diversity thrives and ancient wisdom finds its rightful place in the modern world.

Vihaan Singh | Ahmedabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Fostering innovation from schools to startups

Early education is essential for shaping future innovators and entrepreneurs so that they can drive the nation towards a bright future

The boundary between science and engineering is so narrow that it is hard to differentiate them. They are two sides of the same coin and they go hand-in-hand. Whereas science explores the fundamental principles governing the universe, engineering focuses on applying scientific knowledge to design and develop solutions that meet specific requirements. So, engineers gather more respect in front of the public, as their output is tangible. Every year, the Govt. of India celebrates National Technology Day on 11th May to commemorate the contributions of Indian scientists, engineers and innovators who act as catalysts for the country's development. This year's National Technology Day was celebrated on the theme "From School to Startups: Igniting Young Minds to Innovate", giving thrust to nurture innovation from the school period onwards. One would doubt the need to promote a startup culture in schools. As the common adage goes, the seeds of character and attitude are sown during one's school life.



When we look at the life histories of great entrepreneurs and scientists, we can see that the spark for doing something special was initiated during their school years. Elon Musk, the founder of companies like SpaceX, Tesla and Neuralink, reportedly sold a video game he created at the age of 12 and later started a web software company while attending the University of Pennsylvania. Mark Zuckerberg, the co-founder of Facebook, started coding in middle school, where he developed a messaging programme called "Zucknet" for his father's dental office. Schoolchildren possess the ability to think freely and come up with crazy ideas. The limitations of reality do not shackle their minds. They are unfettered by the comments made by others

and don't have any preconceived notions about an idea. School students also have an inherent curiosity. The insatiable curiosity drives them to seek new knowledge and experience, fueling their creativity and innovation. The quality of innovation observed in the exhibits at various school science fairs, children's science congresses and IISF's students' science village provides ample proof of this. Some of the innovations displayed by the students in these exhibitions are at par or better than what our adult scientists have achieved in their lifetime. The Department of Science and Technology has instituted INSPIRE - MANAK (Million Minds Augmenting National Aspiration and Knowledge) Awards to support student innovators. MANAK, implemented through the National Innovation Foundation - India (NIF), seeks to inspire students in grades 6 to 10 to pursue their studies. The initiative aims to focus on one million unique ideas/innovations based on scientific principles and have practical applications in soci-

ety. Its goal is to promote a culture of creativity and encourage inventive thinking among schoolchildren. Another premier scientific organisation, the CSIR, has instituted the CIASC (CSIR Innovation Award for Schoolchildren) to harness schoolchildren's creative and innovative spirit. Though initiatives like Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs) by the Government of India foster curiosity, creativity and imagination in young minds, most of our schools still put more stress on the traditional mode of rote learning. Rote memorisation and standardised testing prioritise conformity over creativity, relegating innovation to the sidelines. Furthermore, the fear of failure and the pressure to excel academically discourage risk-taking and experimentation. As a result, many children are discouraged from pursuing their innovative impulses, losing their untapped potential.

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



BIJU DHARMAPALAN



FIRST COLUMN

THE ROLE OF MEDITATION IN SLEEP

Meditate every night for a relaxed mind and better sleep



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

A recent newspaper article caught everyone's attention, featuring an elderly woman who initiated a 'Sleep Service Center' for those struggling to find restful sleep. This compassionate woman would just engage in conversation with the person and sing a lullaby offering comfort akin to a mother lulling her child to sleep. The result? Clients emerged refreshed and rejuvenated after just half an hour of her soothing sessions. Isn't it astonishing that we now seek sleep therapists for what should come naturally? What does this say about our society? If animals and birds can sleep peacefully, why can't humans enjoy this innate gift of carefree slumber?

Sleep is the best form of relaxation, akin to meditation, that's why those who sleep well always keep well & feel well. It's a fact that if we get sound sleep during the night, we get up fresh being more active & feeling more energetic. However, in today's world getting sound sleep has become a rare occasion because today millions of people suffer from sleep disorders like sleep apnea, insomnia, restless leg syndrome, narcolepsy etc. In addition, the number of those who get a very broken, fitful sleep would be many times more. Sadly, many of these individuals resort to sleeping pills and drugs which ultimately make the problem worse. Knowing that tranquilisers are usually prescribed for insomnia and such other disorders as are due to anxiety and mental depression etc., one would say: 'Where are we heading?'



Medical science has acknowledged several causes that lead to sleep disorders. The biggest hindrance of all that contributes to sleeplessness is bad mental health. We must understand that not being able to have restful sleep is not only in itself an unhealthy condition but also causes or aggravates many other diseases. For example, it is now recognised that sleep disturbance is one of the factors that lead to coronary heart disease. But most of us would agree subconsciously that tranquilisers are not the answer to the question of sleep disturbance.

They now know well that these drugs represent a purely symptomatic approach, ignoring the underlying problems that cause these conditions. A British medical journal recently published a report about experiments that have shown that sympathy can work well in cases of sleep disorders. It further said that in one trial, the doctors, instead of giving tranquilisers as they would have normally given, spent some time with the patients and talked with them in an open atmosphere. They just had a brief chat with them, with sympathy and also gave them a few words of advice and explained to them why they had those conditions. The results of these informal chats were astounding and the follow-up assessment showed that with this replacement of allopathy by sympathy, depression in those patients dropped from a level of 80 per cent to 40 per cent. The other fact being realised is that mental depression, anxiety, etc. are mainly due to certain lifestyles, behavioural patterns and personality traits. It was also felt that the pattern of behaviour, designated as type 'A' which is characterised by competitiveness, impatience, etc., predisposes a person to coronary diseases, hypertension, etc. As a result of these new findings, doctors all over the world are now increasingly advising such patients to practise meditation and to have proper dietary patterns. It's a medically proven fact that mental ill health adversely affects one's eating habits, which in turn, drastically influences our sleep and health. Under such a medical condition, proper meditation techniques can be of great help if practised regularly. In the hustle and bustle of living a modern life, we tend to forget that it is the quality of life that matters the most & not the quantity. Hence if we jeopardise our sleep for silly reasons, we are knowingly undermining our health.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)

Stopping thieving through DBT

A lot of pilfering from fertiliser subsidies is happening due to policy flaws. This can be curbed if only the subsidy is given under Direct Benefit Transfer



UTTAM GUPTA



On January 22, 2019, addressing NRIs and Indian-origin people at the inauguration of the 15th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention in Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh), Prime Minister Narendra Modi recalled what Rajiv Gandhi had stated "Of the funds the Central Government sends, only 15 per cent of that reaches the people. If one rupee is sent from Delhi, only 15 paise reaches the villages, 85 paise disappear. Even as the country's middle class kept giving tax honestly, this 'loot' of 85 per cent also continued". Modi added "I also want to tell you today's truth as well. We used technology to end this loot of 85 per cent completely". Elaborating on this theme, he explained: "In the last four-and-a-half years, about Rs 580,000 crore, our Government, through various schemes viz. for a home, for education, for scholarship, for gas cylinder and to other such ends etc directly gives to the people, transferring it in their bank accounts. Now, just consider that if the country was being run through the old system, then even today from this Rs 580,000 crore, about Rs 450,000 crore would have disappeared or leaked. If we would not have brought a change in the system then this amount would have been looted like the former Prime Minister had accepted..." Modi said.

That was before the 2019 General Elections. Today, when the 2024 General Elections are underway, the same discourse reverberates in the air even as the PM cites a figure that is nearly seven times. The amount spent on welfare schemes during the last ten years under the Modi - regime has gone up to a gargantuan of around Rs 4000,000 crore. Had the old system (read: before 2014) continued, the amount disappearing from the distribution pipe would have been Rs 3400,000 crore (4000,000x0.85).

What do the facts say? The Union Government executes a plethora of welfare programs aimed at providing basic and necessary amenities and upliftment of the most disadvantaged members of society. It does so mainly through "Central Schemes" (CS) which are fully funded and implemented by it. A total of 740 CS schemes are currently under implementation. During FY2022-23, the CS

spending was Rs 1208,000 crore. In addition, there are "Centrally Sponsored Schemes" (CSS) designed to supplement the efforts of the States in achieving various socioeconomic goals and implementing national priorities. These are funded by the central Government and the States in varying proportions viz. 90:10, 60:40, 50:50 and so on depending on the scheme. These schemes are implemented by the States. During FY2022-23, the spending on a total of 50 CSSs was Rs 412,000 crore. Put together, the total expenditure of the Central Government on CS and CSS schemes during the year was Rs 1620,000 crore.

Now, if we were to apply the 85 per cent magic formula dished out by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the amount pilfered while on the way to the beneficiaries would have been Rs 1377,000 crore. Only Rs 243,000 crore would have reached. Under the Modi - model, the entire Rs 1620,000 crore has been reached; courtesy of, the use of technology to transfer the money to their bank accounts.

How does it work?

Under its flagship Digital India program, the Modi - Government has been implementing what is popularly known as DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer) for transferring the cash benefits and subsidies 'directly' to the Aadhaar-linked bank accounts of individual eligible beneficiaries. Launched by the erstwhile UPA - Government on January 1, 2013, its use has picked up pace under Modi since January 2015. As of date, DBT is used in 314 CS schemes.

The JAM trinity (Jan Dhan, Aadhar, Mobile) is a DBT enabler the 'mover and shaker' behind its successful implementation. Today, there are around 520 million Jan Dhan Accounts, more than 1.39 billion Aadhar cards and 1.15 billion mobile connections. With this, the money can be 'instantaneously'

transferred at the click of a mouse to tens of millions of beneficiaries spread all over the country. The DBT is free from the delays corruption and associated pilferage that was germane to the earlier arrangements under which there was human intervention, a host of intermediaries/mediators and the money was flowing through multiple layers in administrative offices.

To improve transparency, the Government has put in place the Central Plan Scheme Monitoring System (CPSMS) which ensures that all transfers to bank accounts are made strictly as per the list of eligible beneficiaries. The persons included in the list are authenticated with the use of an Aadhaar card that contains their biometric details thus removing any scope for fictitious claimants. The provision for such checks and balances has helped hugely in preventing bogus claims. As per the latest update on the DBT portal, the total savings by way of plugging leakages in the schemes due to the implementation of DBT during FY2022-23 was Rs 63,000 crore.

