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Polling goes south as mercury heads north

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

As swathes of north India stewed in brutal heat during the peak of summer, voter apathy continued in the fifth phase of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, with voter turnout recorded at 57.46 per cent (tentative until 8:30 pm) in 49 constituencies across six States and two Union Territories. This phase saw sporadic incidents of violence in West Bengal and a poll boycott in a village in Uttar Pradesh.

The highest polling percentage was in West Bengal (73 per cent), while the lowest was in Maharashtra (49.04 per cent). This was the smallest phase in terms of the number of constituencies for which voting took place.

Low voter turnout in the fifth phase sent political parties, including the BJP, into a tizzy. After Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla Lok Sabha constituency, one of the 49 seats voting in the fifth phase registered 54.49 per cent voter turnout seems heading for the highest turnout in the last eight Lok Sabha elections.

This is a record of sorts for the constituency in north Kashmir for any general election held so far. The best turnout in the last thirty-five year history of polling in Baramulla seat was 61.09 per cent, in the 1984 general elections. This comes after Srinagar recorded 38.49 per cent polling during the fourth phase. Baramulla is one of the three



UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addresses a campaign meeting in support of BJP candidate for East Delhi seat Harsh Malhotra for Lok Sabha polls, in New Delhi, on Monday

seats in the Kashmir division of J&K—other than Srinagar and Anantnag-Rajouri—where the BJP has not fielded any candidates. In 2019, the constituency recorded a turnout of 34.6 per cent, whereas in 1989, it was at a mere 5.48 per cent, the commission said. As per the EC's voter turnout App, Ladakh recorded at 67.15 per cent, Jharkhand at 63.00 per cent and Bihar 52.60 per cent, Jammu and Kashmir 54.67 per cent, Odisha 60.72 per cent, Uttar Pradesh 57.79 per cent.



AAP's trouble mounts over foreign donations

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In yet another setback to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his party, of which he is the national convenor, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has alleged that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) received ₹7.08 crore in foreign funds from 2014 to 2022, allegedly violating the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), the Representation of People Act (RPA), and the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

In its dossier to the Union Home Ministry, the ED has revealed that the AAP received funds from multiple donors in USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Oman and other countries. According to the ED, the real identity of foreign donors was concealed in AAP's books to circumvent restrictions on foreign donations to political parties, with donations directly deposited into AAP's IDBI bank account.

The ED investigation revealed that multiple donors have used the same passport numbers for donation, e-mail IDs, mobile numbers and credit cards to donate to the AAP. The ED has shared all the information with the Union Home Ministry relating to its investigations with details of donors, such as names of the donor, country of donor, passport number, amount donated, mode of donation and bank account number of receiver, billing name, billing address, billing telephone numbers, billing e-mail, time & date of donation and payment gateway used etc, gathered during the investigation under PMLA, 2002.

The ED, in its investigation, claimed several instances of irregularities in the collection of foreign funds by the AAP and its leaders and accused some of them, including AAP MLA, Durgesh Pathak, of siphoning off the funds collected during a fund-raising event in Canada in 2016, for personal benefits.

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BJP National president JP Nadda chairs party's national general secretaries' meeting, at party headquarters, in New Delhi, on Monday

Two rounds to go, Nadda takes stock of BJP poll fortunes

PIONEER NEW SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the hectic Lok Sabha polls campaigning for the remaining two phases, an urgent meeting of top BJP leaders, including general secretaries was convened by party president JP Nadda on Monday at the party headquarters.

Party sources said the meeting was called to review the party's performance so far in the election and devise a strategy for the remaining phases.

BJP national general secretary (organisation) BL Santhosh, national general secretaries Arun Singh, Tarun Chugh, party IT department head Amit Malviya, national media in-charge Anil Baluni, and Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw were among those who were in the meeting. Sources said Nadda asked all senior leaders and office bearers of the party to play a "more effective role" and make an "active contribution" in the implementation of the party's poll strategy on the ground. BJP chief also reviewed the fifth phase of polling and also discussed the future strategy of the party with regard to the ongoing elections, the sources said.

Iran Prez dies in chopper crash after stinging Israel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/DUBAI



Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, the country's Foreign Minister and several other officials were found dead on Monday, hours after their helicopter crashed in a foggy, mountainous region of the country's north-west, state media reported. Raisi was 63. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei hours later announced Iran's first vice president, Mohammad Mokhber, would serve as the country's acting president until elections are held. Khamenei also announced five days of public mourning.

India announced one-day State mourning on Tuesday as a mark of respect for President Raisi. The Union Home Ministry said the national flag will be flown at half-mast on all buildings where it is regularly flown across India and there will be no official entertainment during the period of State mourning.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Congress president Malliarjun Kharge expressed shock and sadness at the demise of the Iranian President. Modi said, "India stands with Iran in this time of sorrow."

"As a mark of respect to the departed dignitaries, the Government of India has decided that there will be one day's State mourning on May 21 (Tuesday) throughout India," the

spokesperson said. Meanwhile, state TV gave no immediate cause for the crash that occurred in Iran's East Azerbaijan province. Among the dead was Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, 60. The helicopter also carried the Governor of Iran's East Azerbaijan province, other officials and bodyguards, the state-run IRNA news agency reported. It was last month when tension had increased in the region after Iran and Israel had clashed in worrying, unprecedented fashion. But temperatures cooled after the intervention of the US and other world powers.

No relief on the horizon till May 24

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI



Women cover themselves with dupattas to beat blistering heat on Monday in New Delhi

There seems to be no respite from the sweltering heat for the residents of Northwest India, including Delhi, with the India Meteorological Department (IMD) issuing a stark warning on Monday of impending heatwave to severe heatwave conditions over the next five days in the region. As temperatures increased to alarming 48-degree Celsius mark in Delhi's Najafgarh and red alerts issued for the national Capital and extensive regions of northwest India, the severity of the situation cannot be overstated. This has also pushed the country's peak power demand to hover near the projected 235 GW level in

May, following excessive use of cooling appliances like air conditioners and desert coolers. According to the Union Power Ministry data, the peak power demand or the highest supply in the day has already reached 233 GW on May 6 compared to 221.42 GW recorded a year ago. The IMD said scorching

heatwave conditions will persist in Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh-Delhi, and West Rajasthan; in some parts of West Uttar Pradesh, East Rajasthan, and northwest Madhya Pradesh during May 20 to May 24, 2024. Also, the heatwave conditions are likely to be over North Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat during the period. Health experts said this extreme weather not only poses significant health risks but also disrupts daily life and challenges the day to day activities of the people. "In the face of such adversity, urgent measures are needed to safeguard the well-being of citizens and mitigate the impact of this blistering heatwave," they said.

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Har Pal Aapke Saath

Ban on election campaigning 48 hours before voting ends

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In adherence to the guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India (ECI), a strict ban on election campaigning will be enforced 48 hours before the conclusion of voting for the Jharkhand Lok Sabha constituency. This measure, in accordance with Section 126 of the Public Representation Act 1951, aims to ensure a free and fair electoral process.

According to Section 126 of the Public Representation Act 1951, the following activities are prohibited in any polling area during the 48-hour period preceding the close of polling: Public Meetings and Processions:



BJP candidate and Jharkhand MP Bidyut Baran Mahato at Jugsalai Gurudwara on Monday.

No person shall call, organize, attend, participate in, or address any public meeting or procession in connection with the election.

Exhibition of Election Material: The public exhibition of election-related materials through media such as cinema, television, or similar means is prohibited. Publicity through Entertainment: No musical concerts, theatrical performances, or any other entertainment or amusement meant to attract the public towards election-related matters can be organized or arranged. Any individual found violating these provisions can face severe penalties, including: Imprisonment for up to two

years. A fine or both. In line with ECI guidelines, political workers and campaigners who have come from outside the district must leave the district by 5:00 PM on May 23, 2024. This directive applies specifically to individuals who are not voters or candidates in the Assembly Constituency/09 - Jharkhand Lok Sabha constituency. Should any external political workers be found campaigning or present in the constituency after the specified period, they will be subject to legal action under relevant sections. The order from the Election Commission emphasizes the necessity of removing external political func-

tionaries to maintain an impartial and unprejudiced polling environment. The presence of these individuals beyond the campaigning period could potentially compromise the integrity of the election process. An official statement from the Election Commission of India states: "After the closure of the campaign period, no campaign activity can take place within the constituency. The presence of political functionaries, party workers, procession functionaries, campaign functionaries, etc., who have been brought from outside the constituency and who are not voters of the constituency, should not continue to remain in the constituency. Their continued

presence after the campaign ends may undermine the atmosphere for a free and fair poll." By enforcing these regulations, the Election Commission aims to uphold the democratic process and ensure that the elections are conducted in a fair, transparent, and unbiased manner. The ECI's enforcement of a 48-hour ban on election campaigning and the removal of external political workers from the Jharkhand constituency underscore the importance of maintaining the sanctity of the electoral process. Citizens are urged to comply with these regulations to contribute to a smooth and fair election.

Jamshedpur rallies for voter awareness, election song launched

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In an inspiring display of civic engagement, around 5000 citizens gathered at PM Mall to participate in a vibrant voter awareness program, underscoring the importance of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The event aimed to boost voter turnout, particularly in urban areas, which historically show lower participation rates compared to rural regions.

The voter awareness event, organized in the premises of PM Mall, saw the active involvement of District Election Officer Ananya Mittal, Expenditure Observer Ish Gupta, Deputy Development Commissioner Manish Kumar, and trainee IAS officers. They were joined by other officials and members of the Sweep Cell, all dedicated to promoting electoral participation.

A key moment of the event was the launch of Jharkhand's election song, 'Desh Yeh Aage Badhega,' which was unveiled on the big



screen by District Election Officer Ananya Mittal. The song, designed to inspire and mobilize voters, received an enthusiastic response from the crowd, especially the youth.

The program's theme, 'Vote Karega Jharkhand, 25 May 2024,' resonated strongly with the young participants. They performed energetic dances and pledged to vote on election day, emphasizing the critical role of youth in shaping the future of the nation. The District Election Officer urged the attendees to bridge the voter turnout gap

between urban and rural areas, stressing the slogan 'not now or never' to highlight the urgency of voting.

Engaging the crowd further, a quiz on election-related topics was conducted, showcasing the high level of awareness among the participants. The event also featured performances set to popular songs, including a rendition of 'Chak De India,' adapted to encourage voting on May 25th. The atmosphere was electric as both young and older participants danced and sang along, reinforcing their commitment to vote.

Addressing the attendees, District Election Officer Ananya Mittal highlighted the historical voter turnout disparity and called for a collective effort to increase participation this year. He urged the youth to bring their family members to the polling booths, ensuring everyone exercises their right to vote.

The success of the event was bolstered by the contributions of Young Indians volunteers, mall management, and social media influencers, who played pivotal roles in organizing and promoting the program. Their efforts were instrumental in drawing a large crowd and fostering a festive, yet purposeful, environment.

As Jharkhand gears up for the Lok Sabha elections on May 25, 2024, the overwhelming response at the PM Mall voter awareness event signifies a positive shift towards higher voter turnout. The spirited participation and commitment shown by the citizens promise a vibrant and democratic election process.

Star campaigners descend in Dhanbad to support candidates

PANKAJ : DHANBAD

With campaigning for Dhanbad Lok Sabha seat ending on May 23 evening, campaigning by two most formidable candidates, out of 25 in the contest, here have stepped up campaigning.

Even star campaigners of either side be it BJP or Congress have started descending in the coal belt for woo voters to vote for respective candidates.

According to an available report, Priyanka Gandhi is to address a public meeting for her party candidate Anupma Singh on Tuesday at Jealgora stadium. Earlier, on Sunday Kalpana Soren, wife of former chief minister Hemant Soren campaigned for Anupma at Nirsra to woo voters for Anupma. The Congress nominee is getting good backing from JMM, RJD and select Left as well as trade unions of coal and steel belt.

Jharkhand minister Mithlesh Kumar Thakur held meetings in favour of Anupma at different locations on Monday.

As far as the BJP is concerned, the party is organising a press conference every day by one of its senior leaders.

While former BJP state president Deepak Prakash participated in different meetings in favour of party candidates in the last two days Bhanu Pratap Sahi visited different parts of the constituency on Monday.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh is to address a rally for the party nominee in Bokaro on Tuesday.

On the last day of the campaign the UP chief minister is likely to visit Dhanbad.

It's not that the RSS has too stepped its activities in favour of the BJP candidate.

Party candidate Dhullu Mahto on Monday was seen greeting workers of Bokaro Steel Plant main gate in order to woo voters.

It's not only these, Marxist Coordination Committee candidate has stepped up campaign.

'Arpan' to organise blood donation camp on June 23

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Continuing its tradition of community service, the city's prominent social organization 'Arpan' will organise its 9th Blood Donation Camp at Red Cross Society in Sakchi.

Arpan was formed nine years ago by a dedicated group of 20 young leaders who identified the acute shortage of blood during the summer months. Motivated to bridge this gap, they organized their first blood donation camp in the name of Bhole Baba. Following the success of this initial effort, the group officially became known as 'Arpan Uddeshya Seva Bhav'.

Over the past nine years, Arpan has distinguished itself by consistently organizing blood donation drives, thereby saving thousands of lives.

The success of Arpan's initiatives can be attributed to the relentless efforts of its members. Leading the charge are Amarpreet Singh Kale, Jugan Pandey, Pappu Rao, and Mahesh Mishra, among others. Their commitment is



mirrored by other dedicated members including Bibhash Majumdar, Prince Singh, Dheeraj Chaudhary, Sarabjit Singh, Manish Singh, and many more who have played crucial roles in organizing these life-saving events.

During the important meeting held at Arpan's office in Sakchi, the core team and other members resolved to make the 9th Maha Blood Donation Camp a grand success.

Their collective efforts ensured a seamless and impactful event, contributing significantly to the local blood banks' reserves and helping those in dire need of blood transfusions. Arpan's persistent efforts have not only pro-

vided critical blood supplies but have also fostered a spirit of community service and solidarity in Jharkhand. The organization's continuous dedication has inspired many locals to participate in these noble causes, thereby creating a robust network of blood donors.

Looking ahead, Arpan aims to expand its reach and continue its mission of saving lives through regular blood donation camps. The organization remains committed to addressing the challenges faced by blood banks, especially during critical periods, and ensuring that no life is lost due to a lack of available blood.



Deputy Director, IPRD Jharkhand, Biru Kushwaha along with his wife poses for a picture after voting in Ramgarh during the fifth phase of general election on Monday. PNS

NTPC CMHQ holds cleanliness drive at Ranchi Railway Station

PNS : RANCHI

With the objective of creating community awareness on the importance of cleanliness and sanitation, NTPC Coal Mining Headquarters/NTPC Mining Limited, Ranchi as part of observing ongoing Swachhta Pakhwada-2024 (May 16 to May 31, 2024), today organized Swachhta Rally which was participated by Regional Executive Director (Coal Mining), Animesh Jain, Head of the departments and employees and family members in large numbers. The rally commenced from its office campus and concluded at Ranchi Railway Station.

Later the employees participated in the cleanliness drive at the Parking Area of the Railway Station. To promote proper waste management distributed Dustbins to the street vendors near the Railway station & Hand sanitizers were also distributed by the Senior officials and employees as part of the cleanliness of the fortnightly celebration. The initiative was possible with the active support of Ranchi Railway Station administration.

During the Swachhta Pakhwada celebration, NTPC Coal Mining HQ/NML is going to conduct more community cleaning drive activities at public places and organize Street play/Nukad Natak, Radio Jingle in Local FM channel to involve local community to promote "Cleanliness is the key to Good Health."



Officials inspect control room for Lok Sabha polls



R SHARMA : BOKARO

In the office chamber located at the Collectorate, Arun Mahesh Babu, the General Observer for the 06 Girdih Parliamentary Constituency, Pujya Prakash, Superintendent of Police, and Rajeev Kumar, Commandant of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). The General Observer and Police Observer conducted an in-depth discussion on the force deployment and communication plan to ensure a secure and peaceful voting environment on polling day.

at the meeting were Mohit Chawla, the Police Observer for the 06 Girdih Parliamentary Constituency, Vijaya Jadhav, the District Election Officer, Pujya Prakash, Superintendent of Police, and Rajeev Kumar, Commandant of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

The General Observer and Police Observer inspected the Postal Ballot Strong Room. They received crucial information about the strong room from the District Treasury Officer and reviewed the security arrangements. The CCTV-TV monitors were also examined. Present at the scene were the DEO, Superintendent of Police, and other officials who received necessary instructions to ensure smooth operations.