However, if we look at the food subsidy (the excess of the cost of procurement, handling and distribution of food over the price paid by the beneficiary/consumer), during FY2022-23, the Government was able to save over Rs 50,000 crore which works out to around 18 per cent in the total food subsidy bill of Rs 272,000 crore. This was made possible because of the "deletion of over 50 million duplicate and fake/non-existent Ration Cards".

Likewise, under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi or PM-KISAN (, the Union Government provides income support of Rs 6,000 a year to farmers with a valid enrolment, paid in three equal cash transfers of Rs 2,000 every four months; the money is credited to their account via the DBT mode),

it was able to save over Rs 10,000 crore during FY2022-23. This is about 17 per cent of the total payment of Rs. 58,000 crores during the year. The savings were due to the deletion of over 21 million ineligible beneficiaries.

According to the DBT portal, the Government has been able to generate a cumulative saving of Rs 348,000 crore by plugging leakages since the inception of the DBT. Of this, more than half or Rs 185,000 crore are savings in the distribution of food subsidies alone.

Notwithstanding the above, there remains a huge untapped potential for garnering more savings. This is because in the initial years, neither States used Aadhaar for validation nor the Centre made it compulsory even as the latter's efforts in this regard were hamstrung due to protracted litigation in the top court. In such circumstances, a large number of 'ineligible' persons making their way to the beneficiary list was inevitable. While the Government has got rid of them in some schemes like PM-KISAN, it has a long way to go.

Meanwhile, Modi also needs to focus on areas where technology intervention alone won't help. For instance, in fertilisers, the Government asks manufacturers to sell fertiliser at a low price to farmers. The excess of the cost of supply over it is claimed by the latter from the former as a subsidy. Since the subsidy is embodied in the MRP (albeit low), the subsidised fertiliser product must reach the farmer and be used only for growing the crop. If it doesn't reach, then the benefit of subsidy is enjoyed by the person who grabs it. A lot of pilferage from fertiliser subsidies is happening due to this flaw in policy. This can be curbed if only the subsidy is given 'directly' to the farmers under DBT.

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



UNDER ITS FLAGSHIP DIGITAL INDIA PROGRAMME, THE MODI - GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTING WHAT IS POPULARLY KNOWN AS DIRECT BENEFIT TRANSFER FOR TRANSFERRING CASH BENEFITS AND SUBSIDIES 'DIRECTLY' TO THE AADHAAR-LINKED BANK ACCOUNTS OF INDIVIDUAL ELIGIBLE BENEFICIARIES

Filmmakers must calibrate branding of film festivals

In the ever-evolving world of branding, where impressions and connections are paramount, film festivals emerge as vibrant stages

The success of any branding exercise is the impact & impression it creates on the target audience, visibility of products, recall value and deep connection with the audiences cutting across campaigns, launches, events and the wide array of trends and styles. In a similar vein, it is important to understand the impact of the branding idea or strategy on a visible platform, where eyeballs determine the yardstick of success.

Film festivals today are the perfect ecosystem to understand the value, intensity and impact of branding on such a glamorous circuit and ecosystem. In the domain of cinema, where creativity meets commerce, film festivals serve as vibrant hubs where storytelling converges with culture,



CHAITANYA K PRASAD

artistry intertwines with industry and communities bond around a shared love for the silver screen. Beyond the showcases of cinematic aptitude, these festivals have evolved into powerful brands, each with its own distinct identity and allure. From the glitz of Cannes to the heritage of the Venice Film Festival and from the cosmopolitan charm of Berlinale to the intellectual

intricacies of the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and the grandeur of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI), the branding strategies of these festivals offer a fascinating glimpse into the intersection of culture, economics and politics.

Film festivals portray glamour, charisma, fashion and celebrity quotient that creates a unique buzz with audiences Cannes, Berlin, IFFI and Toronto, over the years have developed a unique brand identity that has crafted and shaped the storytelling and visibility narrative in the branding space. Festivals are known for their innovative burst disruptive activities that lead to unique "out of the box Branding." The hustle and bustle of any film festival cre-

ate a unique integral link and the relationship between arc lights that define cinema and colours, shades and images that constitute branding. A study of the branding quotient across film festivals portrays a reflection of the shifting strands of ideas, concepts & evaluation of branding across the festival space. The 4Cs = Creativity, Culture, Content and Consistency outline the integral link between branding and the festival circuit. It is a perfect convergence of creative minds, storytellers, narrators and inspirational Talking heads. Every festival has defining branding moments, which leave an imprint on the minds of audiences and a lasting impression on prospective consumers and supporters of cinematic excel-

lence. Opportunities at festivals are limitless. Cannes, Berlin, IFFI & Toronto integrate branding platforms and ideas, with their filming culture leanings, narrator's values and storytelling nuggets. At these festivals branding as a medium has reinforced the soft power dynamics & equitations leading to better visibility, product value, loaded positive perception and enhanced outreach and networking opportunities. An idea by technology brands brings out another level of product display. Interactive experience and marketing outreach. Each of the prominent festivals in their editions has reinforced the image, identity, influence, interaction and interface of brands with tech tools cross-

cutting alongside thereby positioning a unique product identity & space at the venues. Each major film festival, whether it's Cannes, TIFF, Venice, Berlinale, or IFFI, meticulously builds a blueprint for its branding elements to convey its individuality and values.

Cannes, renowned for its glamour, incorporates the illustration of the Palme d'Or trophy and celebrities on the red carpet, alongside a sophisticated logo design often featuring the Cannes coastline. The festival's colour palette of black, gold and red represents poise, prestige and excitement. Meanwhile, TIFF embraces diversity with dynamic iconography displaying film reels, diverse viewers and Toronto landmarks, complemented by

vibrant shades like red, blue and yellow that reflect energy, creativity and inclusivity. Venice Film Festival, with its rich heritage, opts for classical depictions of Venetian landmarks such as the Rialto Bridge or St. Mark's Square, accompanied by a refined logo design that captures the essence of Venice's timeless beauty. IFFI celebrates Indian cinema with displays of aesthetic motifs and sceneries, traditional logo design and vivid hues of orange, red and gold, beside serene blues and greens that capture India's cultural richness. Through these branding elements, each festival communicates its beliefs, attracts audiences worldwide and reinforces its significance within the global film industry.

For filmmakers, the choice of which festival to submit their work to often depends not only on the esteem and reputation of the event but also on its alignment with their artistic vision and career goals. A filmmaker seeking international recognition may gravitate towards Cannes or Berlinale, while those championing a wide and diverse range of filmography might find a home at Venice or TIFF. In this way, the branding of film festivals becomes a crucial factor in shaping the trajectory of filmmakers' careers and the cultural nuances of movies as a whole.

(The writer was addl. DG, DFF & director IFFI. Views are personal. Inputs by Zoya Ahmed & Vaishnavie Srinivasan)

Ex-Indian Army officer with UN killed in Gaza

First international casualty since Israel-Hamas conflict

PTI ■ UNITED NATIONS

A former Indian Army officer working with the United Nations was killed in Gaza when the vehicle he was travelling in came under attack in strife-torn Rafah, becoming the "first international casualty" for the world body since the Israel-Hamas conflict started last year.

The United Nations has called for a full investigation while Israel has ordered a separate investigation into the attack. Col Waibhav Anil Kale, 46, who took premature retirement from the Indian Army in 2022, joined the UN as a Security Coordination Officer in the United Nations Department of Safety and Security (DSS) two months ago, officials in New Delhi said on Tuesday.

Kale, who had served with the 11 Jammu & Kashmir Rifles, was travelling along with

another DSS staffer to the European Hospital in Rafah when their UN vehicle was struck on Monday morning. The other person, not identified, was seriously injured.

According to Kale's LinkedIn profile, he had joined the Indian Army in April 2004 and had also served as Contingent Chief Security Officer with the United Nations between 2009 and 2010. He did his B.A. from the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi and had degrees in Behavioral Science and International Humanitarian Law and had studied at, among other institutions, the Indian Institute of Management at Lucknow and Indore.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was "deeply saddened to learn of the death of a United Nations Department of Safety and Security (DSS) staff member and injury to another DSS



staffer." A statement by Farhan Haq, Deputy Spokesman for the Secretary-General, said that Guterres condemned all attacks on UN personnel and called for a full investigation. Guterres sent his condolences to the family of the fallen staff member.

"With the conflict in Gaza continuing to take a heavy toll — not only on civilians but also on humanitarian workers — the Secretary-General reiterates his urgent appeal for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and for the release of all hostages," the statement added. In a post on X, Guterres said

the UN vehicle was struck in Gaza, "killing one of our colleagues & injuring another" and said, more than 190 UN staff have been killed in Gaza. Responding to questions on the incident during a press briefing, Haq said at this point, "We are in the process of informing the relevant governments and the relevant family members."

He added that they were "international staff" and confirmed that "this is, in fact, the first international UN casualty."

While there have been international casualties involving workers for the World Central Kitchen in Gaza, Haq said that "of UN staff, I believe I've not been previously aware of an international casualty."

Haq added that the vehicle was headed to the hospital "as part of their regular work. They go to different locations to assess security conditions. And this was the European hospital in Rafah."

When asked for details about how their vehicle was struck, Haq said "We're still accumu-

lating details. We expect to get reports, including from the relevant authorities." He added that close to 190 UN personnel have been killed in Gaza since October 7, "most of them national staff of the UN Relief and Works Agency, UNRWA." Haq added that the UN is "going to set up measures for accountability. A lot of that... ultimately requires an end to the conflict so that we can work these out, but we will be working with the authorities on the ground to get restitution for all of those who have been killed."

Haq said he did not have the full details of whether the vehicle that was struck was part of a large convoy. "I believe it was in a convoy that was moving, and this was the DSS vehicle that was hit." BBC reported that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) confirmed it had received a report from the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) that said two of its workers were injured in the Rafah area — in southern Gaza — on Monday.

The IDF added that the incident was under review, it said. Director-General of the World Health Organization Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a post on X, "We are devastated to learn about the death" of a UN humanitarian worker and injury of another in Gaza. "Too many civilian and humanitarian lives have paid the price for this war. Ceasefire and work towards peace," the WHO chief said.

In April, seven members of the World Central Kitchen were killed in an IDF strike in Gaza. One of those killed in the airstrike was Zomi Frankcom, an Australian of Indian descent, according to reports.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that between October 7, 2023, and May 12, 2024, at least 35,091 Palestinians have been killed and 78,827 injured in Gaza.

More than 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals, including 33 children, were killed in Israel, the vast majority on October 7, when Hamas attacked Israel.

Indonesian rescuers search through rubble after floods kill 50

Tanah Datar (AP): Rescuers on Tuesday searched in rivers and the rubble of devastated villages for bodies, and whenever possible, survivors of flash floods that hit Indonesia's Sumatra Island over the weekend. Monsoon rains and a landslide of mud and cold lava from Mount Marapi caused rivers to breach their banks. The deluge tore through mountainside villages in four districts in West Sumatra province just before midnight Saturday.

The floods swept away people and 79 homes and submerged hundreds of houses and buildings, forcing more than 3,300 residents to flee to temporary government shelters. National Disaster Management Agency spokesperson Abdul Muhari said.

Muhari said 50 bodies had been pulled from mud and rivers by Tuesday, mostly in worst-hit Agam and Tanah

Datar districts, while rescuers are searching for 27 people who are reportedly missing. Television reports showed rescue personnel using jackhammers, circular saws, farm tools and sometimes their bare hands, digging desperately in Agam district where roads were transformed into murky brown rivers and villages covered by thick mud, rocks, and uprooted trees.

Scores of rescue personnel were searching through a river around the Anai Valley Waterfall area in Tanah Datar district where tons of mud, rocks and trees were left from flash floods.

Rescuers were focused on finding four people from a group of seven that were swept away with their cars. Three other bodies were pulled out on Monday, said Abdul Malik, who heads the Search and Rescue Office in Padang, the provincial capital.

Palestinians mark 76 years of dispossession as even larger catastrophe unfolds in Gaza

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Palestinians on Wednesday will mark the 76th year of their mass expulsion from what is now Israel, an event that is at the core of their national struggle. But in many ways, that experience pales in comparison to the calamity now unfolding in Gaza.

Palestinians refer to it as the "Nakba," Arabic for "catastrophe." Some 700,000 Palestinians — a majority of the prewar population — fled or were driven from their homes before and during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war that followed Israel's establishment.

After the war, Israel refused to allow them to return because it would have resulted in a Palestinian majority within its borders. Instead, they became a seemingly permanent refugee community that now numbers some 6 million, with most living in slum-like urban refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

In Gaza, the refugees and their

descendants make up around three-quarters of the population.

Israel's rejection of what Palestinians say is their right of return has been a core grievance in the conflict and was one of the thorniest issues in peace talks that last collapsed 15 years ago. The refugee camps have always been the main bastions of Palestinian militancy. Now, many Palestinians fear a repeat of their painful history on an even more cataclysmic scale.

All across Gaza, Palestinians in recent days have been loading up cars and donkey carts or setting out on foot to already overcrowded tent camps as Israel expands its offensive. The images from several rounds of mass evacuations throughout the seven-month war are strikingly similar to black-and-white photographs from 1948. Mustafa al-Gazzar, now 81, still recalls his family's months-long flight from their village in what is now central Israel to the southern city of Rafah, when he was 5. At one point they were

bombed from the air, at another, they dug holes under a tree to sleep in for warmth.

Al-Gazzar, now a great-grandfather, was forced to flee again over the weekend, this time to a tent in Muwasi, a barren coastal area where some 450,000 Palestinians live in a squalid camp. He says the conditions are worse than in 1948, when the UN agency for Palestinian refugees was able to regularly provide food and other essentials.

"My hope in 1948 was to return, but my hope today is to survive," he said. "I live in such fear," he added, breaking into tears. "I cannot provide for my children and grandchildren."

The war in Gaza, which was triggered by Hamas' October 7 attack into Israel, has killed over 35,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, making it by far the deadliest round of fighting in the history of the conflict. The initial Hamas attack killed some 1,200 Israelis.

The war has forced some 1.7

million Palestinians — around three quarters of the territory's population — to flee their homes, often multiple times. That is well over twice the number that fled before and during the 1948 war.

Israel has sealed its border. Egypt has only allowed a small number of Palestinians to leave, in part because it fears a mass influx of Palestinians could generate another long-term refugee crisis.

The international community is strongly opposed to any mass expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza — an idea embraced by far-right members of the Israeli government, who refer to it as "voluntary emigration." Israel has long called for the refugees of 1948 to be absorbed into host countries, saying that calls for their return are unrealistic and would endanger its existence as a Jewish-majority state. It points to the hundreds of thousands of Jews who came to Israel from Arab countries during the turmoil following its establishment, though few of them want to return.

Georgian parliament approves divisive 'foreign influence' bill

AP ■ TBILISI

The Georgian parliament on Tuesday approved in the third and final reading a divisive bill that sparked weeks of mass protests, with critics seeing it as a threat to democratic freedoms and the country's aspirations to join the European Union.

The bill requires media and nongovernmental organizations and other nonprofits to register as "pursuing the interests of a foreign power" if they receive more than 20 per cent of their funding from abroad. 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.

The opposition has denounced the bill as "the Russian law," because Moscow uses similar legislation to crack down on independent news media, nonprofits and activists critical of the Kremlin. Mass protests against the law in recent weeks have swept the South Caucasus



Demonstrators attend an opposition protest against "the Russian law" near the Parliament building in the centre of Tbilisi, Georgia, on Tuesday. AP/PTI

nation of 3.7 million. European Council President Charles Michel on Tuesday spoke of Georgia in Copenhagen, at a conference on democracy, and said that "if they want to join the EU, they have to respect the fundamental principles of the rule of law and the democratic principles."

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.

Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, who is increasingly at odds with the governing party, has vowed to veto the law, but Georgian Dream has a majority sufficient to override a presidential veto.

2 French officers killed, 3 injured in convoy attack

Paris (AP): Two French prison officers were killed and three others seriously injured when their prison convoy was attacked Tuesday in Normandy, officials said. The attack occurred as the convoy was returning to Evreux jail after a court hearing in Rouen, according to French outlet BFMTV.

Justice Minister Eric Dupond-Moretti said he would join a crisis unit to address the emergency.

"All means are being used to find these criminals. On my instructions, several hundred police officers and gendarmes were mobilized," Darmanin posted on X. He expressed condolences to the victims' families and agents of the Ministry of Justice.

French media reported that a prisoner being transported in the van may have escaped with the assailants.

The incident has prompted a significant law enforcement operation in the northwestern region of France as authorities worked to secure the area and apprehend the assailants.

Aussie army whistleblower sent to jail

Melbourne (AP): An Australian judge sentenced a former army lawyer to almost six years in prison on Tuesday for leaking to the media classified information that exposed allegations of Australian war crimes in Afghanistan.

David McBride, 60, was sentenced in a court in the capital, Canberra, to five years and eight months in prison after pleading guilty to three charges including theft and sharing with members of the press documents classified as secret. He had faced a potential life sentence. Justice David Mossop ordered McBride to serve 27 months in prison before he can be considered for release on parole. Rights advocates argue that McBride's conviction and sentencing before any alleged war criminal he helped expose reflected a lack of whistleblower protections in Australia. McBride's lawyer Mark Davis said he planned to file an appeal against the severity of the sentence.

Biden hiking tariffs on Chinese EVs, solar cells, steel, aluminum

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration announced plans to slap new tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, advanced batteries, solar cells, steel, aluminum and medical equipment — an election year move that's likely to increase friction between the world's two largest economies.

The tariffs come in the middle of a heated campaign between President Joe Biden and his Republican predecessor, Donald Trump, in which both candidates are vying to show who's tougher on China. The tariffs are unlikely to have much of an inflationary impact because of how they're structured. Administration officials said they think the tariffs won't escalate tensions with China, yet they expect China will explore ways to respond to the new taxes on its products. It's uncertain what the long-term impact on prices could be if the tariffs contribute to a wider trade dispute.

The tariffs are to be phased in



over the next three years, with those that take effect in 2024 covering EVs, solar cells, syringes, needles, steel and aluminum and more. There are currently very few EVs from China in the US, but officials worry low-priced models made possible by Chinese government subsidies could soon start flooding the U.S. market. Chinese firms can sell EVs for as little as USD 12,000. Their solar cell plants and steel and aluminum mills have enough capacity to meet much of the world's demand, with Chinese officials arguing their produc-

tion keeps prices low and would aid a transition to the green economy.

Lael Brainard, director of the White House National Economic Council, said the tariffs will raise the cost of select Chinese goods and help thwart Beijing's efforts to dominate the market for emerging technologies in ways that pose risks to US national security and economic stability.

"China is simply too big to play by its own rules," Brainard told reporters on a Monday call previewing the announcement. Administration officials have stressed the decision on tariffs was made independently of November's presidential election. But Brainard noted in her remarks the tariffs would help workers in Pennsylvania and Michigan, two of the battleground states that will decide who wins the election.

Under the findings of a four-year review on trade with China, the tax rate on imported Chinese EVs will rise to 102.5 per cent this year, up from total levels of 27.5 per

cent. The review was undertaken under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, which allows the government to retaliate against trade practices deemed unfair or in violation of global standards.

Under the 301 guidelines, the tariff rate is to double to 50 per cent on solar cell imports this year. Tariffs on certain Chinese steel and aluminum products will climb to 25 per cent this year. Computer chip tariffs will double to 50 per cent by 2025.

For lithium-ion EV batteries, tariffs will rise from 7.5 per cent to 25 per cent this year. But for non-EV batteries of the same type, the tariff increase will be implemented in 2026. There are also higher tariffs on ship-to-shore cranes, critical minerals and medical products.