May 25, 2024, for both the 06 Girdih and 07 Dhanbad parliamentary constituencies. Several instructions were issued to the concerned officials to ensure stringent security measures, both on the day of the election and in the days leading up to it. The officials were directed to deploy security forces and implement the communication plan meticulously.

The General Observer and Police Observer inspected the Postal Ballot Strong Room. They received crucial information about the strong room from the District Treasury Officer and reviewed the security arrangements. The CCTV-TV monitors were also examined. Present at the scene were the DEO, Superintendent of Police, and other officials who received necessary instructions to ensure smooth operations.

CCL's X handle has now more than 20 k followers

PNS : RANCHI

CCL's official Twitter handle @RanchiCCL has crossed an important milestone of 20,000 followers. Now more than 20 thousand people from different backgrounds have joined this popular platform X or Twitter.

This achievement is a testament to the growing interest in the coal sector and CCL's efforts to connect with stakeholders through social media.

Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi tweeted and congratulated the team of CCL.

CIL Chairman, PM Prasad has congratulated the CCL team for this achievement. He appreciated CCL's efforts in leveraging Twitter to share updates, news and insights about the coal industry, underscoring the importance of social media in disseminating information and connecting with the public. Head of Department (CC and PR), Alok Kumar, while thanking all the followers, said that the team members are thrilled to see the increasing interest in the coal sector from the stakeholders. Inspired by the feedback received from all the followers, we are trying to make better use of new technologies for effective communication.

.We will continue to make meaningful use of social media platforms to connect with stakeholders, share information and promote transparency in the coal sector."

The official Twitter handle of CCL, @RanchiCCL, was launched to provide updates, news related to CCL. This handle is actively sharing information on CCL's coal production, mining operations, safety initiatives and corporate social responsibility activities and other activities. CCL is committed to leveraging technology to improve communication and engagement with stakeholders.

This is a significant achievement for CCL, demonstrating its commitment towards transparency, accountability and engagement with stakeholders through social media. CCL has more than 90,000 followers on all major social media platforms combined.

Businessmen announce huge discounts to encourage voting

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In a significant push to boost voter turnout, prominent businessmen in Jamshedpur have announced substantial discounts to encourage participation in the upcoming elections. The Confederation of All India Traders (CAT) Jamshedpur unit, spearheaded by National Secretary Suresh Sonthalia, has launched a voter awareness campaign aimed at increasing urban voter engagement for the fifth phase of voting on May 25.

During a meeting with local business leaders, Sonthalia emphasized the need to address the traditionally lower voter turnout in urban areas compared to rural regions. He called on all city voters to actively participate in what he described as the "world's biggest democratic festival," aiming for record voting numbers for the Jharkhand Lok Sabha seat. Sonthalia specifically urged business owners to ensure that everyone in their network, including family, friends, and employees,

votes. "This time, let's all come together to achieve record voting in Jharkhand," he said.

Bharat Vasni appealed to the thousands of traders in Jamshedpur with a clear message: "Vote first and then shop." He encouraged traders to prioritize voting and mobilize their families, employees, and neighbors to do the same before starting their business activities on voting day.

Kishore Golchha, echoed this sentiment, pledging a 100% turnout from the business community. He reassured voters that all basic facilities would be in place at polling stations and that various programs were being organized to raise voter awareness and increase the voting percentage.

To incentivize voting, various traders and associations have announced attractive offers: Jamshedpur Jewelers Association: Discounts on making charges for gold jewelry, with Chhaganlal Dayalji, Keshavji Chhaganlal, and Kuldeep & Sons Bistupur Jewelry



Sakchi offering a 25% discount.

Bistupur Havells Galaxy: A 4% discount on all fans and mixer grinders. Sakchi Bata Chowk Pehchan: A 10% discount on children's wear. Shrestam Hotel: Free breakfast and cold drinks for the first 21 customers after voting.

PM Mall Food Court: Various discounts including Pizza Hut's buy one get one

free, Domino's combo offer for ₹99, and discounts ranging from 10% to 20% at several eateries such as Chinese Delight, KFC, MBA Chai Wala, and more.

Dilip Golchha and Piyush Chaudhary from CAT clarified that these discounts would be available only to those who vote and show their inked fingers as proof. This initiative is designed to ensure that the community takes their civic responsibility seriously.

Jaichand Jaiswal and Vinod Sharma of Laghu Udyog Bharti appealed to all entrepreneurs to vote and encouraged them to remind family members, including those abroad, to participate. Mahesh Sonthalia and Sanwar Sharma stressed that May 25 should be viewed not as a regular day but as a day of responsibility for every citizen.

By linking economic incentives to civic participation, Jamshedpur's business community aims to significantly enhance voter turnout and ensure that every eligible voter contributes to the democratic process.

DPS alumna felicitated by President

PNS : RANCHI

Ranchi girl Anima Kumari, alumna of Delhi Public School, Ranchi from the batch of 2020 was recently honoured by the President of India, Draupadi Murmu.

Anima had a chance to meet the President upon securing a gold medal in Microbiology and for demonstrating exceptional proficiency in Pharmacology during her MBBS degree.

"Anima has always been a beacon of dedication and hard work. Her success is a testament to her perseverance and strong academic foundation laid at DPS Ranchi. We are incredibly proud of her achievements and look forward to witnessing her future contributions in the medical field," Said Dr Ram Singh, Principal DPS Ranchi.



Nearly 62 % voter turnout in second phase polling in State

Hazaribagh, Koderma and Chatra and Gandey Assembly bypoll went for polling

PNS : RANCHI

Around 62% voter turnout was recorded till 5pm in the three Lok Sabha constituencies in Jharkhand on Monday, as per data by the Election Commission.

Till 5 pm, Chatra recorded a voter turnout of 60.26%, Hazaribagh 63.66%, and Koderma 61.60%. The overall turnout in the state was 61.90%. Barring a few stray incidents, voting was peaceful in all three constituencies. In Hazaribagh, villagers boycotted polling at booths 183 and 184 in Kusumbha village under Katkamdag due to unmet demands for a bridge.

Apart from the three Lok Sabha constituencies of Hazaribagh, Koderma and Chatra, voting for Gandey Assembly bypoll was also held where Kalpana Murmu Soren, wife of former

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, is contesting as the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) candidate.

According to the Election Commission data, 58 lakh 23 thousand 721 voters of Jharkhand were to exercise their franchise in the second phase. In which there are 29 lakh 93 thousand 581 male voters and 28 lakh 30 thousand 085 female voters. The maximum number of voters in Koderma is 22 lakh 05 thousand 358. There are 16 lakh 89 thousand 926 voters in Chatra and 19 lakh 39 thousand 374 voters in Hazaribagh.

These three seats cover 7 districts and 16 assembly constituencies of the state. There are 54 candidates in the fray for these three Lok Sabha seats. There are 22 candidates from Chatra, 17 from Hazaribagh and 15 from



JMM candidate for Gandey assembly by-poll Kalpana Soren poses for a selfie with her supporters during Gandey seat by-election in Giridih district of Jharkhand on Monday. PNS

Koderma 6705 centers were set up for voting in three Lok Sabha

seats Chatra, Hazaribagh and Koderma. Of these, 575 are in urban areas and 6130 in rural

areas. This time all the booths have been made like model booths. Of these, 36 booths were made unique. Where the district administration had made artwork on the theme of their area. Out of these, 73 polling stations were operated by women. Besides, PWD personnel are deployed at 13 polling booths. The Election Commission monitored the voting through webcasting from all the polling stations. For this, 6705 4D cameras were installed.

In the contest for all the three Lok Sabha seats, the direct fight is likely between the JMM-led ruling alliance and the BJP-led opposition in Jharkhand.

In the Koderma Lok Sabha seat, Union Minister and BJP candidate Annapurna Devi has locked horns with Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation



Voters wait in a queue to cast their votes at a polling station for the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections, at Patratu in Ramgarh district of Hazaribagh on Monday. Pix by Ratan Lal

nominee Vinod Singh, an MLA from Bagodar assembly constituency.

In Hazaribagh seat, a direct fight is between the BJP's Manish Jaiswal and Congress'

Jai Prakash Bhai Patel, who recently switched from BJP. Both the candidates are currently the MLAs.

Chatra is also heading for a direct contest between BJP's Kalicharan Singh, who was given ticket instead of sitting MP Sunil Kumar Singh, and Congress's KN Tripathi.

Apart from the polling in Lok Sabha constituencies, the by-poll for Gandey assembly, with 3.15 lakh voters, is also slated for Monday. Gandey is hot seat as Kalpana Soren, the wife of jailed former state CM Hemant Soren is contesting the elections. Apart from her 10 more candidates are in the fray.

Gandey assembly seat fell vacant after the resignation of Sarfaraz Ahmad, who was recently elected to Rajya Sabha unopposed. BJP has fielded Dilip Kumar Verma against Kalpana.

Fifth phase elections conducted peacefully in State

7 cases of MCC violation registered in 3 parliamentary constituencies



An elderly woman shows her inked finger after casting her vote at a polling station for the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections, in Ramgarh on Monday. Pix by Ratan Lal

PNS : RANCHI

Chief Electoral Officer K. Ravi Kumar has said that the fifth phase of elections has been conducted peacefully. Polling personnel have started returning from polling stations to deposit the EVMs in the strong room. He said that the estimated voting percentage in the three parliamentary constituencies was 63. Out of that, the highest estimated 64.32 per cent voting took place in Hazaribagh.

In Chatra the voting percentage was 62.96, whereas, the lowest 61.86 per cent voting took place in Koderma parliamentary constituency. On the other hand, the vote percentage in Gandey Assembly by-election was 68.26. He told that this figure



Jharkhand BJP President cum former Chief Minister Babul Marandi, showing ink-marked finger soon after casting his vote under tight security during the Lok-Sabha 2024 election in Giridih district of Jharkhand on Monday. PNS

is till 5 pm. At some places the voting process was continuing even after 5 pm. After the number of postal ballots etc. is added, the vote percentage will increase slightly. He was holding a joint press conference with State Police Chief Electoral Officer and Nodal Officer AV Homkar at Nirvachan Sadan, Dhurva on Monday. The Chief Electoral Officer said that during voting, seven cases of model code of conduct violations have been registered in seven districts belonging to the three parliamentary constituencies. Of these, 2 FIRs have been lodged in Palamu, 2 in Latehar, 2 in Hazaribagh and one in Giridih. He said that out of 244 candidates contesting elections in the state, 66 have criminal cases registered

against them. State Police Nodal Officer AV Homkar said that a total of 44 thousand personnel of paramilitary forces and Jharkhand Police were deployed for peaceful voting in three parliamentary constituencies. Since the borders of the three Lok Sabha constituencies are connected to the three states of West Bengal, Bihar and Chhattisgarh, constant vigil was maintained on the border in coordination with the respective states. Naxalite activities were completely disrupted and people were encouraged to vote in a fear-free environment. He said that even during the return of the polling party, tight security arrangements have been made. Senior police officers remain in the field.

Senior Citizens and PwDs cast their vote from home in Ranchi

DIVYA MODI : RANCHI

The first-of-its-kind home voting facility especially for the elderly and people with disabilities concluded in the Ranchi parliamentary constituency on Saturday. As many as 322 senior citizens above the age of 85 and 118 People with Disabilities (PwD) cast their ballots using the home voting facility which kicked off on May 15 and concluded on May 18.

"Elderly individuals above 85 years of age and PwDs with 40 percent disability who were willing to vote from the convenience of their home were asked to fill out form 12D to avail the home voting facility this election. The initiative has been implemented with an aim to ensure accessibility and convenience to all voters. It also ensures that voters can participate in the election process with ease and dignity, eliminating the need to visit polling stations," said Bivek Kumar Suman, Deputy Election Officer, Ranchi. As per statistics shared by the election office, a total of 28344 voters registered are senior citizens and 22028 are the number of voters with disabilities. People with Disability (PwD) need to present a certificate issued by the civil surgeon and his team stating a minimum of 40 percent disability to avail the home voting facility. A total of 32 teams consisting of sector office, micro observer, polling officers, videographer, booth level officer and security personnel were deployed to visit the home electors and enable their participation.

On the voting day- May 25, to ensure ease to voters, special measures such as transportation to polling stations, installation of ramps, provision of wheelchair, Braille enabled electronic voting machines, volunteers for assistance and sign language interpreters are being implemented at all polling stations by the district administration.

"The home voting facility was seamlessly organised. My grandparents who cannot visit the polling booth had initially thought that their votes would go waste but with this system in place, they were quite delighted to participate in the election and cast their vote," said Devika, a City based resident who had availed the home voting facility for her elderly grandparents.



Marandi exudes confidence in winning all 3 seats in fifth phase

Rajnath's rally at Bokaro

Defense Minister Rajnath Singh will address a public meeting on May 21 at 12:30 pm at the Durga Puja Ground in Sector 2C of Bokaro Steel City, Dhanbad Lok Sabha. On this occasion, Lok Sabha in-charge Suresh Sahu, Lok Sabha candidate Dhullu Mahato, Bokaro District President Jaydev Rai will also be present.

PNS : RANCHI

BJP State President and former Chief Minister Babul Marandi today expressed his gratitude to the people of the state on the completion of by-elections for three Lok Sabha seats and Gandey Assembly seats of the state.

Marandi said that NDA will win all 14 Lok Sabha seats in the state. The victory of the NDA candidate is certain in the Gandey assembly by-election also. He said that the target of crossing 400 is not difficult for NDA. Last time also BJP had won 303 seats. NDA had won 353 seats. Now only 47 seats have to be expanded which is possible with the blessings of the public. He said that the work that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has done in the last 10 years is not hidden from anyone. Be it the Prime Minister's housing scheme, be it gas connection, tap water reaching every house, be it free



treatment worth Rs 5 lakh under Ayushman Yojana, be it giving free ration every month so that no person sleeps hungry, everyone is aware of this.

Marandi said that apart from this many development works have also been done. Building roads, Highways are being built. The country is standing on its feet. The respect of the country has also increased in the world. Everyone is aware of this also. Everyone has to vote for Narendra Modi again this time and make him the Prime Minister.

Voting for three Lok Sabha constituencies of Hazaribagh, Koderma and Chatra, and Gandey Assembly bypoll was held where Kalpana Murmu Soren, wife of former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, is contesting as the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) candidate.

Around 62% voter turnout was recorded till 5pm in the three Lok Sabha constituen-

cies in Jharkhand on Monday, as per data by the Election Commission.

Also, BJP State President and former Chief Minister will attend the public meeting organized on May 21 at Durga Puja Ground in Sector 2C of Bokaro Steel City. The public meeting will be held from 12:30 pm.

Marandi will participate in the level worker conference organized at 2 pm at the high school ground in Tundi block of Giridih district of Giridih Lok Sabha.

Marandi will participate in the booth level workers conference organized from 3:00 pm at Harladhi ground in Peertaad block of Giridih district. On this occasion, Lok Sabha in-charge Sunil Singh, Lok Sabha convenor Prakash Seth, candidate Chandraprakash Chaudhary, Giridih District President Mahadev Dubey, program in-charge Prakash Pandit will also be present.

Priyanka Gandhi to visit Jharkhand on May 22



PNS : RANCHI

Congress National General Secretary and star campaigner, Priyanka Gandhi Vadhera will visit Jharkhand on May 22. She will hold an election meeting for the fourth and final phase of elections in the State. Priyanka Gandhi's first election meeting is in the Mela ground of Godda. She will also address the election meeting at High Tension Ground in Namkum Lowadh. Chief Minister (CM), Champai Soren and former CM Hemant Soren's wife, Kalpana Murmu Soren will be present in both the election meetings of Gandhi. Apart from this, Congress State In-Charge, Gulam Ahmed Mir, State Chief, Rajesh Thakur, RJD Minister in the State Government, Satyanand Bhokta and leaders of other alliance parties will also participate in the program.

Gandhi will reach Birsa Munda Airport on May 22 at 9 am. From here she will go to Godda by helicopter. At the Mela ground in Godda, Priyanka Gandhi will appeal to Godda to vote in favor of party candidate Pradeep Yadav. After this she will come to Namkum by helicopter where at 1:55 pm, she will address the election rally for Congress candidate

PM's visit ensured JMM candidate's victory in Jamshedpur: JMM

PNS : RANCHI

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), on Monday, took a dig at (PM) Prime Minister Narendra Modi's poll campaign meeting and said he ensured JMM Candidate's victory.

JMM's Central General Secretary Supriyo Bhattacharya addressed a press meet in Jamshedpur and took a dig at industrial policy, labor law and BJP's claims of victory in the Lok Sabha elections. He alleged that the NDA government at the Center has taken over the workers by weakening the labor laws. "The right to strike has been taken away. PM Modi had mentioned the Gua firing in Ghatshila. In response, Supriyo Bhattacharya slammed BJP and reminded them of Bakoria firing. He said that after the elections, BJP will blame the Prime Minister for the defeat," he added.

Voting for Jamshedpur parliamentary seat in



Jharkhand will be held on May 25. Sameer Mohanty of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha is the candidate from India Block.

Bhattacharya said that for the last many days I have been talking about the problems of the tribals and indigenous people living in and around the copper mines. "The BJP Government at the Center weakened 44 such labor laws due to which workers got constitutional protection. The biggest weapon in labor laws was strike. The tradition was that workers used to submit memorandum to the management through their union according to their problems,

demands and needs. The management used to call the workers' delegation for talks. If the issues were resolved then it would be fine, in fact, the union used to give one month's notice to the management before going on strike, but the government weakened it. Now 6 months advance notice will have to be given. Supriyo Bhattacharya said that it is the same thing that I am hungry today and I should wait for 6 months," he added. The General Secretary said that a person can survive for a month without food, but after 6 months there will be no man left, so what about hunger. He said that lakhs of Tata workers in Jamshedpur

have suffered losses due to this. "PM Modi mentioned the Gua firing in Ghatshila. While mentioning Gua, the Prime Minister probably forgot the Tapkara and Bakoria firing incidents that took place during the tenure of Babul Marandi and Raghuvar Das. In the Bakoria firing incident, the police did not even spare the children. Why doesn't the Prime Minister mention this?" he added.

Bhattacharya said that BJP deliberately sent the Prime Minister to Ghatshila so that the victory of Sameer Mohanty in Jamshedpur could be ensured. "Local BJP leaders have learned cunning. If you get defeated then you will say that I never went to Jamshedpur. I was called for the street meeting. Tomorrow in our rally in Jamshedpur, Arvind Kejriwal, Sanjay Singh, Kalpana Murmu Soren, Chief Minister Champai Soren and Ajay Kumar and other leaders from India Block will be present.



Ramesh Gholap, Deputy Commissioner (Chatra) with his spouse showing ink-marked fingers with voter ID cards soon after casting their vote during on-going parliamentary election-2024 in Chatra district of Jharkhand on Monday. PNS

JMM-Cong leaders demand action against Nishikant

PNS : RANCHI

A delegation consisting of leaders of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and Congress, on Monday, met the Election Commission and lodged a complaint against Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Candidate from Godda, Nishikant Dubey and demanded immediate action. In its complaint, the delega-

tion informed that despite a complaint by Congress Candidate, from Godda, Pradeep Yadav to the District Election Officer, Godda, no action was taken regarding concealment of information in the nomination manifesto by Nishikant Dubey. The members included in the delegation said that Podaiyhat police station case number 162/2009

and Jasidih police station case number 213/2019 which are pending in the court have not been mentioned by Nishikant Dubey in his manifesto. There has been mention of borrowing Rs 1, 20,00,000 from Abhishek Jha in the name of his wife, whereas Abhishek Jha, who has filed nomination as an independent candidate from Godda Lok Sabha, has not

mentioned it in his manifesto. Talking to media persons after filing the complaint the State Congress Spokesperson, Rakesh Sinha has asked whether it was black money or white money? "If there was black money, then why did ED not reach there? We demand from the Election Commission to cancel the nomination of both the candidates," he

added. On the occasion JMM Ranchi District President, Mushtaq Alam said that on the day of elections, BJP distributed voter slip slips with a slogan of Rs 400 written on it to the voters. "This slip was also distributed on the day of the fourth phase and is being distributed even today. The commission reached there with the complaint and a demand has



been made to conduct an investigation and register an FIR," he added. Amulya Neeraj Khalko, Satish Pal Munjani were also present on the occasion.

Opposition hits out at Modi over his minorities remark

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Opposition on Monday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "not just today but never" acted against them. He, however, made it clear that he is not ready to accept anyone as "special citizens". BJP MP Sudhanshu Trivedi said what the PM has said is the truth and all his policies for the poor have benefitted all. He also said the Congress has constantly violated the secular spirit of the Constitution, and his campaign speeches are aimed at



exposing the opposition parties' bid to appease the minorities with vote bank politics. Reacting to the prime minister's remarks, CPI general secretary D Raja said, "It is completely lie. Modi knows how they (BJP) have been talking about Muslims. Who spoke about mangalsutra, mothers giving births to more children? Muslims and other minorities have been disrespected and deprived of many of their due rights." The BJP-RSS have been pursuing a "sinister design" of

undermining the minorities and ridiculing them, Raja alleged. While TMC MP Sagarika Ghose also slammed the prime minister for his remarks, AAP MP Sanjay Singh said the prime minister's comments were laughable as he talks in the "language of hate daily". "When you think he cannot lie anymore, he speaks another lie... This is the party which garlanded the rapists of Bilkis Bano, this is the party which garlanded those who lynched

Confident of securing youth votes for Congress: IYC

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Confident of securing the youth votes for his party as well as INDIA Bloc alliance members, the youth wing of the Congress — Indian Youth Congress — claims to have toiled hard to set the narrative of perennial problem of unemployment amongst all caste, creed, section, religion and irrespective of degrees and qualifications. "Unemployment, just like poverty is a curse on humanity which has no religion. In the last 10 years of (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi's misrule such a vast country has only show growing inequality, restlessness amongst youths, no jobs, no vacancies, no manufacturers to fill the vacuum of earning in every household. Youths have understood that Modi cannot play the Pied Piper of Hamelin by exhibiting false narratives through several platforms of media including the social media where he (PM) and his entire army (Council of Ministers and BJP) keep on sharing vague figures, fake reports of unknown agencies. Youth need jobs to feed their



family, look after this kids for better education and care their elderly parents who needs proper medical attention," said Indian Youth Congress (IYC) president Srinivas BV, in an exclusive interview to *The Pioneer*. Srinivas said the above gist is the Congress Manifesto 2024 Lok Sabha poll which has shaped after millions of interactions done by the party's tallest leader, Rahul Gandhi, during his two Bharat Jodo Yatra — the first one from Kanniyakumari to Kashmir and the second from Manipur to Mumbai. He also questioned the very intention of the BJP State Governments about the exams or job vacancies' paper leaks regularly which he claimed that the job seekers too now under-

stood the 'malafide tactics' of BJP Governments. During his yatra, along with RG, (Rahul Gandhi as mentioned by him), Srinivas claimed that most complaints were on the issues related to demonetisation, GST, pandemic and the combined effect of all these has led to depressions, other medical complications amongst the citizens. "Over these a lot of thoughts were given during the preparations for general elections and the strategy to dislodge the BJP led Government at Centre and in due course in the States. Modi government and BJP Governments have only brought complications in their governance which always hampered the common man. Congress from its inception one and half a century ago first thinks of welfare and social upliftment and work to bridge the gap wherever. If you look soon after Independence the realise how a visionary statesman like first PM Nehru ji worked to balance the regional imbalance by placing strategically industries, institutions, organisations the benefit of which shall continue for another century. BJP and Team Modi has this understanding but they will never utter a word on these vision because the saffron party has now visions except to dent harmony," Srinivas said who earned lot of laurels for his humane approach during the covid pandemic for creating a team and bank of medicines and oxygen cylinders to distribute to the needy. On a question that what has been the reason that once upon a time Congress' top youth leaders left the party to join BJP, the Youth Congress president said those who were afraid by pressure tactics and intimidations by the ruling party has gone. "Our leader (Rahul Gandhi) says he will never compromise on party ideology and sincerity come whatever may. He always convey us Daro Mat (don't be afraid). During my criss-cross travel for the elections I heard even the citizens of the country have started feeling the same and says that this time they will pass on the idea of Daro Mat. They claimed they are being intimidated by the current regime that Congress will take away their cattle, ornaments (mangalsutra) but the voters have realised yet another chunavi jumla will not reap this time," Srinivas said.

Agniveers not just soldiers but leaders, innovators, defenders of national sovereignty: CDS Chauhan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan on Monday said Agniveers are not just soldiers but also leaders, innovators and defenders of the nation's sovereignty. Interacting with the Agniveers undergoing training at Maratha Regimental Centre and Airmen Training School (ATS), Belagavi, he underscored the noble purpose of military service and its pivotal role within the military framework. The CDS lauded Agniveers for choosing the Armed Forces. He stated that it was a testament to their exceptional duty towards the nation, defence ministry said here. Acknowledging the personal challenges faced by the soldiers and their families and the hardships they endure while operating in the challenging environments, General Chauhan assured that despite the challenges, the Agniveers will find their journey immensely rewarding and their each step, will lead to their personal growth and deep sense of pride in serving the nation. Elaborating the evolving nature of the warfare, the CDS highlighted the complexity and unpredictability of future conflicts to include



Cyber Warfare, Artificial Intelligence and Asymmetric Threats which are now an integral part of the battlefield. He also spoke about technology integration and continuous learning and mentioned that in addition of staying abreast with the latest advancements, there is also a need to showcase innovative approach towards combat. During his visit to ATS, Belagavi, CDS took a tour of the training institute to gain insight into Agniveervayu training of IAF. He interacted with the third batch of Agniveervayu trainees undergoing training as per the revised induction pattern introduced by the defence ministry in 2022. He exhorted them to focus on training for becoming technologically proficient soldiers,

No attempt be made to reduce area of open air prisons functioning in country, says SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has directed that there shall be no attempt to reduce the area of open air prisons functioning in the country. Semi-open or open prisons allow convicts to work outside the premises during the day to earn a livelihood and return in the evening. The concept was introduced to assimilate the convicts with society and reduce psychological pressure as they faced difficulties in leading normal lives outside. A bench of Justice BR Gavai and Justice Sandeep Mehta noted advocate K Parameshwar, assisting it as an amicus curiae in a matter related to jails and prisoners, submitted that a model draft manual has been prepared by the Centre wherein the nomenclature "open correctional institutions" was used for open air camps/institutions/prisons. "We further direct the (Union) Ministry of Home Affairs to present a status report on recent developments in respect of the open correctional institutions after coming of the Model Prison Manual, 2016, and the Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2023," the bench said in its order passed on May 17. The bench noted it has been informed that there is a proposal to reduce the area at

Sanganer open air camp in Jaipur. "We thus direct that there shall be no attempt of reduction in area of open air camps/institutions/prisons, wherever they are functioning," the bench said. "The data put on record, wherein such open correctional institutions are shown to be functioning in different names, would further show that the said institutions are not being utilised to their optimum capacity," it said. It noted the amicus curiae submitted that strengthening of the open correctional institutions, apart from addressing the issue of overcrowding of jails, will also help in the rehabilitation of prisoners and do away with caste discrimination faced by them. The top court directed Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Kerala and West Bengal, where such facilities are functioning most robustly, to share their best practices, applicable rules, guidelines and experience on setting up, expansion and management of open correctional institutions with the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA). "The registry shall communicate this order to the chief secretary of the states of Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Kerala and West Bengal for compliance," it said.

Kharge heaps praise on Adhir as combative soldier of party

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/KOLKATA

Days after snubbing him for questioning the trustworthiness of TMC supreme Mamata Banerjee, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday heaped praise on West Bengal Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, lauding him as a "combative soldier" of the party. Kharge had snubbed Chowdhury, five-time Lok Sabha MP from Bahrampur, last week for his remarks that Banerjee cannot be trusted and that she might go with the BJP. "Vo hamarey ladaku sipahi hain (combative soldier)," he said about Chowdhury, who has only intensified his offensive against the West Bengal chief minister by alleging that she has used violence to crush the Congress in the state and has been helping the BJP. Kharge said some TMC leaders were now trying to rake up the issue of the Congress alliance with the Left but that will not help. "They are trying to present it differently. But it will not happen like this as the Congress party is strong and understands each other. What has happened in West Bengal is that the Congress high command has taken a decision to have a coalition with the Left and we are moving forward with that," Kharge said. The TMC is contesting the Lok



Sabha elections alone in the state, while the Congress and the Left are jointly fighting the polls. On Saturday, Kharge had dismissed Chowdhury's criticism of Banerjee while addressing a joint press conference with Shiv Sena (UBT) president Uddhav Thackeray and NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar in Mumbai. "Mamata Banerjee is with the alliance. She has recently said that she will join the government. Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury will not take the decision. The decision will be taken by me and the high command and those who don't agree will go out," Kharge had said in remarks that riled Chowdhury's supporters in Bengal. Chowdhury, while reacting to Kharge's comments, had said, "I cannot speak in favour of someone who wants to finish me and our party in Bengal politically. This is a battle for every Congress worker. I have spoken on their behalf. I don't

Congress vows to deliver Paanch Nyaya, Pachees Guarantee if INDIA Bloc comes to power

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As the Siddaramaiah-led Government completed one year in office, the Congress on Monday said it has successfully implemented all guarantees made to the people of the State and when the INDIA bloc inevitably gets the clear mandate on June 4, the party will deliver by implementing 'Paanch Nyaya Pachees Guarantee'. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said when the Congress makes guarantees to India's voters, it delivers. "It has now been one year of our government in Karnataka, where we have successfully implemented all guarantees made to the people. When the Congress and INDIA

Janbandhan inevitably get the clear and convincing mandate of the people on June 4th, we will deliver again, by implementing our 'Paanch Nyaya Pachees Guarantee'. Ramesh also gave a summary of the Karnataka government's guarantees which have been implemented such as 'Gruhalakshmi' under which every month, 1.21 crore women heads of the family receive 2,000 directly in their accounts from the government, combating inflation and inequality. "With a monthly allocation of Rs 2,430 crore, close to Rs 23,365 crore has been spent till date for Gruhalakshmi!" he said. Ramesh said under the 'shakti scheme', 60 lakh women in the state travel for free in



buses daily, accounting for 210 crore free rides and costing approximately 5,096 crore. Under the 'Annabhagya', he

said in order to end hunger in Karnataka, the government transfers 5 kg free rice grain to 1.38 crore families and 4.08 crore beneficiaries. Ramesh also listed the other schemes implemented by the Karnataka government such as 'Yuvanidhi' — to support youth looking for jobs, graduates are given Rs. 3000/month and diploma holders Rs. 1500/month — and 'Gruhajyoti' under which 200 units of free electricity is benefiting over 1.67 crore families. "Many of our signature guarantees for the Lok Sabha elections are built on the Karnataka Model: Mahalakshmi: Rs. 1 lakh per year transferred directly to the account of one woman in each poor family; Doubling of

the individual allowance of free ration under the National Food Security Act to 10 kg per person; Pehli Naukri Pakki: Guaranteed one-year apprenticeship of Rs. 1 lakh per year to all graduates and diploma holders," the Congress leader said. The Congress' vision for India is being implemented in Karnataka today -- freedom from hunger and from price rise, affordable healthcare, jobs for youth, and prosperity for all, Ramesh said. The Congress has pitched its election campaign on 'Paanch Nyaya' — Yuva Nyaya, Naari Nyaya, Shramik Nyaya, Kisaan Nyaya and Hissedari Nyaya -- under which it has promised 25 main guarantees for the people.

Three Indian Navy ships in Philippines to strengthen maritime cooperation: Official

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Three Indian Navy ships are in the Philippines with an aim to further strengthen maritime cooperation with that country, an official said on Monday. Their visit is part of an operational deployment of the Indian Navy's Eastern Fleet to the South China Sea. Indian Navy ships — INS Delhi, INS Shakti and INS Kiltan — arrived in Manila on Sunday, a spokesperson of the Navy said. The aim is to further strengthen the long-standing friendship and mar-

itime cooperation, the official said. The ships were accorded a warm welcome by the Philippines Navy. During the visit, personnel from both the navies will engage in wide range of professional interactions, including subject matter expert exchange, sports fixtures, cross-deck visits, cultural visits and collaborative community outreach programmes, the spokesperson said. "The ships will also participate in a Maritime Partnership Exercise (MPX) with the Philippines Navy," he said.