The new tariffs, at least initially, are largely symbolic since they will apply to only about USD 18 billion in imports. A new analysis by Oxford Economics estimates the tariffs will have a barely noticeable

impact on inflation by pushing up inflation by just 0.01 per cent.

The Chinese foreign ministry lashed out over the US move. A ministry spokesperson, Wang Wenbin, said the US is, under the banner of overcapacity, suppressing the advanced industries of other countries, carrying out protectionism with the excuse of free competition, and trampling on the principles of a market economy and international economic and trade rules.

"It's a naked act of bullying," Wang said.

He said China's rapid growth in new-energy areas such as EVs, lithium batteries and photovoltaics is based on technological innovation, complete supply chain, sufficient market competition, and not so-called "subsidies."

The Chinese economy has been slowed by the collapse of the country's real estate market and past coronavirus pandemic lockdowns, prompting Chinese President Xi Jinping to try to jumpstart growth by

ramping up production of EVs and other products, making more than the Chinese market can absorb.

This strategy further exacerbates tensions with a US government that claims it's determined to strengthen its own manufacturing to compete with China, yet avoid a larger conflict.

"China's factory-led recovery and weak consumption growth, which are translating into excess capacity and an aggressive search for foreign markets, in tandem with the looming US election season add up to a perfect recipe for escalating US trade frictions with China," said Eswar Prasad, professor of trade policy at Cornell University.

The Europeans are worried, too. The EU launched an investigation last fall into Chinese subsidies and could impose an import tax on Chinese EVs.

After Xi's visit to France last week, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen warned that government-sub-

sided Chinese EVs and steel "are flooding the European market" and said, "The world cannot absorb China's surplus production."

Biden's Democratic administration views China with subsidies of its own manufacturing as trying to globally control the EV and clean-energy sectors, whereas it says its own industrial support is geared toward ensuring domestic supplies to help meet US demand.

"We do not seek to have global domination of manufacturing in these sectors, but we believe because these are strategic industries and for the sake of resilience of our supply chains, that we want to make sure that we have healthy and active firms," Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said. The tensions go far beyond a trade dispute to deeper questions about who leads the world economy as a seemingly indispensable nation. China's policies could make the world more dependent on its factories, possibly giving it greater leverage in geopolitics.

EU agrees on a new migration pact

AP ■ BRUSSELS

European Union nations endorsed sweeping reforms to the bloc's failed asylum system on Tuesday as campaigning for Europe-wide elections next month gathers pace, with migration expected to be an important issue.

EU government ministers approved 10 legislative parts of The New Pact on Migration and Asylum. It lays out rules for the 27 member countries to handle people trying to enter without authorisation, from how to screen them to establish whether they qualify for protection to deporting them if they're not allowed to stay.

Hungary and Poland, which have long opposed any obligation for countries to host

migrants or pay for their upkeep, voted against the package but were unable to block it. Mainstream political parties believe the pact resolves the issues that have divided member nations since well over 1 million migrants swept into Europe in 2015, most fleeing war in Syria and Iraq. They hope the system will starve the far right of vote-winning oxygen in the June 6-9 elections.

However, the vast reform package will only enter force in 2026, bringing no immediate fix to an issue that has fuelled one of the EU's biggest political crises, dividing nations over who should take responsibility for migrants when they arrive and whether other countries should be obligated to help. Critics say the pact will let

nations detain migrants at borders and fingerprint children. They say it's aimed at keeping people out and infringing on their right to claim asylum. Many fear it will result in more unscrupulous deals with poorer countries that people leave or cross to get to Europe.

Europe's asylum laws have not been updated for about two decades. The system frayed and then fell apart in 2015. It was based on the premise that migrants should be processed, given asylum or deported in the country they first enter. Greece, Italy and Malta were left to shoulder most of the financial burden and deal with public discontent. Since then, the ID-check-free zone known as the Schengen Area has expanded to 27 countries, 23 of them EU members. It means

that more than 400 million Europeans and visitors, including refugees, are able to move without showing travel documents.

Some 3.5 million migrants arrived legally in Europe in 2023. Around 1 million others were on EU territory without permission. Of the latter, most were people who entered normally via airports and ports with visas but didn't go home when they expired. The pact applies to the remaining minority, estimated at around 300,000 migrants last year. They are people caught crossing an external EU border without permission, such as those reaching the shores of Greece, Italy or Spain via the Mediterranean Sea or Atlantic Ocean on boats provided by smugglers.

Golgappas makes frequent entries into WH menu

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Golgappa, pani puri or puchka is making frequent entry into the White House receptions with guests being served with this mouth-watering popular Indian street food.

In the last year, it has been served at least a couple of times, the latest being the Rose Garden reception on Monday hosted by President Joe Biden to celebrate the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month.

The guests included scores of Asian-Americans and several Indian-Americans, including US Surgeon General Dr Vivek Murthy who played an important role in the fight against COVID-19. So far, only samosas used to appear on the



White House receptions menu. However, golgappas now appear to be catching up with the samosas fast.

"Last year when I was here, there were golgappas/pani puri. This year too, I was looking for them and then suddenly one of the servers brought in the pani puri golgappa. That was amazing. The taste was dingy and a little spicy. Perfect!" communi-

ty leader Ajay Jain Bhutoria told PTI after attending the AANHPI reception in the Rose Garden of the White House on Monday evening. A curious Bhutoria met White House executive chef Cristeta Comerford on the grounds of the White House and asked her about the golgappa. "I asked her, did you make the golgappas-in-house? She said, yes, we made everything in the White House," he said.

There was another Indian item 'Khoya' on the White House menu at the reception, Bhutoria said. "It was sweet and made of khoya and they called it khoya. That was wonderful. It is good to see in the AANHPI heritage month celebration, representation of all the Asian American communities, food and delicacies, and especially

for Indian-American golgappa and khoya." Bhutoria said in response to a question.

Over the last few years, golgappa is increasingly becoming popular in the US because of its mouth-watering taste. "A lot of US administration officials, whether the people from the State Department or the White House, have travelled to India many times. I'm sure the counterparts over there say out of all the street foods, you need to try golgappa. I'm sure they have stopped somewhere, taken them on the roadside or whichever of the five-star hotels. After they tested it out, they said, oh, we must serve this in the White House," Bhutoria said.

"That's where we have seen golgappas, during the Diwali party in the State Department.

Blinken: US arms to aid Ukraine amid new Russian offensive

AP ■ KYIV

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday that American military aid on its way to Ukraine will make a "real difference" on the battlefield, as the top diplomat made an unannounced visit to reassure an ally facing a fierce new Russian offensive. In increasingly intense attacks along the northeastern border in recent days, Moscow's troops have captured around 100 to 125 square kilometres (about 40 to 50 square miles) of territory that includes at least seven villages, according to open source monitoring analysts. Though most of those villages were already depopulated, thousands of civilians in the area have fled the fighting. Analysts have called this moment one of the most dangerous for Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 — and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy asked Tuesday for more air defence systems to protect civilians under Russian



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (left) shakes hands with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba (right) in Kyiv, Ukraine, on Tuesday. Blinken is on a two-day state visit to discuss with his close friend and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping the future course of their strategic alliance amid mounting pressure on Beijing to scale down its support to Moscow's continuing war in Ukraine.

sets aside USD 60 billion in aid for Ukraine, much of which will go toward replenishing badly depleted artillery and air defense systems. Some of that "is now on the way," Blinken said, and some has already arrived in Ukraine. Moscow's renewed offensive in the northeastern region of Kharkiv is the most significant border incursion since the early days of the war — and comes after months when the roughly 1,000-kilometre (620-mile) front line barely budged. More than 7,500 civilians have been evacuated from the area, according to authorities. The Kremlin's forces are also expanding their push to the northern border regions of Sumy and Chernihiv, Ukrainian officials say, and Kyiv's outgunned and outnumbered soldiers are struggling to hold them back. Troops fought street to street on the outskirts of Vovchansk, which is among the largest towns in the Kharkiv area, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said on national television.

Two civilians were killed in Russian shelling Tuesday, he said. The UN human rights office said the battles are taking a heavy toll. "We are deeply concerned at the plight of civilians in Ukraine," Liz Throssell, spokeswoman for the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said in Geneva. "In the Kharkiv region, the situation is dire." Zelenskyy thanked Blinken for the US aid — but added that more is necessary, including two Patriot air defense systems that are urgently needed to protect Kharkiv. "The people are under attack: civilians, warriors, everybody. They're under Russian missiles," he said. Artillery, air defence interceptors and long-range ballistic missiles have already been delivered, some of them already to the front lines, said a senior US official travelling with the secretary on an overnight train from Poland who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity ahead

of Blinken's meetings. Ahead of the trip, US officials noted that since President Joe Biden signed the aid package late last month, the administration has already announced USD 1.4 billion in short-term military assistance and USD 6 billion in longer-term support. The administration is "trying to really accelerate the tempo" of US weapon shipments, said national security adviser Jake Sullivan. But delays in US assistance, particularly since the Israel-Hamas war began and has preoccupied top administration officials, have triggered deep concerns in Kyiv and Europe. Blinken, for example, has visited the Middle East seven times since the Gaza conflict began in October. His last trip to Kyiv was in September. On his fourth trip to Kyiv since Russian troops rolled over the border, Blinken emphasized the United States' support for Ukraine's independence and eventual recovery, according to

spokesperson Matthew Miller. The US diplomat and the Ukrainian president also discussed long-term security arrangements and Ukraine's economic welfare. Blinken was due to give a speech later Tuesday extolling Ukraine's "strategic successes" in the war. It is intended to complement a Blinken address last year in Helsinki, Finland, deriding Putin for Moscow's strategic failures in launching the war. Since the Helsinki speech, however, Russia has intensified its attacks, most noticeably as the US House of Representatives sat on the aid package for months without action, forcing a suspension in the provision of most US assistance. Those attacks have increased in recent weeks as Russia has sought to take advantage of Ukrainian shortages in manpower and weapons while the new assistance is in transit. Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin plans to make a two-day state visit to China this week, the Chinese Foreign Ministry

said. Beijing has backed Moscow politically in the war and has sent machine tools, electronics and other items seen as contributing to the Russian war effort, without actually exporting weaponry. "A strong, successful, thriving, free Ukraine is the best possible rebuke to Putin and the best possible guarantor for your future," Blinken told Zelenskyy in Kyiv. The senior US official said despite some recent setbacks, Ukraine could still claim significant victories. Those include reclaiming some 50 per cent of the territory Russian forces took in the early months of the war, boosting its economic standing and improving transportation and trade links, not least through military successes in the Black Sea. The official acknowledged that Ukraine faces "a tough fight" and is "under tremendous pressure" but argued that Ukrainians "will become increasingly more confident" as the new US and other Western assistance begins to arrive.