ICMR distances itself from research stating 50 per cent of Covaxin recipients complained of infection

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on Monday distanced itself from the study, conducted by researchers from the Banaras Hindu University that stated that nearly 50 per cent of 926 study participants who received Covaxin complained of infections during the follow-up period, predominated by viral upper respiratory tract infections. Covaxin has been indigenously developed in India by the Hyderabad based Bharat

Biotech in collaboration with the ICMR. ICMR Director General Dr Rajiv Bahl criticised the study for its poor methodology and design, and clarified the article was misleading and erroneously "acknowledged" the government's premier medical research institute. Dr Bahl said the study had no control arm of unvaccinated individuals for comparing the rates of events between the vaccinated and unvaccinated groups. Hence, the reported events in the study cannot be linked or attributed to COVID-19 vaccination.

The ICMR is not associated with the study and has not provided any financial or technical support for the research, Dr Bahl said. The ICMR DG has also written a letter to the authors of the paper and Editor of the journal to immediately remove the acknowledgement to ICMR and publish an erratum. The research paper, titled 'Long-Term Safety Analysis of the BBV152 Coronavirus Vaccine in Adolescents and Adults: Findings from a 1-Year Prospective Study in North India' stated that nearly one-



third of the 926 participants in the study who received Bharat Biotech's anti-Covid vaccine Covaxin reported 'adverse events of special interest', or AESI. Dr Bahl said that ICMR was acknowledged for research support without any prior approval of or intimation to ICMR, which is inappropriate and unacceptable. He stated that ICMR cannot be associated with this poorly designed study which purports to present a "safety analysis" of Covaxin due to several critical flaws. He said the study does not

even provide background rates of observed events in the population, making it impossible to assess the change in incidence of observed events in the post-vaccination period. Baseline information of study participants is missing. The study tool used is inconsistent with 'Adverse Events of Special Interest (AESI)' as defined in the reference provided in the paper for AESI. The method of data collection has a high risk of bias, he said. Dr Bahl also noted that similar acknowledgements to ICMR have been made in

previous papers without permission, raising concerns about the authors' practices. "The authors have been urged to immediately rectify the acknowledgment to ICMR and publish an erratum. Additionally, they are asked to address the methodological concerns raised. Failure to do so may prompt ICMR to consider legal and administrative action," he said. The Editor has been asked to retract the paper which implicitly makes conclusions on vaccine safety which are not supported by evidence.

Congress did not revoke Article 370 for appeasement politics: Shah

PTI ■ KARNAL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday attacked the Congress, saying the party did not revoke Article 370, which allowed special status to Jammu and Kashmir, for the sake of appeasement politics. Addressing an election rally here, Shah reiterated that Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) belongs to India and "we will take it back". The senior BJP leader also attacked the Congress on the Ram temple issue, saying its top leaders such as Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi did not take part in the temple's consecration ceremony to please the party's minority vote bank. Targeting the Congress on Kashmir, he said "For appeasement politics, they did not revoke Article 370." The Congress did not revoke the article despite a rise in terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, he said. "You all made Narendra Modi ji the Prime Minister for the second time, and on August 5, 2019, he scrapped Article 370. And now our tricolour proudly flutters in Kashmir," he said. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, who is contesting the Karnal assembly bypoll and former chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar, who is in fray for the Karnal Lok Sabha seat, were also present in the rally.



Addressing the gathering, Shah told the crowd, "Tell me, is Kashmir ours or not? Say it loudly, your voice should reach Kharge." "Kharge sahab, you are 80-year-old but you do not understand the country. Haryana's youth can give their life for Kashmir," Shah said hitting out at the AICC president. Shah was alluding to the AICC president's recent remark on why the prime minister spoke about the abrogation of Article 370 during a rally in Rajasthan and not the issues plaguing the state. The home minister also slammed Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar's atom bomb remark that has sparked a political row.

"I want to tell Rahul (Gandhi) baba from this land of Karnal, listen with open ears, this is the BJP government, PoK belongs to India, will remain ours and we will take it back," he said. In a purported video clip that has gone viral on social media, Aiyar is heard saying India should give respect to Pakistan as it is a sovereign nation and engage with it as it also possesses the atom bomb. He indicated in the video that if a "mad person" comes to power there and uses the atomic bomb, it will have its effect in India too. Shah also asked the Congress and particularly, its party leader B S Hooda why they let the Ram Temple issue linger for 70 years.

He highlighted that all the major developments regarding the temple took place in Modi's second term - the 'bhoomi puja' of the temple land, the victory of the Hindu side in the Ram Janmabhoomi case, and the idol consecration on January 22. The BJP leader also pointed fingers at Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi for not taking part in the "Ram Utsav (consecration) which was happening after 500 years as they feared about their minority vote bank". The Union minister also praised Modi on the occasion for making India prosperous and bringing the country's economy from the 11th to fifth spot.

Post polls, vacation beckons Andhra Pradesh leaders

PTI ■ AMARAVATI

After a whirlwind electioneering and polling, some of the prominent leaders from Andhra Pradesh are currently on a well-deserved break, scattered across diverse destinations, enjoying some much-needed relaxation and rejuvenation. Polls for the 175 Assembly and 25 Lok Sabha seats in the state were held on May 13 and the counting of votes will be taken up on June 4, nationwide. YSRCP supreme and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy on May 17 left for a foreign tour with family. Jagan, who is currently in Europe, is expected to return during the month-end, sources close to him said. The YSRCP chief contested from Pulivendula Assembly segment in the recently concluded polls. Similarly, TDP supreme and Leader of the Opposition Nara Chandrababu Naidu also, along with his family left the country for a vacation after the polls, Telugu Desam Party sources told PTI. "Naidu will be coming back at the end of May. He may also undergo a health check-up in the USA during his vacation," they said. He also visited Shirdi and offered prayers at the Sai Baba temple before embarking on the voyage. The TDP leader is contesting from Kuppam Assembly



constituency. Janasena founder and actor Pawan Kalyan also left for a foreign country after the polls and is expected to return in a couple of days, party sources said while refusing to share details. Kalyan contested from Pithapuram Assembly segment. Naidu's son Lokesh, along with his family is also currently on an international tour. He is contesting from Mangalagiri Assembly seat from where he lost in 2019. The YSRCP contested in all 175 Assembly seats and 25 Lok Sabha segments in the state. As part of a seat-sharing deal among NDA partners, the TDP was allocated 144 Assembly and 17 Lok Sabha constituencies while the BJP contested from six Lok Sabha and 10 Assembly seats. he Janasena fielded candidates in two Lok Sabha and 21 Assembly seats.

62 per cent voter turnout recorded in Jharkhand till 5 pm

PTI ■ RANCHI

A voter turnout of 61.90 per cent was recorded till the end of polling at 5 pm on Monday in the three Lok Sabha constituencies in Jharkhand, officials said. Voting had commenced at 7 am in Chatra, Hazaribag, and Koderma constituencies as part of the second phase of elections in the eastern state. It was peaceful in all the three constituencies, officials said. Hazaribag Lok Sabha seat registered the highest voter turnout of 63.66 per cent, followed by Koderma (61.60 per cent) and Chatra (60.26 per cent). The overall voter turnout in these three constituencies was 61.90 per cent. Among the voters in Hazaribag was 81-year-old Abhijit Sen, who exercised his franchise at polling booth no 153 in Hazaribag town. "From voting during the time of first Prime Minister Pt Jawaharlal Nehru to present PM Modi, I have voted in all the Lok Sabha and assembly elections since 1962," Sen claimed. First-time voter Aadya Chandra, 18, said she was happy to participate in the festival of democracy. Similarly, 91-year-old Shankar Lal Chaudhary, who voted at Koderma, also expressed his happiness to take part in the process. This phase involved 22 candidates in Chatra, 15 in Koderma, and 17 in

Hazaribag. In Hazaribag, villagers boycotted polling at booths 183 and 184 in Kusumbha village under Katkamdag due to unmet demands for a bridge. About 58.34 lakh voters, including 28.35 lakh women, are eligible to vote in these constituencies. Chief Electoral Officer K Ravi Kumar said this phase covered seven districts and three parliamentary constituencies. Kumar said there were 6,705 booths, including 6,130 in rural areas. Among these, 73 were managed by women, 13 by persons with disabilities, and 13 by youths. Chatra constituency has 16.89 lakh voters, including 8.27 lakh women, with 1,899 booths. Koderma has 22.05 lakh voters, including 10.65 lakh women, with 2,552 booths. Hazaribag has 19.39 lakh voters, including 9.42 lakh women, and 2,254 booths. The BJP has fielded Manish Jaiswal from Hazaribag and Kalicharan Singh from Chatra. The Congress has nominated KN Tripathi from Chatra and Jai Prakash Bhai Patel from Hazaribag. CPI (ML) Liberation has given ticket to Bagodar MLA Vinod Kumar Singh from Koderma. BJP Koderma nominee Annapurna Devi promised to focus on employment generation and educational improvements after winning the polls.

Restoration of JK statehood is solemn promise we have made, will stand by it: Modi

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said his government has made a "solemn promise" for restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood and will stand by it, adding the Centre was working very hard to create the right conditions. Noting that the record voter turnout in Srinagar is one of the "most gratifying things" he has seen in his tenure, Modi said people of Jammu and Kashmir have seen the NDA government's commitment to democracy enhancement in the region, "even at the cost of us sacrificing power for ourselves". "The restoration of statehood is a solemn promise we have made and we stand by it. We are working very hard to create the right conditions so that it can be done expeditiously," he told PTI in an exclusive interview here Sunday night. The Modi government had abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution, which gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, in August 2019 and the erstwhile state was

bifurcated into two Union Territories — Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. "Through the abrogation of Article 370, we today have witnessed not just the dreams and aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir coming into fruition but also their enthusiasm for participating in one of the biggest festivals in any democracy - elections," Modi said. He said the voting percentage in Srinagar, once a hotbed for all kinds of radical elements, witnessed the highest voter turnout in decades. Srinagar recorded a 36.7 per cent turnout—the highest since 1996—in the fourth phase of Lok Sabha elections on May 13. The world witnessed the growth and enthusiasm of the people in J and K when they welcomed the delegates from across the world during the G20 events, he added. "The progress that Jammu and Kashmir has made in the last five years gives me immense hope that we are on the right path to restore statehood. We want to institutionalise the positive changes that have taken place and make the gains irreversible so that the people

of the region have to never ever witness the torrid years that generations had to bear. "We want to create a Jammu and Kashmir where violence is history, prosperity is destiny. This is our long term strategy for Kashmir. Our aspiration is that Jammu and Kashmir regains its stature as the hub of culture, knowledge and tourism along with becoming a centre of futuristic technologies like AI (Artificial intelligence)," Modi said. On holding assembly elections in J and K, the prime minister said the Supreme Court has set a date for assembly polls in the region and the Election Commission is mandated to follow the directions of the highest court and it is the best organisation to assess as to when and how it will conduct assembly elections. In December 2023, the apex court had directed the Election Commission to conduct elections in J and K by September 30, 2024. Asked for his assessment on the high turnout in the ongoing Lok Sabha polls in J and K after the abrogation of Article 370, Modi said



Parliament had put its seal of approval on scrapping this provision in August 2019 and the people had given their implicit approval in 2019 itself and beyond by defying all doomsday predictions and helping maintain peace in the region. Then in December 2023, he said, the Supreme Court imprinted the judicial seal on the abrogation with an unanimous verdict by a constitution bench. "What the elections in Jammu and Kashmir have done in

2024 is to put a seal of explicit democratic approval as well - the final seal in the trinity of according approval to our historic decision," Modi said. Modi said the BJP is perhaps the only party in the country which walked out of a government so that more power could be devolved to the people. "And we fulfilled our commitment by conducting peaceful local body and Panchayat elections in Jammu and Kashmir in December 2018."

In June 2018, the BJP, which was part of a coalition government in J and K with the People Democratic Party (PDP), pulled out of the alliance, leading to the fall of the then Mehbooba Mufti government and imposition of central rule. The saffron party then alleged that it became untenable for it to continue its alliance government as "terrorism, violence and radicalisation have risen and fundamental rights of the citizens are under danger in the Valley".

Modi said people of the region have seen his government's honest intentions, the consistent efforts it has made to integrate them into the mainstream of India's democracy and they have now proactively endorsed the steps taken through this peaceful, high voter turnout. "I have no doubt in my mind that Jammu and Kashmir has a very bright future and the region will serve as a beacon of democratic empowerment and aspirations." Asked how the recent situation in J and K aligns with the government's long-term strategy for the region, the prime minister said Jammu and Kashmir, since 1947, has been a victim of the conflict economy, where the stakeholders were a few politicians, many who were working for their own personal agendas or those of outside forces. "For almost seven decades, the people of Jammu and Kashmir were denied the right to development, progress, and prosperity because a few families, in India and their masters outside, wanted to use the people to peddle their own

separatist agenda. This was an irreversible loss for generations of innocent families who were pulled into a conflict. We want to ensure that now there is an irreversible dividend of peace for future generations to come." Modi said ever since his government came into office in 2014, its agenda has been quite clear — development for all, opportunities for all, prosperity for all. He said for 70 years, there was a conflict, but for 70 years, not all regions were accessible via all-weather roads, or with all the basic necessities. "Think about the struggles of the tribal population in the mountains, or the youth in region who could not get any aspirational jobs like the youth in the rest of the country. We have managed to reverse this trend, especially post 2019," he added. The prime minister said from tourism to education, from sports to agriculture, from manufacturing to FPOs (Farmer Producer Organisations), and from SHGs (Self Help groups) to entrepreneurship, the government wants to create an ecosystem for everything within the region itself.

Over 45 per cent polling recorded in five LS seats in Bihar till 3 pm

PTI ■ PATNA

A voter turnout of 45.33 per cent was recorded in five Lok Sabha constituencies in Bihar till 3 pm on Monday, officials said. The polling began at 7 am in Muzaffarpur, Madhubani, Sitamarhi, Saran and Hajipur Lok Sabha constituencies and will continue till 6 pm, a senior official at the CEO's office said. Over 95 lakh voters in these five seats will decide the electoral fate of 80 candidates at 9,436 polling stations. Over 49.99 per cent of voters have exercised their franchise in Muzaffarpur, 45.19 per cent in Sitamarhi, 44.59 per cent in Hajipur, 43.77 per cent in Madhubani and 43.13 per cent in Saran till 3 pm. Of the total voters, 45.11 lakh are women, 21 lakh are under 29 years of age and 1.26 lakh are in the age group of 18-19 years. Talking to reporters in Patna, Bihar BJP president and Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary said, "Voting is going very smoothly in all five constituencies in the state



today." Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Nityanand Rai cast his vote on Monday at a polling booth in Hajipur Lok Sabha constituency. After casting his vote, Rai said, "I urge people to exercise their franchise in large numbers. It's a festival of democracy". Rai is seeking re-election from Ujiarpur Lok Sabha constituency where voting took place on May 13." Notable candidates include NDA ally Chirag Paswan in Hajipur, Lalu Prasad's

daughter Rohini Acharya, who is pitted against two-term sitting BJP MP and former Union minister Rajiv Pratap Rudy in Saran, and Muzaffarpur's sitting MP Ajay Nishad, who crossed over to the Congress after being denied a BJP ticket for a third term. Sudhir Kumar Ojha, an advocate who remains in the news for his petitions against top political figures, Bollywood stars and even foreign heads of state, is contesting from Muzaffarpur.

Amitabh Bachchan, SRK, Aamir Khan, Akshay Kumar and other celebs vote in Mumbai

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Popular Hindi cinema stars Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan and Akshay Kumar were among the celebrities who stepped out to cast their votes in the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections here on Monday. Polling was underway since 7 am in 13 Lok Sabha constituencies of Maharashtra, including six in Mumbai. Bachchan, 81, and wife Jaya, 76, cast their votes in a polling booth in the Juhu area of Mumbai. Daughter-in-law Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, who is nursing a hand injury and just returned from her trip to the Cannes Film Festival, was also seen at a polling booth. Aamir Khan and ex-wife Kiran Rao posed for cameras after voting at a polling booth in Bandra in suburban Mumbai. The actor also urged people to come out and cast their votes. "I just want to appeal to all Indians to come out in large numbers and cast their vote and become part of this democracy. It is our responsibility to vote. I appeal to everyone to step out and



vote, and don't waste your vote. I want youth, elderly, women, men and everyone should come out and vote," the superstar told reporters. Shah Rukh Khan, wife Gauri, son Aryan, daughter Suhana and younger son AbRam were also photographed entering a polling station in Bandra. Superstar Salman Khan's father Salim Khan and mother Salma too cast their votes. Ranbir Kapoor posed for pictures with his inked finger after casting his vote. Ranveer and Deepika, who are expecting their first child, cast their votes at a polling booth in Bandra, while Varun Dhawan and Shahid Kapoor took to their social media accounts to encourage others to vote. Kumar, who voted for the first time since receiving Indian



citizenship, was one of the early voters. "I want my India to be developed and strong and I've kept these things in my mind when I went to cast my vote, and all the Indians should think what is right for them and vote," Kumar said after voting at a polling station in Juhu. Akhtar, who queued up at a polling station in Bandra West to cast his vote, told PTI: "My vote is for good governance, the government that looks after all people, gives us a better city." The actor-filmmaker urged people, especially youngsters to step out and vote. "I just heard from somebody that young people are complaining that it's too hot but it's not hot at all, so please do step out, do vote," Akhtar



said. His sister, filmmaker Zoya Akhtar and mother Honey Irani also voted. Actor Hema Malini, who's BJP candidate from Mathura Lok Sabha constituency, said she is hopeful that voters' turnout will be good. "We are very much concerned (about voter turn-out). We've done maximum publicity for people to come and vote. Across India, celebrities have requested (people to vote). I'm sure the voter turnout will be good," Malini, who was accompanied by daughter Esha, said after casting her vote in Mumbai. Dharmendra, 88, said, "They (voters) know how to be a good Indian citizen. They know how to take India to great heights, and they know how and what to do for that." Other Bollywood celebrities,



who have voted so far, include Tabu, Kajol, Saif Ali Khan with his wife Kareena Kapoor Khan, Kiara Advani, actor Kiara Advani, Rekha, Sunny Deol, Sanjay Dutt, Sanya Malhotra, Govinda, Manoj Bajpayee, Anil Kapoor, Ali Fazel, Konkana Sen Sharma, Paresh Rawal, Shradha Kapoor, Bhumi Pednekar, Ananya Panday, Sara Ali Khan with her mother Amrita Singh, Suniel Shetty, Shilpa Shetty, Arshad Warsi and Tiger Shroff. Ashutosh Gowariker, Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, Subhash Ghai, Onir noted poet and lyricist Gulzar, his filmmaker daughter Meghna Gulzar, Kunal Kohli, musician Vishal Dadlani, singer and music composer Shankar Mahadevan, among others.



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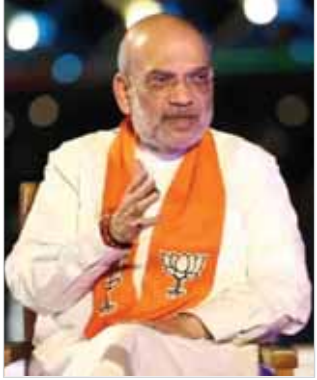
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PAPER WITH PASSION

The PoK hobgoblin

In election season, BJP leaders intensify campaign for PoK integration with India

If it is election season in India, can references to Pakistan be far behind? In 2019, it was Pulwama and the resultant surgical strikes. This time, an IAF convoy came under terror attack in the Poonch area on May 4, following which Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) made a rather late entry into the poll narrative. The call for reclaiming PoK is being given wide currency by the BJP; its top leaders are making bold assertions on the issue. Senior party leaders Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh and Himanta Biswa Sarma have all recently underscored the BJP's commitment towards integrating PoK with India. To begin with, Amit Shah made a striking declaration, asserting that India will take PoK as it "belongs to us". The statement is seen as a bold political promise, aligning with the BJP's long-standing position on PoK. Then, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma echoed the sentiment, adding that the move is not merely aspirational but a realistic objective under the current Government. Then came Rajnath Singh's slightly different approach, focusing on the human rights situation in PoK. Singh called on international bodies to take cognisance of the rights violations in the region. These statements during the ongoing polls are clear indication that the BJP wants to draw people's attention to this long-pending issue. They also underline the party's strategic use of PoK as a rallying point in the lead-up to the elections, aiming to consolidate support among nationalist segments.



Indeed, the situation in PoK is not good. The locals there are demanding greater autonomy and political rights, more self-governance and local control. They are also concerned about rights abuses and restrictions on civil liberties, calling for the protection of their basic rights, freedom of expression and an end to political repression. Additionally, economic development is a major issue, with calls for better opportunities, improved infrastructure, healthcare and education, along with increased investment to drive regional growth. But can India intervene in PoK matters and reintegrate it in our territory is another question. Unfortunately, such statements often cross borders and have unintended ramifications on the other side. Domestically, it may serve to galvanise the party's core supporters and assert the BJP's strong stance on national security and territorial integrity. It is also likely to influence electoral dynamics, with the party hoping to leverage this narrative to bolster its performance in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections. Internationally, these statements may further strain India-Pakistan relations, potentially escalating tensions in an already volatile region. The call for international intervention on human rights grounds adds a new dimension to the discourse, potentially inviting global scrutiny and diplomatic engagements which India has been avoiding ever since this issue started. These remarks are more driven by poll expediency and election rhetoric rather than the Government's stated policy. These statements could exacerbate regional tensions and complicate diplomatic efforts.

PICTALK



People show their inked finger after casting their vote during the fifth phase of Lok Sabha elections, in Ladakh

Communal friction must end now



PRAFULL GORADIA

Despite facing criticism, Modi's tenure has seen minimal communal clashes, emphasising the importance of mutual understanding for communal harmony

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the hectic campaigning for the current Lok Sabha elections has asked the Muslim community to seriously introspect; he has also exposed the Congress of endlessly pampering their notions of separateness. As expected, he has been pilloried for doing some blunt speaking. No honest political observer can deny that Prime Minister Modi's administration has been free of communal clashes, except the Delhi riots of 2020. Earlier, this used to be a regular feature. The only other communal clashes have been over the abduction of cows. Hindus detest the killing of cows and oxen. In the 16th century, the Mughal emperor Akbar banned the killing of cows, because it offended Hindu sentiments.

In the 20th century, the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Hind, founded by Maulana Azad advised Muslims to avoid killing cows as it offends Hindus. An unwritten clause of the Partition of India was that those Muslims who wanted to stay back in post-Partition India shouldn't do anything to offend Hindu sentiments. Qaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah had clearly stated in his Lahore speech of March 22, 1940, that "Hindus and Muslims are very different and cannot exist in the same country". Dr BR Ambedkar endorsed this view in his 1941 book Thoughts on Pakistan that an exchange of population should be organized on the Turko-Greek lines in 1923, under the auspices of the League of Nations. Jinnah, Ambedkar and Dr Rajendra Prasad endorsed this view. Rajendra Babu, India's President from 1950 to 1960, had written India Divided, wherein he proposed that Muslims who couldn't emigrate to Pakistan could be specially permitted to stay back, not as citizens but as aliens with visas. Jinnah and other League functionaries in 1946 and 1947, had repeatedly demanded an exchange of population. Their views were published in the Dawn, newspaper Jinnah (now published in Karachi but initially printed in Delhi). Sir Feroze Khan Noon, later Pakistan's first prime minister, threatened in



April 1946 that if Hindus took an obstructive attitude to population exchange, Muslims would re-enact the murderous orgies of Genghis and Halaqu Khan. Iftikhar Husain, the Nawab of Mamdot, in December 1946 said he supported an exchange of population because many Muslims wanted to settle in Sindh. Ismail Chundrigar, later Pakistan's sixth prime minister, said that the British had no right to hand over Muslims to a subject people over whom they had ruled for 500 years. Shaukat Hayat Khan, son of Sikandar Hayat Khan, said the exchange of population was an integral part of the demand for Pakistan. Ismail Mohammed, a Muslim Leaguer from Madras said that Muslims were in the middle of a jihad. Similar were the views of Raja Ghazanfar Ali, who was later Pakistan's food, agriculture and health minister. To the extent that Professor M Mujeeb, Vice-Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi met the Turkish representatives to the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization (UNO), the latter was surprised and asked Mujeeb, "How are you representing India? I thought all Muslims went away to Pakistan". The point here is that all



THE INCUMBENT GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN BOLD ENOUGH TO BRING IN SOME REFORMS, HOWEVER LIMITED. INSTANT VERBAL DIVORCE HAS BEEN ABOLISHED AND EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES AND INITIATIVES HAVE BEEN EXPANDED TO INCLUDE MUSLIM GIRLS

clashes or friction between the two communities ought to have been put finally at rest. They would have been so but for the insertion of Articles 25 to 30 into the Constitution of India by the Leftist followers of the country's first PM Jawaharlal Nehru. They wanted a substantive vote base for their great leader. This explains why a Uniform Civil Code was made a non-justiciable part of the Constitution. While zamindaris and jagirdaris were abolished, waqfs, which have been nationalized in many Islamic countries, were left untouched. Every other aspect of the separateness of the community's separate identity, like Urdu, polygamy, instant verbal talaq, etc., was not only not touched but continuously pampered. Madrasas, which foster a parallel and obscurantist education system, continue to thrive, preaching sectarianism and schism, to the detriment of their community. The present Government has been bold to bring in some reforms, however limited. Instant verbal divorce has been abolished and educational facilities and initiatives have been expanded to include Muslim girls. The womenfolk of the community, who have benefitted from these reforms, are being suspected of voting for a Hindu party in these elec-

tions. Islam accords priority to the ummah (community) over the vatan (country). There can be no denying that former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had said that Muslims have "first claim over our national resources" and he would have no hesitation in allotting 15 per cent of resources to them. During his regime, he appointed no less than five commissions to 'enquire' how and why Muslims in India were disadvantaged and what should be done to pull them up. Qutubuddin Aibak captured Delhi in 1192 AD and thereafter, one Muslim dynasty after another ruled Delhi till 1857, i.e., a total of 665 years before they were erased by the British Crown. With such a long rule, has any Government asked why the community is backward and needs a lift-up? Is taqlid (orthodoxy) in preference to ijihad (re-interpretation) the reason for this? Does the neglect of women also further this state of near-perpetual backwardness? Who is answerable for these crimes of omission? Is the present prime minister, the first Indian leader to ask these uncomfortable questions, in any way answerable for this? (The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS PERSIST

Madam — Apropos the news article, "Economic crisis takes a backseat in elections," published on May 20, this is my response. In this dance of democracy, scarce resources are rambling up election tempos. The focus shifts from core issues like employment to distractions like religious and cultural symbols. Despite being touted as the fifth-largest economy, India faces grim realities: high unemployment, displacement due to conflicts in Manipur and agrarian distress. Political promises of increased reservations appear futile without sufficient job creation. The International Labour Organisation highlights severe forced labour issues, questioning India's progress. With inflation soaring and trade deficits widening, the economic situation remains dire. Public-sector job cuts and reliance on self-employment indicate systemic failures. To truly uplift the marginalised and revitalise the economy, a robust public sector and equitable competition with the private sector are essential. Would politics support such a transformation?

Kunal Singh | Patiala

THE TRUMP SYNDROME

Madam — In US politics, Donald Trump was not the cause of a democratic crisis of faith. He just rode to power on it. Once in control, he leveraged the same disillusionment that helped him into office. Debasing democratic norms and abusing tall institutions led to the subversion of democratic systems. This Trump syndrome of relentless polarisation, which spawns apathy and disconnect in the polity, is seen creeping into nations across the globe to keep the political brew on a boil. Scandals and crises would shake voters' faith in the political system occasionally, but an engineered schism and dysfunction in the polity with agenda-driven governance turned corrosive. Universally, people feel that democracy is failing because the Governments it produced were unable or unwilling to address their greater concerns. In the ongoing

Combating wildlife trafficking



Apropos the news article, "YouTube happy hunting ground for wildlife traffickers," published on May 20, this is my response. Reading about the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) taking down over 1,100 YouTube videos linked to illegal wildlife trade is both reassuring and deeply concerning. On one hand, it's encouraging to see concerted efforts to tackle this digital menace. However, the sheer volume of such content on a major platform like

YouTube highlights a troubling trend. It's alarming that tech-savvy wildlife traffickers exploit YouTube's vast user base to market and sell protected species, such as parakeets, rare turtles and pangolins. This underscores a significant challenge: the intersection of advanced technology and traditional crime. Despite YouTube's policies against animal abuse, the persistence of these videos suggests enforcement gaps. The WCCB's proactive steps, involving volunteers and "WILD NET," show progress in wildlife crime control through digital tools. Stronger tech-enforcement collaborations are vital for effective monitoring and policy enforcement. As we applaud the WCCB's efforts, we must also recognise the ongoing battle against a lucrative and persistent illicit wildlife trade that adapts as quickly as we counter it.

Neha Gupta | Delhi

phase of political asphyxiation, the disillusioned electorate is dispirited to defend a system that has failed to champion its cause. Worse, it could be more than ever before that ballots may no longer be the sole guarantee of true democracy. Apathy towards democracy is a gateway to larger unrest.

R Narayanan | Mumbai

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT

Madam — Various things on earth now feel the effect of climate change. Due to climate change, it has been seen that the negative impact on the mental health of people has increased. This research has been published in the journal "Lancet Neurology." Fluctuations in temperature are now affecting brain diseases as well. I recently read in the news that the severity of diseases like cerebral palsy and encephalitis is increasing. Cases of cerebral palsy are also increasing due to the rise in nighttime temperatures. Overall, the scope of climate change is becoming very large. Due to the increase in temperature, various birds and animals have also start-

ed to be affected. It is time for them to go to human settlements for drinking water. All this is happening due to many things. It seems that more than 5 million trees have been cut in India only from 2018 to 2022. This was recently stated in the report "Nature Sustainability." According to this report, most trees have disappeared in Telangana and Maharashtra. It has come to light that big trees have been cut down to expand agriculture in many areas. The remaining trees are also affected by forest fires and fungal infections. One factor that mitigates overall temperature rise is the current state of the tree. The temperature rise will affect many things and many cities near the sea are also likely to go under water. The increase in temperature should be stopped by humans. Otherwise, it seems that he will have to face many problems and the Government should also take measures for this.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune

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Museums are pillars of culture and education

Museums play an essential role in preserving the history of human civilisation, offering tangible evidence of our existence and activities throughout time



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

Museums play an indispensable part in understanding the history of human civilisation. It is proof of our existence on this planet and material evidence of human activity carried out during our lifetime. Understanding the diverse cultural tapestries that make up human history helps build more inclusive societies. Museums come in various types, each focusing on different aspects of human knowledge, culture and the natural world, like Art museums, history museums, natural history museums, science museums, military and war museums, aviation and space museums, etc. This range of purposes results in a remarkable diversity of museums in terms of their form, content and function. The history of museums is a fascinating journey that reflects humanity's evolving ways of collecting, preserving and interpreting objects of significance. The concept of collecting valuable or significant objects dates back to ancient civilisations. In ancient Greece, for instance, temples often housed collec-



tions of art and artefacts dedicated to the gods. The word "museum" originates from the Greek "mouseion," a term used to describe a place dedicated to the Muses, the goddesses of the arts and sciences. The concept of the public museum began to take shape in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Many consider the Ashmolean Museum, which opened in 1683 at Oxford University, as the first public museum of its kind. The founding of the British Museum in London in 1753 was a watershed moment in the evolution of museums worldwide. Numerous national museums were founded in the 19th century, frequently serving as emblems of cultural identity and national pride. The history of museums in India is deeply intertwined with the country's rich cultural and historical legacy. The colonial period saw the estab-

lishment of the first formal museums in India. The British East India Company and other colonial powers began collecting artefacts, often to showcase their conquests and understand local cultures. The Indian Museum in Kolkata, founded in 1814, is the oldest museum in India and one of the earliest in the world. It was established by the Asiatic Society of Bengal and housed collections that ranged from geological to archaeological artefacts. Post-independence, the National Museum under the Ministry of Culture was established in Delhi in 1949. It houses a vast collection of artefacts representing over 5,000 years of Indian history. It was a significant step towards preserving and showcasing India's cultural heritage. To propagate science and develop scientific temper, the National Council of Science Museums (NCSM) was established on April 4, 1978. Today, it administers 26 Science Centres/Museums spread across the country and is considered the world's largest network of science centres/museums. Museums not only play a vital

role in education and research, serving as repositories of knowledge, culture and history, but also in the conservation and preservation of the region's cultural heritage. Their contributions extend beyond simply displaying artefacts; they provide immersive learning experiences, support scholarly research and engage the public in various educational activities. Museums offer interactive exhibits that engage visitors in hands-on activities. These interactive elements make learning more engaging and memorable, helping visitors, especially children, to grasp complex concepts in science or history through experience. Museums also act as centres of active research. Researchers in archaeology, anthropology, biology and art history rely on museum collections for their studies. Much breathtaking research in science, especially on paleogenomics, was done using the artefacts from museums. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN ADDRESSING EMOTIONAL IMBALANCE IN SOCIETY

Independence is not possible without education in emotional self-control



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Today, whether you open a newspaper or tune into a news channel, you are almost guaranteed to encounter reports of crimes ranging from petty thefts to dacoity, murder, terrorism and sexual offences. Crime is alarmingly on the rise. This surge in criminal activity to a variety of factors, each adding to the growing sense of unease in our society. Giving the rationale behind this frightening phenomenon, they explain that some cases are due to the motive of money, others due to rage, hate, enmity and revenge and yet others due to odious discrimination based on caste, religion, ethnicity, culture or nationality or due to business rivalry or professional jealousy. However, they do not go into the common root cause of all these multifarious manifestations and motives of crime. As a result, they fail to address themselves to the real problem and to remedy the worsening and threatening situation. So, it would be correct to say that, in reality, there is no other problem but that people do not know and eradicate the roots of the tree of all problems and, instead, they try to get rid of some of its branches only. Of course, no one can deny that in a society where corruption and criminal tendencies have become strongly entrenched and where the virus of crime has entered and spread into the whole body of society, it has become difficult to breathe the pure air of freedom or liberation from worry, fear and tension and, despite lacs of able-bodied military men and police and trained and thoughtful investigating officers, life is neither safe from ruffians nor Governmental apathy. Everyone is fed up with the delaying tactics of those whose job is to facilitate rather than obstruct. Everyone is tired of the corrupt ways of everyone who can do something good and gracious but who, in practice, is doing the reverse.