Putin to discuss future strategies during China visit

PTI ■ MOSCOW/BEIJING

Days after being sworn in for a fifth term, Russian President Vladimir Putin will travel to China on Thursday on a two-day state visit to discuss with his close friend and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping the future course of their strategic alliance amid mounting pressure on Beijing to scale down its support to Moscow's continuing war in Ukraine. At the invitation of Xi, Putin will pay a state visit to China from May 16 to 17, the first state visit since his new term as president began. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told a media briefing here on Tuesday. Both leaders will exchange views on bilateral relations, cooperation in various fields, and international and regional issues of mutual interest in view of the 75th anniversary of China-Russia diplomatic relations, he said. During his visit, Putin, who was sworn in for his fifth Presidential term on May 7,



Russian President Vladimir Putin (left) and Chinese President Xi Jinping (right) shake hands during their meeting in Beijing, China, on Tuesday. Putin is on a two-day state visit to discuss with his close friend and Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping the future course of their strategic alliance amid mounting pressure on Beijing to scale down its support to Moscow's continuing war in Ukraine.

will travel to two cities: Beijing and Harbin. Putin's visit to China, the second in about eight months, follows Xi's just concluded European Union tour to France, Serbia and Hungary. In his talks with French President Emmanuel Macron and EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen, Xi pledged that China would not sell arms to Russia and would control the flow of dual-use goods to its military. The US too is mounting pressure on China not to sell arms to Russia to further its war in Ukraine. While Xi, 70, regards his ties with Putin, 71, as counter to the US' increasing hostility towards China, which Beijing says is aimed at countering its rise, there is unease here over Putin's continuation of the Ukraine war. Though Beijing has not publicly supported Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the "no lim-

its" China-Russia strategic partnership has come under intense scrutiny from the United States and its allies, who have imposed sanctions on Moscow and repeatedly called Beijing to use its leverage to bring the war to an end. Ahead of Putin's visit, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Russia and China have many allies and will have many more in the future, Russia's state-run Tass news agency reported on Tuesday. "We have many allies, and their number will continue to grow, I have no doubt. And, of course, all this will be for the benefit of democratisation of international relations, when everyone will take his place in world affairs by right, according to the real contribution to the development of the world economy, world politics, world security, and not through blackmail, threats, ultimatums," Lavrov said. Lavrov stressed that Moscow and Beijing "are not the only ones who want to reform the international system, promote the establishment of a multipolar world order that would

Another top Russian official held amid Kremlin shake-up

AP ■ MOSCOW

A second senior Russian defence official was arrested on bribery charges, officials said Tuesday, days after President Vladimir Putin replaced the defence minister in a Cabinet shake-up that fuelled expectations of more such purges. Lt. Gen. Yuri Kuznetsov, the 55-year-old chief of the Defence Ministry's main personnel directorate, was arrested in a raid early Monday on his suburban Moscow villa, Russian media reported. He was detained on charges of bribery and jailed pending an investigation and trial, according to the Investigative Committee, Russia's top state criminal investigation agency. Kuznetsov is accused of accepting an "exceptionally large bribe," a charge punishable by up to 15 years in prison. The committee alleged he received the bribe in his previous post as head of the military General Staff's directorate in charge of preserving state secrets, a posi-

tion he held for 13 years. In the raid, agents of the Federal Security Service, or FSB, broke down the doors and windows of his home while he was asleep, the reports said, seizing gold coins, luxury items and over 100 million rubles (just over USD 1 million) in cash. His wife, who previously worked in several Defence Ministry structures, was also reportedly interrogated. On Sunday, Putin reshuffled his Cabinet as he starts his fifth term in office, replacing Sergei Shoigu, who served as defence minister for 11 1/2 years, with Andrei Belousov, an economics expert and former deputy prime minister. Putin named Shoigu the secretary of Russia's Security Council, a role roughly similar to the US national security adviser, replacing Nikolai Patrushev. Patrushev, a hawkish and powerful member of Putin's inner circle who held the job for 16 years, was appointed a presidential aide. Alexei Dyumin, the governor of the Tula region

and often mentioned as a potential Putin successor, also was named a presidential aide. Patrushev will oversee Russian shipbuilding industries in his new job, but may later also deal with other duties, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday. He rejected notions that Shoigu's reshuffle represented a demotion, describing his new role as a "very senior job with broad responsibilities." While Shoigu, who had personal ties with Putin and accompanied him on vacations in the Siberian mountains over the years, was given a new senior position, the future of his close entourage in the Defence Ministry appeared in doubt under Belousov. Shoigu's deputy, Timur Ivanov, was arrested last month on bribery charges and was ordered to remain in custody pending an official investigation. His arrest was widely interpreted as an attack on Shoigu and a possible precursor to his dismissal.

Imran Khan asks Pak Army chief to apologise

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan, who has been in jail since August last in different cases, on Tuesday asked Army chief General Asim Munir to apologise to him for his "illegal" abduction and for backing the 'London Plan' and vowed not to cut a deal with the powerful military. "On the morning of May 9, 2023, my illegal abduction from the High Court was part of the London Plan (to topple the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government and impose a hybrid system led by the Sharif family on the country), for which General Asim Munir should apologise to me," Khan said on X. It is believed that his family is running his social media account. Criticising Gen Munir, Khan said: "It is the misfortune of this country that a self-proclaimed King (Gen Munir) has taken hold of all the decision-making. I am currently in prison because if I am free, it will challenge the power of that one person." Khan said the Director General of the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) - the media wing of the armed forces - and the Chief of Army Staff are making threatening political statements and involving the army in politics which is tarnishing the image of the army. The powerful Army, which has ruled the coup-prone country for more than half of its 75-plus years of existence, has hitherto wielded considerable power in matters of security and foreign policy. ISPR DG Maj-Gen Ahmed Sharif last week said that any dialogue with the PTI could happen only if it "earnestly apologises publicly in front of the nation, promises to adopt constructive politics, and forgoes politics of anarchy".

3 killed in security forces' crackdown in PoK

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

At least three people were killed and six others injured when security forces opened fire on protesters who attacked paramilitary Rangers in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, which has been rocked by protests against high prices of wheat flour and inflated electricity bills, media reports said on Tuesday. The paramilitary Rangers, which were called in to maintain law and order in the disputed region, came under attack in the regional capital Muzaffarabad while moving out of the town, the Dawn newspaper reported. Instead of exiting via Brarkot, the village bordering Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the 19-vehicle convoy, including five trucks, chose to exit the region from Kohala, it said. As the convoy reached Muzaffarabad in a "charged atmosphere", it was pelted with rocks near Shorran da Nakka village, to which they responded with teargas and firing, the report said. A social media clip verified by Dawn showed three Rangers vehicles ablaze on the Muzaffarabad-Brarkot road. After entering the city through the Western Bypass, the Rangers were welcomed with rocks again, prompting them to use teargas and bullets. The shelling was so intense that the entire neighbourhood reeled from it, the report said. Divisional Commissioner Muzaffarabad Sardar Adnan Khurshid said that at least three persons had died in firing by Rangers and another six had suffered wounds. On Monday, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had approved a Rs 23 billion subsidy for immediate release to the region after the negotiations between the protesters and the regional government ended in a deadlock. However, the government's decision to dole out the subsidy failed to pacify the region, the report said.

The disputed region also 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. Shortly before the violence, Prime Minister Sharif and the disputed region's "prime minister" Anwarul Haq after a meeting had approved the release of Pakistani Rs 23 billion for the region on account of power and wheat subsidies. The subsidised rate for 40kg flour will be Pakistani Rs 2,000, down from Pakistani Rs 3,100. The electricity tariff was reduced to Pakistani Rs 3, Rs 5 and Rs 6 per unit for up to 100, 300, and more than 300 units, respectively, the Dawn reported. 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. After the subsidy was announced by the government, the movement leaders said they would decide about it after the issuance of notifications. The notifications immediately went viral on social media. On Tuesday, the JAAC called off the ongoing protests as the government "accepted all the demands of the protesters", a JAAC head Shaukat Nawaz Mir said, asking protesters to return to their homes and businesses. "The shatter-down strike is being called off," he added. Speaking to a gathering on Monday evening, Mir had said that their legal team would "legally examine" the notifications issued by the government. "If these notifications do not fulfil legal requirements in accordance with our charter of demand, we, the joint action

committee members will unanimously decide our next course of action tonight," he said. Mir also demanded financial compensation to the families of three protesters and a police official who were killed in the violence. Meanwhile, the bodies of two of those killed in the violence had been taken by their kin to the ground adjacent to Eidgah, where slogans were heard against the government and the civil armed forces. "There is tension and anger in the air," said Adil Hameed, a resident of the old city of Muzaffarabad. Reports received from other towns in PoK said that people had staged demonstrations to express wrath and indignation at the killings in Muzaffarabad. 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".