But still, everyone is doing, more or less, what he or she considers distasteful, disdainful, obnoxious or horrible. If we go deep into this problem, then we will find that emotional disturbance is the origin of all disturbances. Yes! Emotional imbalance or instability of the mind is the forerunner of all imbalances and instabilities. Emotional imbecility is the mother of all kinds of anarchy, deviant behaviour and crime — big or small. It is a lack of emotional intelligence that is at the back of every kind of waywardness, wanton behaviour and vicious tendencies. In this context, let us understand that like and dislike are the natural tendencies in all men and women. But liking for a particular gender may become so irresistible as to grow into -lust and dislike for certain persons may become so strong as to grow into deep hatred and, in the case of these emotions going berserk, people may, one day, find that they have landed in jails. So, when we talk of emotional maturity or control, what we mean is that we have to have a measure of discipline or control over our tendencies of inclination and aversion, liking and disliking or love and hate so that these natural tendencies enable us to keep the company of what is good and salubrious and keep away from what is bad and harmful. When we refer to emotional intelligence, we, refer to our sound judgment as to what are the things or who are the persons with which or with whom we should associate and what or who are of the opposite kind so that we may ward them off. But, alas! Most men and women miss that education that trains emotions or develops emotional potential positively. As long as this continues to happen, we will have a society where crimes are rampant and where people live in a State of tension with the push and pull of criminal tendencies pounding their minds. But what else is the means of emotional training than spiritual education? Our struggle for independence will remain incomplete unless people are educated to have emotional self-control. (Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)

Celebrating the power of cultural diversity



RAJDEEP PATHAK

As Nobel laureate Desmond Tutu once articulated, our differences underscore our mutual interdependence, highlighting the profound value of cultural diversity

The "World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development", celebrated annually on May 21st, stands as a beacon of hope in a world often marred by conflicts stemming from cultural, religious and socio-economic differences. In such a situation of growing discord, dialogue emerges as a powerful tool for fostering understanding, cooperation and ultimately, development. Dialogue serves as the cornerstone of development in a world, characterized by its diversity. The 1984 Nobel Peace Prize winner from South Africa and Theologian Desmond Tutu had eloquently stated, "We are different so that we can know our need for one another," thus necessitating the essence of cultural diversity - an opportunity to learn, grow and empathize with others. UNESCO established the "World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development" in response to the 2001 terrorist attack that destroyed the Bamyana Buddha statue in Afghanistan. In December 2022, the United Nations General Assembly officially designated May 21st as this day. The 2002 Universal Declaration recognized the need to "Enhance the potential of culture as a means of achieving prosperity, sustainable development and global peaceful coexistence".

Moreover, with 89% of all current conflicts in the world occurring in countries with low intercultural dialogue, to forge effective cooperation and sustain peace, strengthening intercultural dialogue becomes a necessity. Further, according to UNESCO data (https://www.un.org/en/observances/cultural-diversity-day), the cultural and creative sector is one of the most powerful engines of development worldwide. It accounts for more than 48 million jobs globally - almost half of which are held by women - representing 6.2% of all existing employment and 3.1% of global GDP. It is also the sector that employs and provides opportunities for the largest number of young people under the age of 30. However, the cultural and creative sector still does not have the place it deserves in public policies and international cooperation. Thus, in a bid to change this, in September 2022, delegations from 150 States gathered in Mexico for MONDIACULT 2022 - the largest world conference devoted to culture (in the last 40 years) - where they unanimously adopted the historic 'Declaration for Culture' affirming 'culture' as a "global public good" and calling for it to be integrated "as a specific goal in its own right" in the Development Agenda beyond 2030. But what exactly are the concepts of diversity and inclusion along with culture? Diversity encompasses the intentional and inclusive gathering of individuals from various backgrounds, encompassing differences in race, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, gender identity, disability, sexual orientation, age, educational background and this list can go on. It emphasizes the importance of bringing these diverse identities together to interact positively and contribute to a shared environment. Inclusion goes beyond merely acknowledging and respecting each person's distinct experiences and identities. It requires fair treatment and widespread recognition. It means embracing and appreciating these differences as essential



THROUGHOUT HISTORY, NUMEROUS INSTANCES UNDERSCORE THE TRANSFORMATIVE POTENCY OF DIALOGUE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION. ONE SUCH EXAMPLE IS THE GANDHIAN MODEL OF 'NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION'. MAHATMA GANDHI ADVOCATED 'SATYAGRAHA' AGAINST OPPRESSION

elements for the progress and well-being of all. Thus the "World Cultural Diversity Day", commemorating the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, also emphasizes four key objectives. First, it advocates for policies fostering the creation, production and dissemination of diverse cultural goods and services. Secondly, it encourages initiatives facilitating a balanced exchange of cultural products while enhancing the mobility of artists and cultural professionals. Thirdly, it promotes sustainable development policies and international aid programs that embrace cultural integration. Lastly, it underscores the importance of aligning international and national legislation with human rights and fundamental freedoms, ensuring the preservation and flourishing of cultural diversity worldwide. All this is because, 'Cultural Diversity', drives development, not only economically, but also personally. Simultaneously, 'Dialogue' also transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, catalysing cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. As Rumi, the 13th-century Persian poet, poignantly expressed, "The wound is the place where the Light enters you," a profound insight underscoring the potential for growth and enlightenment that arises from engaging in dialogue, even amidst adversity. In today's complex landscape, dialogue emerges as an urgent necessity, given the multitude of global challenges like climate change, economic disparity and geopolitical tensions. Martin Luther King Jr.'s timeless words, "Injustice any-

where is a threat to justice everywhere," emphasize the interconnectedness of human experiences and the pivotal role of dialogue in addressing systemic inequalities in this landscape. Engaging in dialogue, not only enhances self-awareness but also fosters profound connections with others. For instance, movements like 'Black Lives Matter', sparked by tragic incidents like George Floyd's and Breonna Taylor's deaths, underscore the imperative of dialogue in combating systemic racism and police brutality. Meaningful conversations among communities, law enforcement agencies and policymakers are essential for driving substantial reforms and promoting racial equity. Throughout history, numerous instances underscore the transformative potency of dialogue in conflict resolution. One such example is the Gandhian model of 'nonviolent communication'. Mahatma Gandhi advocated for 'Satyagraha' or truth force, advocating peaceful resistance against oppression. His commitment to dialogue and nonviolence inspired millions, to follow the path of non-violence against the might of British colonial rule. Through nonviolent protests, civil disobedience and constructive dialogue, Gandhi showcased the power of dialogue in effecting profound social and political change. His method challenged colonial oppression's legitimacy, spurring a global movement for civil rights and social justice, across the country and inspiring others worldwide. Gandhi's legacy underscores dialogue's enduring potential in resolving conflicts and advancing justice worldwide.

CEO of the East African Centre for Human Rights, Judith Oloo, writing for "The Standard" in her article "The World Day of Cultural Diversity: Children's role as carriers of culture" (standard media.co.ke), lays importance on the role of children as torchbearers of cultural diversity. She says that children, "As participants in and carriers of our culture... are a critical part of our population - the future of our societies". According to her, culture profoundly shapes children's development, influencing emotional, social, physical and linguistic growth from birth. Customs, beliefs and practices surrounding food, art, language and religion play significant roles. Recognizing this, professionals working with children, such as social workers and child rights advocates, must grasp these influences to bring about a change. In today's world, addressing global challenges requires collaborative approaches rooted in dialogue and mutual understanding. According to the UN, "Three-quarters of the world's major conflicts have a cultural dimension. Bridging the gap between cultures is urgent and necessary for peace, stability and development." Each of us has a role in fostering understanding to cultivate thriving communities. It's crucial to recognize how culture, in its various diversified forms, enriches discourse and contributes to sustainable development across different realms - social, environmental, economic and so on. Is it then not the time for us to at least sit across the table and start communicating? (The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

Outrage over superstar Mammooty's alleged Jihadi ties

The controversy has ignited a fierce political debate and exposed deep-seated tensions within Kerala's political landscape

The disclosure by Mohammed Sharshad, a Chennai-based businessman, who is also a CPI(M) activist, that Malayalam cinema's "super mega star" Mammooty was shocked the secular, liberal and democratic political leaders of Kerala. The CPI(M), CPI and Congress leaders have come out openly against the Sangh Parivar for portraying Mammooty as a Jihadi. The disclosure about Mammooty's links with Jihadi organisations was made by a Muslim youth, a local leader of the CPI(M). The first person to attack Sangh Parivar about the report about Mammooty's Jihadi links was K T Jaleel MLA, a former CPI(M) minister and former president of the banned SIMI. Jaleel is famous for his



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

speeches and writings that India could be liberated only through Islam. Then other ministers took up the issue and it has caused ripples in Kerala. Mammooty, who was a below-average student during his college days is an Arabic graduate from Maharaja's College Ernakulam. While he was a student, Prof Ummer was the head of the Arabic Department and it was the latter who set the question papers

and valued the answer sheets. No Arabic student has failed in BA Arabic examination in Maharajas College those days. The title super mega star reminds one of the age-old adage in the land of the blind, the one-eyed is the King. Mammooty is no match for his counterparts in Hindi movies or Hollywood. Being a Jihadi or communalist is not a crime. The issue here is that one who questions the organized bargaining capacity of the Muslim community becomes persona non grata in Kerala. Leaders who were bold enough to point out the hidden agenda of the Muslim political and spiritual leaders ended up in dustbins. EMS Namboodirippadu tops the list of such persons who

were decimated by the Islamist leaders. Before the 1991 assembly elections, there was a suggestion from certain CPI(M) leaders like E K Nayanar and M V Raghavan (both left to meet Marx, Lenin and Stalin) that the party should ally with the Muslim League. But Namboodirippadu was quick to retort that the Muslim League should get rid of its name and flag (that resembled the Pakistani national flag) to be considered an ally. Leaders of the Muslim League became furious and they saw to it that Namboodirippadu was cut to size and the CPI(M) removed him from the coveted position of general secretary in 1992. The next to earn the wrath of leaders of the Muslim community was A K Antony who was the chief minister during the

period 2001 to 2004. The 2003 Marad beach massacre that saw the slaughtering of eight Hindu fishermen by Islamic radicals happened during Antony's tenure. Antony was for an investigation by the CBI but made a hasty retreat as Muslim League leaders throttled the move. But he warned the League leaders openly that the organized bargaining power of communal outfits would not be entertained by his Government. This hurt the Muslim League leadership who asked the Congress High Command to remove Antony from the chief minister's post at the earliest. That's how Antony tendered his resignation post-2004 Lok Sabha polls and moved over to New Delhi. V S Achuthanandan, a widely respected leader of the

CPI(M) was sworn in as chief minister in 2006 after the assembly election. Achuthanandan was always against any kind of communalism and fanaticism. During a press meeting in the national capital in 2010, Achuthanandan said that Love Jihad was a reality. "The Muslim fundamentalists have an agenda to convert Kerala into a Muslim majority State within the next two decades," he had said. Though the CPI(M) lost the 2011 elections by a whisker, the party returned to power in 2016 making use of the goodwill enjoyed by Achuthanandan all over Kerala. The highway from Kasaragod to Thiruvananthapuram was dotted with larger-than-life-size

posters of Achuthanandan giving an impression that he would be the automatic choice of the CPI(M) as chief minister after the election. But Pinarayi Vijayan, whose pictures or posters were conspicuously absent, was nominated as chief minister by the party's leadership and since then the former has become the uncrowned king of Kerala. Achuthanandan was sidelined not because of the influence wielded by the Muslim community in the CPI(M). The ire of the Muslim League and community leaders also claimed the political career of G Sudhakaran, a CPI(M) minister who was disliked by the district-level leaders of Alappuzha (all belonging to the Muslim community) from where he hails. PC George, the

seven-time legislator who had defeated both the LDF and the UDF in assembly elections was made to bite the dust in his home turf of Poonjar for lambasting Love Jihad and the role of various Islamist outfits in this operation. For more than four decades, George was a secular leader acceptable to the Muslim community. But when he pointed out the plight of the victims of Love Jihad, George became an enemy of humanity and the entire Muslim community voted against him in the 2021 assembly election. This is Kerala's brand of secularism. Caveat Emptor would be the ideal word of caution for those daring to question the Islamist outfits. (The writer is a special correspondent with the Pioneer; views are personal)

Mohammad Mokhber appointed Iran's acting President

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran's first Vice President Mohammad Mokhber was appointed as acting president of the Islamic Republic on Monday after the death of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash in the country's northwest. Mokhber, 68, largely has been in the shadows compared to other politicians in Iran's Shiite theocracy. Raisi's death under the constitution thrust Mokhber into public view. He is expected to serve as caretaker president for some 50 days before mandatory presidential elections in Iran.

previously associated with Iran's shah or those in his government.

Mokhber oversaw a bonyad known in English as the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order, or EIKO, referring to the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The US Treasury said the organisation oversaw billions of dollars in assets as "a business juggernaut under the direct supervision of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei that has a stake in nearly every sector of the Iranian economy, including energy, telecommunications, and financial services." "EIKO has systematically violated the rights of dissidents by confiscating land and property from opponents of the regime, including political opponents, religious minorities, and exiled Iranians," the Treasury said in 2021 in sanctioning Mokhber. The European Union also had sanctioned Mokhber for a time with others over concerns then about Iran's nuclear programme. As the head of EIKO, Mokhber oversaw an effort to make a COVID-19 vaccine during the height of the pandemic, pledging to make tens of millions of



In this photo provided by Moj News Agency, rescue team members work at the scene of a crash of a helicopter carrying Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Varzaghan in northwestern Iran, Monday

doses. Only a fraction of that ever made it to the public, without explanation. Mokhber previously worked in

banking and telecommunications. He also worked at the Mostazafan Foundation, another bonyad that's a major con-

glomerate that manages the country's mega-projects and businesses. While there, he found himself entangled in a bit-

ter legal dispute between mobile phone service providers Turkcell and South Africa's MTN over potentially entering the Iranian market. MTN ended up entering Iran.