Pakistan, IMF start talks for fresh bailout package

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan and the IMF have started negotiations for a fresh bailout package to address the cash-strapped country's fiscal challenges and implement crucial reforms, media reports said on Tuesday. On Monday, the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) mission chief to Pakistan, Nathan Porter, called on Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb to "kick start the discussions on further engagement with the Fund," the Ministry of Finance said in a statement. "The finance minister welcomed the IMF team and thanked them for the successful completion of the Stand-By Arrangement (SBA)," said the ministry statement. Aurangzeb also "appreciated the IMF team about the improvement in the macroeconomic indicators over the course of the SBA and underscored the government's commitment to continue with and expand upon the reform agenda". Last month, Pakistan completed a short-term USD 3 billion programme with the IMF, which bailed the country out of any default. It was unclear whether the IMF mission would end with a formal staff-level agreement for the next bailout package, according to The Express

Tribune newspaper. The duration, instrument, and size of the next IMF programme were open to discussion, the report said, quoting sources. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's decision to announce the Rs 23 billion subsidies for consumers in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) has weakened the government's case in the eyes of the IMF, sources said. Sharif approved the immediate provision of Rs 23 billion after the disputed region was rocked by protests against high wheat flour prices and inflated electricity bills. As many as three people were killed during the clashes, while more than 100 were injured. During the meeting, Porter raised the issue of the shortfall in tax collection and pointed out the disparity in the federal and provincial taxation, the report said. Fiscal adjustment of at least 1.5 per cent of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) or about Rs 1.6 trillion would have to be made in the coming budget, The Dawn newspaper reported. This will be achieved through a combination of additional revenue measures coupled with expenditure rationalisation and privatisation, the report said, quoting sources.

Nigeria's wounded soldiers find healing at Prince Harry's invictus games

Abuja (AP): One evening in November 2020, a year into his military service, Peacemaker Azeugbulam's lifelong dream of being a soldier came to an abrupt end. He was among a group of Nigerian soldiers deployed in the country's grinding counteroffensive against Islamic extremists in north-eastern Borno state when an anti-aircraft weapon was fired at them. When he regained consciousness, his life was no longer the same, and his left leg later had to be amputated. He was given what he described as a chance to recover when he joined Nigeria's team in last year's Invictus Games and won Africa's first gold medal at the biennial sporting event

founded a decade ago by the UK's Prince Harry to aid in the rehabilitation of wounded soldiers. "I thought I couldn't meet up with life, but Invictus gave me an opportunity to recover through sports," Azeugbulam, 27, said of the games, which are in the spotlight with Harry and his wife, Meghan's three-day visit to Nigeria. Azeugbulam is among the Nigerian service members wounded and mentally battered in the country's 14-year-long war against Islamic extremists and other armed groups in the country's northern region. They say they feel better and are recovering faster since last year's Invictus Games, when Nigeria became the first African country to compete in the event.

Top US and Chinese officials begin talks on AI in Geneva

AP ■ GENEVA

Top envoys from the US and China huddled in closed-door talks in Geneva on Tuesday to lay out their national approaches to the promise and perils of emerging artificial intelligence technology. The talks, which Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping agreed to launch in last 2023, are meant to open up bilateral dialogue between the world's two biggest economies — and increasingly, geopolitical rivals — on a fast-moving technology that already has consequences for trade, lifestyles, culture, politics, national security and defence and much more. US technology experts say the meeting — led on the American side by high-level White House and State Department officials — could offer a glimpse into Beijing's

thinking about AI amid a generally tight-lipped Chinese approach to the technology. Co-founder Jason Glassberg of Casaba Security in Redmond, Washington, an expert on new and emerging threats posed by AI, handicapped the meeting as a get-to-know-you that will likely yield few concrete results, but get the two sides talking. "What's most important right now is that both sides realise they each have a lot to lose if AI becomes weaponized or abused," Glassberg said in an e-mail. "All parties involved are equally at risk. Right now, one of the biggest areas of risk is with deepfakes, particularly for use in disinformation campaigns." "This is just as big of a risk for the PRC as it is for the US government," he added, referring to the People's Republic of China. It was not immediately clear

why the meeting was taking place in Geneva, though the internationally-minded Swiss city bills itself as a hub of diplomacy and UN and international institutions. The Geneva-based International Telecommunications Union — a UN agency currently headed by American Doreen Bogdan-Martin and previously run by China's Houlin Zhao — is set to host its annual "AI for Good" conference in the city later this month. The meeting is the first under an intergovernmental dialogue on AI agreed upon during a multi-faceted meeting between Xi and Biden in San Francisco six months ago. The US government has sought to set some guardrails around the technology while fostering its growth, seeking a possible boon for economic output and jobs.

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REGISTRAR

Stock markets rise for third day on buying in auto, metal shares

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex climbed 328 points while Nifty closed above the 22,200 level on Tuesday as stock markets continued the winning march for the third straight day on the back of gains in index major Reliance Industries and positive inflation data. Rising for the third day, BSE Sensex rose by 328.48 points, or 0.45 per cent, to settle at 73,104.61. The 30-share index rallied 510.13 points, or 0.70 per cent, to touch a high of 73,286.26 in day trade. As many as 20 Sensex stocks ended with gains while 10 declined.

The broader Nifty of NSE rose by 113.80 points, or 0.51 per cent, to settle at 22,217.85 with 36 of its constituents ending in the green and 14 in the red. Gains were led by metal and auto shares while EMCG and pharma shares declined due to profit taking, analysts said. From the Sensex basket, Mahindra & Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro, JSW Steel, NTPC, IndusInd Bank, Sun Pharma, UltraTech Cement, State Bank of India, Reliance Industries, and Maruti were the major gainers. Nestle, Tata Consultancy Services, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finance, ITC, and Asian Paints were among the laggards. Retail inflation eased to an



11-month low of 4.83 per cent in April as prices of some kitchen items declined, though overall food basket firmed up marginally, according to government data.

"The domestic market has sustained its recovery path from recent lows, aided by a moderation in India's CPI and favourable signals from its Asian peers," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. Volatility and range-bound trading are likely to persist in the near term, given the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the low turnout, Nair added.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 1.79 per cent and midcap

index advanced 1.14 per cent. Among the indices, utilities soared 2.80 per cent, power (2.51 per cent), industrials (2.40 per cent), telecommunication (2.27 per cent), capital goods (2.11 per cent), commodities (1.87 per cent), services (1.78 per cent), energy (1.52 per cent) and realty (1.03 per cent).

"Nifty continued to gain for the third consecutive session on Tuesday after rising through the day with minimal corrections. Global equities were mixed in muted trading Tuesday as investors waited for producer prices data for cues on inflation in the world's largest economy and ahead of Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell speech later in the day," said Deepak

Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities. Meanwhile, official data released on Tuesday showed wholesale inflation rose to a 13-month high of 1.26 per cent in April fuelled by rising prices of food articles, especially vegetables. In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled higher while Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading mixed. Wall Street ended on a mixed note on Monday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.17 per cent to USD 83.22 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,498.92 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Significant percentage of Indian firms hit by ransomware attacks in 2023: Sophos

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Nearly 64 per cent of Indian organisations surveyed were hit by ransomware attacks in 2023, a latest report by Sophos said on Tuesday, noting that while the attack rates fell year-on-year, the impact on victims actually intensified. The average ransom demand was USD 4.8 million, with 62 per cent of demands exceeding USD 1 million. The median ransom paid was USD 2 million, the report by the global cybersecurity solutions provider said. Put simply, ransomware refers to malicious software or malware that seizes files on a computer, network share, backups, and server, and encrypts them, following which the attacker exhorts the user to cough up money to unlock the files. Typically, ransomware attacks come with a timeline, threatening users that if ransomware demands are not fulfilled, the users will lose files. According to the 'State of Ransomware in India 2024' report by Sophos, there has been a decrease in the rate of ransomware attacks against Indian organisations from the 73 per cent reported in last study (2022) to 64 per cent in 2023. Notably though, "the impact on victims has intensified, with higher ransom demands and recovery costs compared to the previous year".



The findings are derived from an independent survey of 5,000 IT decision makers across 14 countries, including 500 respondents in India. Conducted in January and February 2024, respondents were asked to answer based on their experiences in the previous 12 months. For the first time, Indian organisations were found to be more likely to recover data by paying the ransom (65 per cent) than using backups (52 per cent). The report revealed that 44 per cent of impacted computers on an average were encrypted in attacks against Indian victims. "Thirty four per cent of

attacks included data theft in addition to encryption, slightly down from 38 per cent the previous year. Excluding ransom payments, the average cost to recover from an attack was USD 1.35 million," Sophos said in a release. As per the report, 61 per cent of victims were able to recover data within a week, up from 59 per cent in 2022. As many as 96 per cent reported the attack to authorities, with 70 per cent receiving investigation assistance. "Prevention remains the most cost-effective ransomware strategy," Sunil Sharma, Vice President, Sales, India and SAARC, Sophos said.

Rupee settles on flat note at 83.51 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee settled on a flat note at 83.51 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, as the support from positive domestic markets and favourable inflation data was negated by strong US Dollar and foreign fund outflows. Forex traders said the rupee remains under pressure due to ongoing elections as well as foreign fund outflows and the same shall subside once the results are out. 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 83.52 during the day. The domestic unit finally settled for the day at 83.51 (provisional), unchanged from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled flat at 83.51 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on the strong US dollar and a rise in crude oil prices. Sustained FII outflows may further pressure the rupee," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said. Choudhary further noted that a positive tone in the domestic markets may support the rupee at lower levels.

VIT founder, Chancellor Viswanathan gets honorary doctorate from State University of New York



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Founder and Chancellor of Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) Dr. G. Viswanathan received the State University of New York (SUNY) Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree during Binghamton University's convocation ceremony in the USA recently. The honorary doctorate was conferred on Dr. G. Viswanathan by Binghamton University President Harvey Stenger. Dr G Viswanathan has been conferred the honorary doctorate for his contributions to international higher education.

Public sector banks total profit crosses ₹1.4 lakh crore in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Public sector banks' cumulative profit crossed Rs 1.4 lakh crore in the financial year ended March 2024, recording a growth of 35 per cent over the previous year on a high base of Rs 1 lakh crore. The 12 Public Sector Banks (PSBs) together had earned a net profit of Rs 1,04,649 crore in 2022-23. Out of the total profit of Rs 141,203 crore earned during the FY24, market leader State Bank of India (SBI) alone contributed over 40 per cent of the total earnings, as per the published numbers on exchanges. SBI earned a profit of Rs 61,077 crore 22 per cent higher than the previous financial year (Rs 50,232 crore). In percentage terms Delhi-based Punjab National Bank had the highest net profit growth with 228 per cent to Rs 8,245 crore, followed by



Union Bank of India with a 62 per cent rise to Rs 13,649 crore and Central Bank of India with a 61 per cent increase to Rs 2,549 crore. Among the banks which recorded over 50 per cent jump in net profit included Bank of India with a 57 per cent growth to Rs 6,318 crore while Bank of Maharashtra with a 56 per cent rise to Rs 4,055 crore and Chennai-based India Bank recorded a 53 per cent improvement to Rs 8,063 crore. During the year, the only

public sector bank out of 12 reported drop in profit was Punjab & Sind Bank. Punjab & Sind Bank, headquartered in Delhi, reported a 55 per cent decline in annual net profit, dropping from Rs 1,313 crore in 2022-23 to Rs 595 crore in the fiscal year ending March 2024. The PSBs which reported an annual profit in excess of Rs 10,000 crore are Bank of Baroda (Rs 17,788 crore) and Canara Bank (Rs 14,554 crore). PSB is a turnaround story from record losses of Rs 85,390 FY18 to record profit in FY24. The doom-to-bloom story of the public sector banking industry can be attributed to the initiatives and spate of reforms undertaken by the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, along with former finance minister Arun Jaitley, his successor Nirmala Sitharman and financial services secretary Rajiv

Kumar and his successors. The government has implemented a comprehensive 4R strategy: Recognising NPAs transparently, Resolution and recovery, Recapitalising PSBs, and Reforms in the financial ecosystem. As part of the strategy, the government infused an unprecedented Rs 3,10,997 crore to recapitalise PSBs during the last five financial years — from 2016-17 to 2020-21. The recapitalisation programme provided much-needed support to the PSBs and prevented the possibility of any default on their part. The reforms undertaken by the government over the last nine years addressed credit discipline, ensured responsible lending and improved governance. Besides, there was the adoption of technology, and amalgamation of banks, and the general confidence of bankers was maintained.

India's April palm oil imports jump 34 per cent on lower global prices

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's palm oil imports registered a 34.11 per cent jump on-year in April to 6,84,000 tonnes, buoyed by a fall in global prices, the Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA) said on Tuesday. Palm oil accounted for 52 per cent of India's total edible oil imports of 13,04,409 tonnes in April, the trade body said in a statement, adding that sunflower and soybean oils import stood at 6,20,315 tonnes. Including non-edible oils, overall vegetable oil imports rose 26 per cent in April to 13,18,528 tonnes compared to 10,50,189 tonnes a year ago, it said. Bearish global prices encouraged higher imports of refined, bleached and deodorized (RBD) palmolein and crude palm oil (CPO), which declined by nearly USD 100 a tonne last month, SEA said.



Soybean oil prices fell USD 40 per tonne globally, while the sunflower oil rate dropped just USD 15 a tonne over the last month, it added. Among palm oils, RBD palmolein imports climbed to 1,24,228 tonnes as against 1,12,248 tonnes in the year-ago period. CPO (crude palm oil) shipments increased 36 per cent to 5,36,248 tonnes over 3,93,856 tonnes, while crude palm kernel oil imports jumped nearly 6-fold to 23,618 tonnes from 3,990 tonnes.

For soft oils, soybean oil imports surged to 3,85,514 tonnes from 2,62,455 tonnes, though sunflower oil inflows eased to 2,34,801 tonnes from 2,49,122 tonnes. As of May 1, India held 22.45 lakh tonnes of edible oil stockpiles, SEA said. India is the world's biggest edible oil importer. Indonesia and Malaysia are the major suppliers of RBD palmolein and CPO, while soybean oil is imported from Argentina and Brazil, and sunflower oil from Russia, Romania and Ukraine.

Domestic passenger vehicle sales up 1.3 per cent in April: SIAM



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Passenger vehicle wholesales in India rose to record levels in April driven by strong demand for utility vehicles, automobile industry body SIAM said on Tuesday. The overall passenger vehicle dispatches from companies to dealers rose 1.3 per cent year-on-year to record levels of 3,35,629 units in April, as compared to 3,31,278 units in April 2023. Utility vehicle sales stood at 1,79,329 units last month, up 21 per cent from 1,48,005 units in the same month last year. Passenger car dispatches, however, declined by 23 per cent to 96,357 units, as

compared to 1,25,758 units in April 2023. Van sales rose 15 per cent to 12,060 units last month, as against 10,508 units in April last year. As per the data issued by the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), two-wheeler wholesales rose 31 per cent to 17,51,393 units last month, as compared to 13,38,588 units in April last year. Motorcycle wholesales stood at 11,28,192 units last month, up 34 per cent, as compared to 8,39,274 units in the same month last year. Scooter wholesales rose 25 per cent year-on-year to 5,81,277 units in April, as compared to 4,64,389 units in the same month last year.

Three-wheeler wholesales rose 14.5 per cent to 49,116 units last month, as against 42,885 units in April 2023. SIAM president Vinod Aggarwal said the current fiscal has started on a reasonably good note for the auto industry, as all the segments have posted growth in April 2024, compared to April 2023, driven by positive consumer sentiments and festivities during the month. "Above normal monsoon rainfall, policy continuity and government's push on manufacturing and infrastructure would propel the overall economic growth which would help in continuing the auto sector's growth trajectory," he added.

Tata Power DDL organises networking meet



New Delhi: Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited, a leading power utility supplying electricity to 7 million in North Delhi, in line with its commitment to social inclusion and support for Affirmative Action communities, including women entrepreneurs, recently organised a networking meet in collaboration with the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DICCI) on May 3. The session with the DICCI was orchestrated to showcase the leadership's commitment towards the development and upliftment of the Business Associates. The meet served as a platform to highlight Tata Group's legacy of fostering social inclusion and supporting Business Associates within the AA community. With the progressive philosophy of 'Be Job Givers, Not Job Takers', the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry is an organisation representing Dalit entrepreneurs belonging to the Affirmative Action community. PNS

Tax incentives can help enhance adoption of sustainability manufacturing: Experts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Providing financial incentives, such as tax breaks, and subsidies, for companies that invest in sustainable technologies and practices can help accelerate the adoption of green manufacturing practices, experts say. They also said there is an increasing emphasis by businesses to ensure sustainable practices through their supply chains. "This requires companies to improve their sustainability operation through responsible procurement, investment, energy transition, recycling, financing etc.," Hi-Tech Gears Chairman Deep Kapuria said. He also said that today, sustainability is at the core of business strategy for corporates across all sizes and sectors. "Indian companies are also taking advantage of the lower interest rates on sustainability-linked loans to fund their expansion plans. Further, large Indian companies are also investing big in recycling the waste," Kapuria added. Anup Garg, Founder and Director of WOCE-World of Circular Economy, said that manufacturers are



increasingly investing in energy-efficient technologies and renewable energy sources to reduce their carbon footprint. This includes the adoption of LED lighting, energy-efficient HVAC (Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) systems, and renewable energy installations like solar panels and wind turbines. Garg said that the governments can support sustainability in manufacturing through regulatory frameworks, incentives, public private partnerships and awareness. "Providing financial incentives, such as tax breaks, grants, and subsidies, for companies

that invest in sustainable technologies and practices. "This can accelerate the adoption of green manufacturing practices," he said. He added that WOCE offers expert advisory and consulting services to help manufacturers develop and implement comprehensive sustainability strategies. "This includes setting realistic targets, creating action plans, and integrating sustainability into core business operations. These services ensure that manufacturing processes are optimized for sustainability, leading to reduced environmental impact and enhanced regulatory compliance," he added.

Bharti Airtel net profit tanks 31 per cent in Q4

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom operator Bharti Airtel on Tuesday posted a 31 per cent drop in consolidated profit to Rs 2,072 crore in the March quarter. The company had registered a profit of Rs 3,005.6 crore in the year-ago period. The consolidated revenue of operations increased 4.4 per cent to Rs 37,599.1 crore during the quarter under review from Rs 36,009 crore a year earlier. "Consolidated performance was impacted primarily by the devaluation of the Nigerian Naira. We added 7.8 million smartphone customers and delivered an industry leading ARPU of Rs 209," Bharti Airtel Managing Director Gopal Vittal said. For the year ended March 31, 2024, Bharti Airtel's profit dropped 10.5 per cent to Rs 7,467 crore from Rs 8,346 crore in FY23. The annual revenue from operations of the company increased 7.7 per cent to Rs 1,49,982.4 crore during the reported fiscal from Rs 1,39,144.8 crore in 2022-23.

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

Format C-2

(for candidate to publish in Newspapers, TV)