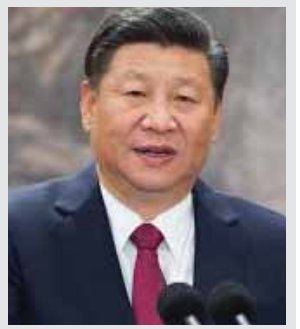
A Turkcell filing alleged Mokhber sought MTN's help in securing "certain defence equipment" in exchange for potentially working with it as opposed to Turkcell. Mokhber used "improper influence up to and including negotiating with and on behalf of the Supreme Leader in MTN's favour," Turkcell later alleged in a legal filing. An MTN report later said there were no arms transfers, though it acknowledges Mokhber was a player in Iran's decision to go with MTN.

Iranian media reports suggest Mokhber, who holds a doctorate in international law, was crucial in Iranian efforts to bypass Western sanctions on its oil industry. Mokhber has been a member of Iran's Expediency Council since 2022, which advises the supreme leader, as well as settles disputes between parliament and the Guardian Council, Iran's constitutional watchdog that also oversees the country's elections. Mokhber

'China lost a good friend'

PTI ■ BEIJING

President Xi Jinping on Monday condoled the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, who was killed in a helicopter crash, saying China has lost a good friend as he made positive efforts to consolidate and deepen the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two nations. In a message to Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber, Xi on behalf of the Chinese government and the people of China, expressed deep condolences and extended sincere sympathies to Mokhber, the family of President Raisi, and the Iranian government and people, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said. Xi said since President Raisi took office, he made important contributions to maintaining



Iran's security and stability and promoting national development and prosperity. He added that Raisi also made positive efforts to consolidate and deepen the China-Iran comprehensive strategic partnership. Raisi's tragic death is a great loss to the Iranian people, and the Chinese people also lost a good friend, Xi said.

was born Sept 1, 1955, in Dezful in Iran's southwestern Khuzestan province to a clerical family. He served as an officer in the Revolutionary Guards' medical corps during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war, according to the

pressure group United Against Nuclear Iran. "Mokhber used the vast wealth accumulated by EIKO — at the expense of the Iranian people — to reward regime insiders like himself," UANI said.

WikiLeaks founder wins bid to challenge extradition to US

PTI ■ LONDON

Wikileaks founder Julian Assange on Monday won a major reprieve as a London court permitted him to appeal against his extradition to the US on espionage charges, a legal saga which has been going on for over a decade. The 52-year-old Australian national has been held at Belmarsh high-security prison in London since 2019 when he was taken into custody from the Ecuadorian Embassy here where he had sought asylum. While the US authorities want Assange to face trial for allegedly endangering lives by publishing thousands of classified documents on Wikileaks, his lawyers have argued that the case against him is politically motivated. On Monday, two High Court judges at the Royal Courts of Justice granted the Australian-born Assange permission to appeal against his extradition



order. They agreed with his legal team on the issue of assurances from the US administration that Assange would be protected by and allowed to rely on the First Amendment of the country's Constitution, which protects freedom of speech in the US, and the death penalty would not be imposed. "Based on the principle of the separation of powers, the US court can and will apply US

law, whatever the executive may say or do," barrister Edward Fitzgerald told the court on behalf of Assange. The barrister representing the US government countered that the judicial branch of the country would take due notice of the executive's "solemn assurance". "The assurance does make it clear that he will not be discriminated against because of his nationality. He can and will be able to raise all those arguments and his nationality will not prejudice a fair trial," said James Lewis in written submissions.

The High Court ruling in favour of Assange means he will be able to challenge US assurances at a full hearing over how his prospective trial in America would be conducted and whether his right to free speech would be infringed on being extradited. His appeal is expected to be heard sometime next year as he continues his fight against

being extradited after the UK government had signed off on the order in June 2022. Assange has denied any wrongdoing all along and argued that his disclosures in 2010 revealed war crimes by the US. Supporters of Assange, led by his wife Stella Assange, gathered at the High Court and continued their calls for his release on medical grounds. Had the court ruled in the US's favour, Assange would have exhausted all legal avenues in the UK. He has resisted extradition from the UK for more than a decade after his Wikileaks website published thousands of confidential US documents in 2010 and 2011. The US Department of Justice described the leaks as "one of the largest compromises of classified information in the history of the United States". The files suggested the US military had killed civilians in unreported incidents during the war in Afghanistan.

Condition of Slovakia PM Fico improves

Bratislava (AP) — Slovak populist Prime Minister Robert Fico's condition is improving following an assassination attempt last week that shocked the European Union nation deeply polarised over his policies. "After today's consultation, the patient's condition is stabilised," the hospital treating the Slovak leader in the central city of Banská Bystrica said on Monday.

A statement released by the clinic said Fico is "clinically improving, communicating, inflammatory parameters are slowly decreasing". It said Fico remains hospitalised in the clinic for the time being. On Sunday, the clinic said that Fico, 59, was no longer in life threatening condition after he was shot in the abdomen as he greeted supporters on Wednesday outside a cultural centre in the town of Handlova, nearly 140 km (85 miles) northeast of the capital, Bratislava.

South Africa's apex court ends Zuma's bid to be elected again

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

South Africa's highest court on Monday ended a bid by former president Jacob Zuma to stand as a candidate for Parliament in a national election on May 29 citing his previous criminal conviction. The country's apex judicial institution, the Constitutional Court (ConCourt), upheld the initial decision by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to disqualify 82-year-old Zuma's candidacy on the grounds of his 15-month prison sentence for contempt of court in 2021. It had been nominated as the leader of the recently-established Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) Party, named after the erstwhile armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC) during the freedom struggle that ended in 1994 with Nelson Mandela becoming the country's first democratically-elected President.

When MK named him as its candidate whose photo should appear on the ballot paper, the IEC declared that Zuma could not run because of the constitutional provision that prohibited anyone sentenced to more than 12 months in prison from being a member of parliament. On appeal to the Electoral Court, the IEC decision was overturned and Zuma has been actively campaigning for the party, despite a dispute with a founding member that Zuma was no longer the leader of the party. "It is declared that Mr Zuma was convicted of an offence and sentenced to more than 12 months' imprisonment for purposes of Section 47(1)e of the Constitution and is accordingly not eligible to be a member of and not qualified to stand for election to the National Assembly until five years have elapsed since the completion of his sentence," Justice Leona

Theron said as she read the unanimous decision of the court. Zuma was ousted in 2018 by the ANC just months before the end of his second term in 2018 after he refused to step down amid a huge public outcry about his alleged closeness to the controversial Gupta family, originally from India and now believed to be in self-exile in Dubai, as South Africa seeks their extradition to face charges of looting billions from state coffers. After walking out of hearings at the Commission of Inquiry into state capture in 2020, Zuma was slapped with a contempt of court sentence of 15 months. He served only three months after being controversially released on medical parole. The incident led to unprecedented violence and looting for several days in Zuma's home province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and in the economic hub of Gauteng province, Johannesburg.

Ship that caused deadly Baltimore bridge collapse refloated

Baltimore (AP) — The container ship that caused the deadly collapse of Baltimore's Francis Scott Key Bridge was refloated Monday and has begun slowly moving back to port. The Dali has remained at the collapse site since it lost power and crashed into one of the bridge's supporting columns on March 26, killing six construction workers and snarling traffic into Baltimore Harbour. The ship appeared to start moving shortly after 6 am as crews started to maneuver it out of the wreckage. It started and stopped a few times before slowly backing away from the collapse site. Officials said it would move at about 1 mph on the roughly 2.5-mile (4-km) trip, a fraction of the speed it was travelling when it lost power and crashed into the bridge. Pieces of the bridge's steel trusses protruded from its bow, which remained covered in concrete from the collapsed roadway. Officials have said they plan to unload the ship's containers and complete some short-term repairs while it's docked in Baltimore. Monday morning's high tide had been expected to bring the best conditions for crews to refloat and start moving the ship, according to a statement from the Key Bridge Response Unified Command. Several tugboats were escorting the Dali on its path to the marine terminal. The work is expected to last at least 21 hours. Crews conducted a controlled demolition on May 13 to break down the largest remaining span of the collapsed bridge. The Dali experienced four electrical blackouts within about 10 hours before leaving the Port of Baltimore for Sri Lanka and hitting the bridge, according to a preliminary report issued by the National Transportation Safety Board.

ICC prosecutor seeks arrest warrant for Netanyahu

AP ■ THE HAGUE/ JERUSALEM

The chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court said Monday he is seeking arrest warrants for Israeli and Hamas leaders, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in connection with their actions during the seven-month war. Karim Khan said that he believes Netanyahu, his defence minister Yoav Gallant and three Hamas leaders — Yehya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif and Ismail Haniyeh — are responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip and Israel. Speaking of the Israeli actions, Khan said in a statement that "the effects of the use of starvation as a method of warfare, together with other attacks and collective punishment against the civilian population of Gaza are acute, visible and widely known. ... They include malnutrition, dehydration, profound suffering and an increasing number of deaths among the Palestinian popula-



'ICC SEEKING WARRANTS IS 'HISTORIC DISGRACE'

tion, including babies, other children, and women." Of the Hamas actions on October 7, he said that he saw for himself "the devastating scenes of these attacks and the profound impact of the unconscionable crimes charged in the applications filed today. Speaking with survivors, I heard how the love within a family, the deepest bonds between a parent and a child, were contorted to inflict unfathomable pain through calculated cruelty and extreme callousness. These acts demand accountability."

Israel's foreign minister says the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court's decision to seek arrest warrants against Israeli leaders is "a historic disgrace that will be remembered forever". Israel Katz said Monday he would form a special committee to fight back against any such action and would work with world leaders to ensure that any such warrants are not enforced.

UK's health service accused of cover up in infected blood scandal

AP ■ LONDON

Britain's state-funded National Health Service (NHS) was accused of cover up in an infected blood scandal dating back to the 1970s in a public inquiry report submitted to the government on Monday. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is expected to issue an apology on behalf of the government after inquiry chair Sir Brian Langstaff delivered his scathing verdict on the issue, which involves over 30,000 people being infected with life-threatening viruses such as HIV and Hepatitis C while they were under NHS care between the 1970s and 1990s. It involves infected batches of Factor VIII, an essential blood clotting protein which haemophiliacs do not produce naturally, imported from the US and used widely to treat patients at the time. They were infected as donated

blood was not tested for HIV/AIDS until 1986 and Hepatitis C until 1991 in the UK. "The scale of what happened is horrifying. The most accurate estimate is that more than 3,000 deaths are attributable to infected blood, blood products and tissue," notes Langstaff in his report following a five-year investigation. "Standing back, and viewing the response of the NHS and of government, the answer to the question 'was there a cover up?' is that there has been. Not in the sense of a handful of people plotting in an orchestrated conspiracy to mislead, but in a way that was more subtle, more pervasive and more chilling in its implications. To save face and to save expense, there has been a hiding of much of the truth," he said. The 2,527-page and seven-volume document goes on to detail the enormous scale of the scandal and also makes a series of recommen-

dations, including a speedy compensation scheme for those directly affected and who lost loved ones as a result. The report also calls upon the NHS to ensure anyone who received a blood transfusion before 1996 is urgently tested for Hepatitis C. New patients at any medical practice should also be asked if they had a transfusion before that time. The report also picks apart the approach to the scandal under the Margaret Thatcher led Conservative Party government, which insisted that people were given "the best treatment available" at the time. "The reality is that this use of this blanket line to take — sometimes applied to the position of people with bleeding disorders, sometimes to all those infected with Hepatitis C from blood or blood products — was inappropriate. It was wrong and its use was unacceptable. It became a mantra and was never ques-

tioned," it notes. "An apology should not only give some detail as to what is being apologised for, but to be understood by those to whom it is addressed as sincere and meaningful, it should lead to action. Compensation is part of this," it adds. Two sets of people were caught up in this historic health scandal of contaminated blood — people with haemophilia and similar blood clotting disorders who received a new treatment at the time to replace the missing clotting agents made from donated human blood plasma and a second group who had a blood transfusion after childbirth, accidents or during medical treatment. Ministers from the Sunak-led government have promised to address the issue of final compensation once the inquiry's report is published, the total cost for which is likely to run into billions of pounds.

Saudi Arabia's all-women rock band 'Seera' breaks barriers

AP ■ RIYADH

Leaning into the microphone in Saudi Arabia's capital, Noura let loose a primal scream. Guitars wailed and drums throbbed behind her as part of a set with her bandmates during a recent show. The performance by Seera, an all-women psychedelic rock band that blends traditional Arabic melodies with the resurgent psychedelia of bands like Tame Impala, would have been unthinkable just years earlier in the kingdom. But as Saudi Arabia liberalises some aspects of its society, Seera represents the way women now are finding their voice and expressing themselves through the arts in a nation long associated with ultraconservative Islam and the strict separation of the



sexes. "We didn't know how people would react," said Meesh, the band's bassist, who like other members asked to be identified by their stage names. "We believe strongly in self-

expression. To our surprise, they really had open arms for us." The band's name, Seera, can mean "life" or "biography" in Arabic. Band members say they try to embrace the multi-

ple meanings one can draw from a word in the language in its sound, whether through the driving drums and cymbals or the synthesizer backing the guitars. Seera's music style

revolves around the life experiences of the four-member band, who are all Saudi nationals. They sing in the Saudi dialect of Arabic, while drummer Thing wears a traditionally embroidered red face covering. "I thought this would be great as a reflection of the culture, the heritage and the roots," she said. "At the same time it would be a cool representation between the traditional and the modern and the expression of it. That's also within our sonic identity as well." Seera is quick to point out they aren't the first female band in the kingdom. Instead, they say that goes to The Accolade, which formed in 2008 and could only play underground. Things have changed radically in the kingdom in recent years since the accession of King Salman and

his assertive son, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. In 2018, women gained the right to drive. Movie theatres and other entertainment centres opened. Women are no longer required to wear the fully cloaking black abaya. Clear limits still remain on speech and any political activity in the tightly governed kingdom. But in the arts space, Saudi Arabia is slowly opening up, as could be seen by Seera's show earlier this month at The Warehouse, a live music space in Riyadh's Diriyah neighbourhood. There, dozens of youths in leather jackets and black rock T-shirts swayed and danced to the music. One young man with heavy eyeliner wore a shirt declaring "I HATE LIFE." The fashion choices resembled any

other punk show at a club in the West, though there was an absence of smoking or any alcohol in the dry kingdom. "Things have become definitely better, more towards inclusivity and in a broader perspective and in a broader way," Thing said. "There's definitely room for more growth." Seera plans to release their debut album later this year. They've also booked their first international concert in Dubai, where they'll get their first chance to perform outside of Saudi Arabia. Noura said she wanted the band to be "an inspiration for the younger generation" to express themselves. "It's OK to look, act, behave the way you want as long as you're not harming anyone," she said.

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Prachanda wins vote of confidence in Parliament

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' on Monday won a vote of confidence in Parliament, allowing him to lead a coalition government in the Himalayan nation while attempting to maintain political stability amidst frequent power struggles.

Prachanda, 69, a former guerilla leader from the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) — the third largest party in the House of Representatives (HoR) — received 157 votes in the 275-member House of Representatives.

The government required at least 138 votes to win the vote of trust.

In total, 158 lawmakers took part in the voting. The main Opposition Nepali Congress boycotted the voting process and chanted slogans against Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane, accused of misappropriating cooperative



Nepalese Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal waves to media after winning a vote of confidence in parliament in Kathmandu, Nepal, Monday. Dahal will continue leading his shaky governing coalition after winning his fourth vote of confidence in two years on Monday. AP/PTI

funds, leading to the delay in the session. One HoR member remained neutral.

Speaker Dev Raj Ghimire announced that Prachanda had won the floor test as he got a majority in Parliament. This was the fourth time that Prachanda sought a vote of confidence in the House since he assumed prime minister-ship in December 2022.

The vote comes days after one of the coalition partners, Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP), withdrew its support last week for his government while quitting the coalition government.

Earlier, the voting had to be delayed due to obstructions caused by the Nepali Congress, which has been demanding the formation of a Parliamentary probe committee to investigate Lamichhane's alleged involvement in the scam.