Declaration about criminal cases

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

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

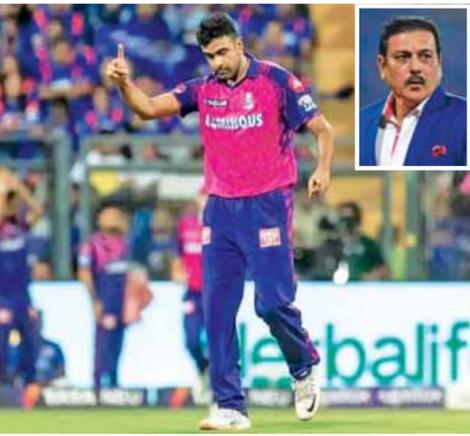
*Name of Election : **LOKSABHA- 2024**

Name of State/UT : **JHARKHAND**

1	2	3	4		5		
Sl. No.	Name of Constituency	Name of Candidate	(A) Pending criminal cases		(B) Details about cases of conviction for criminal offences		
			Name of Court, case no. & status of the case(s)	Sections of the Acts concerned & brief description of offence(s)	Name of Court & date(s) of order(s)	Description of offence(s) & punishment imposed	Maximum Punishment Imposed
1	DHANBAD	DULU MAHATO	Anuska Jain Judicial Magistrate Dhanbad Dhanbad PS Case no. 85/2020 Pending	385, 504, 506 of IPC	Md. Umar, JMFC Dhanbad 20-01-2016 (In Connetion on with Barora PS Case no. 307/2006)	1 Year (12 Months), Appeal(Cri. Rev. 278/2016) is Admitted and Pending in High Court in Ranchi	
			Anuska Jain Judicial Magistrate Dhanbad Kenduadih PS Case No. 132/2023 Pending	147, 148, 149, 341, 323, 307, 120B, 504, 25(1-B), 26, 27 (2), 35, 326 of IPC	S.D.J.M., Dhanba d, 09-10-2019 (In Connect ion with Katras PS Case No. 120/2013)	18 Months, Appeal (Cri. Rev. 1157/2022) is Admitted and Pending in High Court in Ranchi	
			Anuska Jain Judicial Magistrate Dhanbad Barora PS Case No.150/2006 Pending	147, 149, 160, 323, 342, 504, 506, 109, 120B of IPC			
			Anuska Jain Judicial Magistrate Dhanbad Barora PS Case No.12/2022 Pending	147, 148, 149, 341, 323, 307, 354, 427, 379 of IPC			
			Anuska Jain Judicial Magistrate Dhanbad Rajgang PS Case No. 15/2022 Pending	147, 148, 149, 379, 384, 385, 427, 120B of IPC and 27 Arms Act			
			SDJM Dhanbad Katras PS Case No. 106/2018 Pending	147, 148, 149, 341, 323, 324, 427, 120B of IPC and 27 Arms Act			
			Akhilesh Kumar ADJ XVI Dhanbad Barora PS Case No. 11/2020 Pending	147, 148, 341, 323, 307, 354, 504, 506 of IPC and 27 (1) of Arms Act			
			Akhilesh Kumar ADJ XVI Dhanbad Baghmara PS Case No. 17/2020 Pending	395, 120B, of IPC and 27 of Arms Act			
			Anuska Jain Judicial Magistrate Dhanbad Barora PS Case No. 21/2021 Pending	147, 148, 149, 324, 341, 427, 120B, 307 of IPC and 3/4 of Explosive Act			

10			Anuska Jain Judicial Magistrate Dhanbad Barora PS Case No. 54/2022 Pending	147, 148, 149, 341, 324, 387, 307, 120B of IPC and 27(1) of Arms Act			
11			Anuska Jain Judicial Magistrate Dhanbad Barora PS Case No. 39/2021 Pending	341, 387, 504, 506 of IPC			
12			Anuska Jain Judicial Magistrate Dhanbad Loyabad PS Case No. 58/2021 Pending	147, 148, 149, 341, 323, 337, 504, 506, 307 , 353, of IPC and 25 (1B) (a), 26, 35, 27 of Arms Act and 3/4 Explosive substance Act			
13			Anuska Jain Judicial Magistrate Dhanbad Loyabad PS Case No. 59/2021 Pending	147, 148, 149 ,120 B, 504, 506, of IPC and 27 Arms Act and 3/4 Explosive Substance			
14			ADJ 1st ST/SC SPL Court Dhanbad Barora PS Case No. 17/2020 Pending	147, 148, 149, 341, 504, 506 of IPC and 3(1) (F), 3(1)(G) of SC/ST Act			
15			Anuska Jain Judicial Magistrate Dhanbad Barora PS Case No. 20/2020 Pending	147, 148, 149 ,341, 323, 385, 386, 307, 504, 506 of IPC and 27(1) of Arms Act			
16			Nupur Ekka JM Ranchi Dhurwa PS Case No. 107/2023 Pending	147, 148, 188, 353, 332, 109, 427 of IPC			
17			Anuska Jain Judicial Magistrate Dhanbad Jogta PS Case No. 11/2024 Pending	147, 148, 149, 341, 323, 379, 307, 387, 120B of IPC and 27 Arms Act and 3/4 of Explosive Substance Act.			
18			Anuska Jain Judicial Magistrate Dhanbad Barwadda PS Case No. 53/2024 Pending	109, 387, 504, 506, 120B of IPC			
19			SDM Dhanbad Barora PS Case No. 05/2024 Pending	107 of IPC			
20			Anuska Jain Judicial Magistrate Dhanbad Dhansar PS Case No. 69/2024 Pending	188, 171-F of the IPC			

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RAJASTHAN AIM TO CLINCH PLAY OFF BERTH IN PARAG'S 'ROYAL' HOMECOMING

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Rijyan Parag, the hottest cricketing property to emerge from India's north-east, is expected to get a grand welcome from his home fans when Rajasthan Royals try to ensure a safe passage into the IPL play-offs against the ousted Punjab Kings in their penultimate league game on Wednesday.

Placed second in the 10-team table with 16 points, Royals need to ensure one win in their next two 'home' games in Guwahati. That will be enough to seal a last four berth.

For the past few years, Guwahati has been Royals' second home base and it was a strategic move by the franchise having invested a good six years in tapping Parag's potential.

Panned for being inconsistent on social media platforms, Parag's homecoming this year is special as his performance of 483 runs at a strike-rate of 153

despite not being an opener is simply outstanding. A stable core and improvisation as per match situations have already made Parag an India contender for the next T20 series where he is expected to make his international debut.

As and when it happens, Parag will become the first cricketer hailing from the north-eastern part of the country to wear the senior team's iconic blue jersey. Parag's emergence as the cricketing face from the region makes this and the RR's next match against KKR more significant. The support for the 22-year-old will be organic and that will also help Sanju Samson and his men against Punjab Kings, which unearthed two T20 gems in Shashank Singh and Ashutosh Sharma but once again failed to fire as a team.

Skipper Shikhar Dhawan's absence due to injury for the better part of the season made matters worse as his stand-in



Sam Curran didn't exactly look the part. Samson, on the other hand, has grown in stature as a leader in what is expected to be his best season as a batter. He already is his team's top-scorer with 486 runs. The dynamic opening duo of Yashasvi Jaiswal (344 runs) and Jos Buttler (359 runs) have had an average season by their standards but Parag and Samson have ensured that batting remained solid and consistent with he low-scoring game against CSK being an aberration.

RR's strongest aspect is their bowling unit that has never been taken to the task as such during the whole season. Sandeep Sharma (Economy Rate 8.07) at the death and Trent Boult (ER 8.38) at the start have executed plans to the "T". Ravichandran Ashwin has only become sharper as the tournament has progressed and Yuzvendra Chahal can always produce that magic ball against the run of play.

Shastri, Ashwin back Impact Player rule

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The "Impact Player" rule might have come in for sharp criticism in the ongoing IPL, but former India coach Ravi Shastri and senior spinner Ravichandran Ashwin have backed it, stating that it leads to more close finishes.

The rule, implemented in the competition last season, has been a topic of debate this edition, with some experts and current players saying that it will make all-rounders redundant.

"When any new rule comes in, there will be people who will try to justify why that's not right," Shastri said.

"But with time, when you see the scores — 200 and 190 — and then, individuals grabbing that opportunity and making the most of it, people will start re-looking at how they think about it."

Shastri vouched for the rule, saying that the game has to evolve with time.

"The Impact Player (rule) is good. You have to evolve with the times. It happens in other sports as well. It's got tighter finishes," he said on Ashwin's YouTube channel.

"I think it's a good rule. You saw the number of tight finishes we had in last year's IPL. So, it has made a big

difference." BCCI Secretary Jay Shah had recently said that the rule is not permanent.

"Impact Player is like a test case. We have implemented it slowly. The biggest advantage of it is that two Indian players are getting a chance (in each game), which is the most important," he told the media in Mumbai last week.

"We will consult with the players, franchises, broadcasters (and take a call). This is not permanent, (but) I am not saying that it will go. (We'll see) if it's making the game more competitive or not. Even then, if a player feels that this is not right, then we will talk to them. But no one has told us anything yet. So, it will be decided after the World Cup."

India skipper Rohit Sharma and Delhi Capitals' Axar Patel and Mukesh Kumar, also expressed their displeasure with the rule.

"I genuinely feel it is going to hold back the development of all-rounders because eventually cricket is played by 11 players, not 12," Rohit had said a couple of weeks back.

"So, I am not a big fan of the Impact Player rule because you are taking so much from the game just to make it a little more entertaining for the people around you."

Teams where coaches work behind scenes and give players freedom do better: Rayudu

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India cricketer Ambati Rayudu has no doubts that IPL teams that empower their players to take "ownership" are the ones likely to be more successful compared to those who leave decision-making in the hands of coaches.

In a discussion on what goes into keeping the team environment healthy, the former India and Chennai Super Kings player cited Kolkata Knight Riders mentor Gautam Gambhir's example. He loves the manner in which Gambhir gives his players the freedom to perform and according to him, it has been the

key to the two-time IPL champions' run of success so far this season.

"If the coaches take a back-seat and work behind the scenes, and let the players take the ownership, and let the players have the freedom in order to perform on the ground, those are the sort of teams that excel, and that is what KKR has been doing," Rayudu, a veteran of 55 ODIs and six T20Is told Star Sports on Tuesday.

KKR, the IPL winners in 2012 and 2014 under Gambhir's captaincy, became the first team to enter the playoffs this season and are currently on 19 points after nine wins.

This may be published in Newspapers and Tv from the day following the last date for Withdrawal of candidature and upto twodays before the date of poll

Format C-2

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				Description of offence(s) & punishment imposed
				Maximum Punishment Imposed
1.	RANCHI	SANJAY SETH	Smt. Nutan Ekka Spl. JMFC, MP, MLA, Civil Court Ranchi Dhurwa PS Case no. 159/2021 Pending	Sec. 147, 148, 341, 323, 353, 332, 427, 188, 269, 270, of IPC and Sec. 51 of DM Act 2005- Allegation for Participating in a public protest against the state government
2.			Smt. Nutan Ekka Spl. JMFC, MP, MLA, Civil Court Ranchi Dhurwa PS Case no. 107/2023 Pending	Under Sec. 147, 148, 188, 353, 332, 109, 427, 323 of IPC

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				Maximum Punishment Imposed
1.	Jamshedpur	Bidyut Baran Mahato	Chaibasa MP/MLA Court Sakchi (Jamshedpur) PS Case no. 3/22 Pending	Violation of Model Code of Conduct

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