According to constitutional provisions, a prime minister has to take a vote of confidence after an ally withdraws support to the ruling coalition. Earlier on March 13, Prime

Minister Dahal won his third consecutive vote of confidence, days after he dumped the Nepali Congress and forged a new alliance with the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist).

Last year, Prachanda faced a floor test after former prime minister KP Sharma Oli-led CPN-UML withdrew its support to the Prachanda-led government following a rift over backing the main opposition party's candidate for the presidential poll.

Prachanda is serving a third time as prime minister, although he did not complete the full five-year term during previous stints.

In the past few decades, three big parties — the Nepali Congress, the CPN-UML, and the Maoist Centre — have ruled the country turn by turn, forever changing coalitions and partners at their convenience.

Nepal has had 13 governments since it abolished its 239-year-old monarchy in 2008 and became a republic.

China fumes as Prez Lai asserts

AP ■ BEIJING/TAIPEI

China on Monday denounced Taiwan's new President Lai Ching-te for his assertion that the self-ruled island is sovereign and vowed to uphold the status quo, saying that he has sent "a dangerous signal" of seeking "Taiwan independence".

Lai, 64, also known as William Lai, who succeeded his independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) colleague Tsai Ing-wen after winning the popular vote in the January Presidential election this year, was sworn in as the president at a ceremony held in Taipei on Monday. China views Taiwan as a rebel province that must be reunified with the mainland, even by force.

Lai's DPP party does not seek independence from China but maintains that Taiwan is already a sovereign nation.

In his no-holds-barred inaugural speech, Lai called on China to stop threatening the island, promised to uphold the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, and called on Beijing to work jointly for peace.

Lai urged Beijing to replace confrontation with dialogue and avowed that Taiwan would never back down in the face of intimidation from China, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. "As the future of both sides of the Taiwan Strait will have a decisive impact on the development of the world, we — carrying on Taiwan's democratisation — are the helmsmen of peace," he said.

Lai said his government will adhere to the "four commitments" [of national sovereignty, democracy, and freedom] and maintain the status quo without being overbearing or servile.

We all know that a country has sovereignty. According to the constitution of the Republic of China, (official name for Taiwan) the sovereignty of the Republic of China belongs to the people as a whole," Lai said. "Anyone who holds Republic of China nationality is a citizen of the Republic of China; thus, it is clear that the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are not subordinate to each other," he affirmed. "Every individual must unite and cherish the nation. Any political party

must resist annexation and protect sovereignty, and cannot sacrifice national sovereignty for political power," Lai said in an apparent reference to pro-Beijing opposition parties.

Taiwan's sovereignty is a red rag for China as President Xi Jinping has been consistently maintaining that Taiwan will eventually be part of China. Xi has ramped up massive military infrastructure around the Taiwan Strait, the narrow sea that separates the two sides deploying aircraft carriers, with numerous naval ships, jet fighters, and missiles pointing toward the island.

Many top Taiwanese politicians speculated that China will attack Taiwan by 2027 but the US said it will militarily oppose Beijing's invasion of Taiwan. US President Joe Biden had said "Yes" in 2022 to a question from a US TV network whether US forces would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion.

Later again, during a visit to Tokyo, Biden reiterated that Washington adhered to the 'One China' policy, but opposed the forcible takeover of Taiwan by China.

Much on the expected lines, China hit back with its Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin countering Lai by saying: "Taiwan independence is a dead end." "Regardless of the pretext or the banner under which it is pursued, the push for Taiwan independence is destined to fail," Wang told a media briefing here, in reaction to Lai's remarks. No matter how the political situation on the Taiwan island changes, it will not change the historical and legal facts that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China, and the historical trend that China will eventually be reunified, and will inevitably be reunified, Wang said. He said the vast majority of countries and international and regional organisations in the world stand firmly with the Chinese government and people. China makes its 'One China' policy, meaning Taiwan is part of it, mandatory for all nations to have diplomatic ties with it. Only 12 countries out of the 193 UN member states have diplomatic ties with Taiwan but Taipei gets diplomatic support from the US and Japan despite their recognition of the 'One China' policy.

Taiwan's new prez urges China to stop military intimidation

AP ■ TAIPEI

Taiwan's new president, Lai Ching-te, said in his inauguration speech Monday that he wants peace with China and urged it to stop its military threats and intimidation of the self-governed island that Beijing claims as its own territory.

"I hope that China will face the reality of (Taiwan)'s existence, respect the choices of the people of Taiwan, and in good faith, choose dialogue over confrontation," Lai said after being sworn into office. Lai pledged to "neither yield nor provoke" Beijing and said he sought peace in relations with China. But he emphasised the island democracy is determined to defend itself "in the face of the many threats and attempts at infiltration from China".

Lai's party, the Democratic Progressive Party, doesn't seek independence from China but maintains that Taiwan is already a sovereign nation.

Lai, 64, takes over from Tsai Ing-wen, who led Taiwan through eight years of economic and social development despite the COVID-19 pandemic and China's escalat-



Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te delivers an acceptance speech during his inauguration ceremony in Taipei, Taiwan, Monday.

ing military threats. Beijing views Taiwan as a renegade province and has been upping its threats to annex it by force if necessary.

Lai is seen as inheriting Tsai's progressive policies, including universal health care, backing for higher education and support for minority groups, including making Taiwan the first place in Asia to recognise

same-sex marriages.

In his inauguration speech, Lai pledged to bolster Taiwan's social safety net and help the island advance in fields such as artificial intelligence and green energy.

Lai, who was vice president during Tsai's second term, came across as more of a firebrand earlier in his career. In 2017, he described himself as a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan's independence", drawing Beijing's rebuke. He has since softened his stance and now supports maintaining the status quo across the Taiwan Strait and the possibility of talks with Beijing.

Thousands of people gathered in front of the Presidential Office Building in Taipei for the inauguration ceremony. Donning white celebratory hats, they watched the swearing-in on large screens, followed by a military march and colourful performances featuring folk dancers, opera performers and rappers. Military helicopters flew in formation, carrying Taiwan's flag. Lai accepted congratulations from fellow politicians and delegations from the 12 nations that maintain official diplomatic relations with

Taiwan, as well as politicians from the US, Japan and various European states.

Lai, also known by his English name William, has vowed to continue his predecessor's push to maintain stability with China while beefing up Taiwan's security through imports of military equipment from close partner the US, the expansion of the defense industry with the manufacture of submarines and aircraft, and the reinforcing of regional partnerships with unofficial allies such as the US, Japan, South Korea and the Philippines. The Chinese government didn't immediately address Lai's inauguration, but the Chinese Ministry of Commerce announced sanctions against Boeing and two other defence companies on Monday for arms sales to Taiwan.

US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken congratulated Lai on his inauguration. "We look forward to working with President Lai and across Taiwan's political spectrum to advance our shared interests and values, deepen our long-standing unofficial relationship, and maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," Blinken said in a statement from his office.

The US doesn't formally recognise Taiwan as a country but is bound by its own laws to provide the island with the means to defend itself.

Lai's relatively conciliatory tone will come across as reassuring to foreign governments that may have been concerned about his past reputation as a firebrand, said Danny Russell, vice president of the Asia Society Policy Institute.

"There is virtually nothing that Lai could have said, short of unconditional surrender, that would satisfy Beijing," he said.

During her tenure, Tsai oversaw a controversial pension and labour reform and extended the military conscription length to one year. She also kickstarted a military modernisation drive.

Tsai's leadership during the pandemic split public opinion, with most admiring Taiwan's initial ability to keep the virus largely outside its borders but criticising the lack of investment in rapid testing as the pandemic progressed.

Imran, others acquitted in two vandalism cases

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

In a relief to beleaguered Imran Khan, a district and sessions court in Pakistan on Monday acquitted the jailed former prime minister and other leaders of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party in two vandalism cases.

The court's verdict in the two cases related to the vandalism during the March 2022 long march came during the hearing of acquittal pleas filed by the 71-year-old PTI founder and other politicians, Geo News reported.

Other leaders of the party who were acquitted included Zartaj Gul, Ali Nawaz Awan, Faisal Javed, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Qasim Suri, Raja Khurram Nawaz, Shireen Mazari, Saifullah Niazi, Asad Umar and Awami Muslim League chief Sheikh Rashid Ahmad.

The cases against Khan and

other politicians were registered in the Kohsar and Karachi Company police stations for violation of Section 144 imposed by authorities following the arrest of the former prime minister in an alleged corruption case.

Speaking with journalists here, Khan's lawyer Naem Panjotha said the cases against the PTI founder were based on political vengeance.

"No evidence of vandalism found against the PTI founder during the long march," he said, adding that the Islamabad administration did not issue any notification to enforce Section 144 in the capital city.

Various cases of the same nature have been registered against the PTI founder and he has been acquitted in several cases about the long march, the counsel added. He also noted that other political leaders were acquitted in the van-

dalism cases.

The verdict on the acquittal of Khan, Qureshi, Rashid, Awan, Suri, and Nawaz was issued by Judicial Magistrate Shahzad Khan for a case registered at Kohsar police station.

The court had earlier reserved its verdict in the Long March vandalism case. The development comes days after a district and sessions court on May 15 acquitted Khan in two cases about the May 9 vandalism.

Khan, the only prime minister to be voted out of his office, who remains behind bars in Adiala jail, and several other PTI leaders have been facing various allegations in the cases related to the violence following his arrest on May 9. Islamabad High Court on May 16 also approved the PTI founder's bail petition in the 190 million pound National Crime Agency (NCA) settlement case.

Pentagon vows to keep weapons moving to Ukraine as Kyiv faces assault by Russia

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin committed Monday to keeping US weapons moving to Ukraine as Kyiv faces one of its toughest moments against a renewed assault by Russia. Austin and as many as 50 defence leaders from Europe and around the world were meeting Monday to coordinate more military aid to Ukraine, as Kyiv tries to hold off a Russian offensive in the northeast while launching its own massive assault on the Russia-occupied Crimean Peninsula. "We're meeting in a moment of challenge," Austin said, noting that Russia's new onslaught of Kharkiv showed why the continued commitment by the countries was vital to keep coming. Austin vowed to keep US weapons moving "week after week."

The US announced no new aid packages Monday, even as Ukrainian forces continue to complain that weapons are

just trickling into the country after being stalled for months due to congressional gridlock over funding. Pentagon officials have said that weapons pre-positioned in Europe began moving into Ukraine soon after the aid funding was approved.

It's unclear how much of that has reached some of the front lines, where Russian troops have intensified their assault. Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday during a visit to China that Moscow's offensive in Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv region aims to create a buffer zone but that there are no plans to capture the city.

Ukrainian troops have been fighting to halt Russian advances in the Kharkiv region, while also increasing their offensive attacks in Crimea, including on military infrastructure sites on the Black Sea coast and in the Russian-occupied city of Sevastopol.

Ukraine has also struggled to get enough troops to the front lines, as the war drags on into its third year and fighting takes its toll. In an effort to increase troop numbers, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed two laws, allowing prisoners to join the army and increasing fines for draft dodgers fivefold. The controversial mobilisation law goes into effect on Saturday. In the three weeks since President Joe Biden signed the USD 95 billion foreign aid package, the US has sent USD 1.4 billion in weapons pulled from Pentagon stockpiles and announced it was providing USD 6 billion in funding through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative. USAI pays for longer-term contracts with the defence industry and means that the weapons could take many months or years to arrive. In recent packages the US has agreed to send High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and rock-

ets for them, as well as munitions for Patriot and National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems, artillery, anti-aircraft and anti-tank munitions, and an array of armoured vehicles, such as Bradley and Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles.

The US is also providing additional coastal and riverine patrol boats, trailers, demolition munitions, high-speed anti-radiation missiles, protective gear, spare parts and other weapons and equipment. The State Department has also approved a proposed emergency sale of High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) to Ukraine for an estimated USD 30 million. State said Ukraine has asked to buy three of the rocket systems, which would be funded by the government of Germany. The US has now provided about USD 50.6 billion in military assistance to Ukraine since Russia invaded in February 2022.

Stabbing spree: Two killed, 10 hurt at Chinese school

PTI ■ BEIJING

At least two people were killed and 10 others injured when a knife-wielding woman went on a stabbing spree at a primary school in east China's Jiangxi province on Monday, in the second such incident in the country this month.

The incident happened in Guixi city and the suspect, a 45-year-old female surnamed Pan, has been brought under control by the police, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Two people were killed in the incident, while 10 others were injured. The injured have received treatment, among which six were slightly wounded while trying to dodge the attack, local public security authorities said.

Further investigation into the incident is underway, the report said. This is the second knife attack in China this month, which has become a common occurrence. Officials blame these attacks on disgruntled or mentally deranged people. Earlier this month, two people were killed and 21 others injured in an incident of mass stabbing at a hospital on May 7 in Yunnan province. China, where private gun ownership is illegal for most civilians, has faced a spate of mass knife attacks in public places in recent years. In August last year, two people were killed and seven others injured after a man with a history of mental illness attacked people with a knife in a residential district in Yunnan. In July of the same year, six people, including three children, were killed in a stabbing incident at a kindergarten in the south-eastern province of Guangdong. Zhenxiang County, situated in Yunnan's northeast, borders Guizhou and Sichuan provinces and, until 2020, was classified as poverty-stricken.

ISIS claims attack in Af that killed 3 Spanish citizens and 3 Afghans

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for an attack on foreigners in central Afghanistan in which three Spanish citizens and three Afghans were killed.

Seven people were wounded in the attack on Friday in Bamiyan province, a major tourist area, according to Abdul Mateen Qani, a spokesman for the interior minister. He said seven suspects were arrested at the scene.

The Islamic State group issued statements on its Amaq news agency late Sunday that said IS fighters attacked a bus carry-

ing tourists and their guides. "The attack was in response to the IS leaders' directions to target citizens of the European Union wherever they are found," it said.

Spain's Foreign Ministry said three Spaniards died and at least one more had been wounded. A Taliban official in Bamiyan who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak to the media said the four wounded foreigners were from Spain, Norway, Australia and Latvia.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez wrote on social media platform X that he was "overwhelmed" by the news.

Qani said that all those who were wounded have been transferred to capital Kabul for treatment and they are stable condition.

The Islamic State group's affiliate in Afghanistan is a major Taliban rival and its militants have attacked schools, hospitals, mosques and minority Shiite areas throughout the country.

The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021 as US and NATO forces were in the final weeks of their withdrawal from the country after 20 years of war.

The Taliban is seeking to increase the number of tourists coming to the country. In

2021, there were 691 foreign tourists; in 2022, that figure rose to 2,300; and last year, it topped 7,000. Bamiyan was the site of two massive Buddha statues carved into a cliff between the 4th and 6th century and which were destroyed by the Taliban at al-Qaida's urging in early 2001.

Separately on Monday, a hand grenade exploded in the southern city of Kandahar, killing at least one civilian and wounding three, the Kandahar police chief's office said.

Police were investigating the explosion near the road toward Kandahar airport, the statement said. No group has taken responsibility for the blast.

Irish diplomat worried about slow justice in peacekeeper's killing

Beirut (AP): Ireland's top diplomat in a visit to Lebanon on Monday expressed his concern over the slow progress in criminal proceedings against several Lebanese men charged with the killing of an Irish peacekeeper in 2022 in the tiny Mediterranean country.

Michael Martin, Irish foreign and defence minister, said he was "very, very concerned" about the case. He met with Irish peacekeepers in south Lebanon and with Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib and a representative of the Lebanese defence ministry. Lebanon's military tribunal last June charged four men with the killing of Pvt. Seán Rooney, 24, of Newtown Cunningham,

Ireland, following a half-year probe. Rooney was killed on December 14, 2022. Only one of the suspects, Mohammed Ayyad, was arrested. However, he was released on bail in November, with officials citing his medical condition. The four others facing charges — Ali Khalifeh, Ali Salman, Hussein Salman, and Mustafa Salman — remain at large. All five are allegedly linked with the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah. Hezbollah has repeatedly denied any role in the killing. On the fatal night, Rooney and several other Irish soldiers from UNIFIL were on their way from their base in southern Lebanon to the Beirut airport. Two UN vehicles

apparently took a detour through Al-Aqbiya, which is not part of the area under the peacekeepers' mandate. Initial reports said angry residents confronted the peacekeepers, but the indictment concluded that the shooting was a targeted attack. The UN peacekeeper vehicle reportedly took a wrong turn and was surrounded by vehicles and armed men as they tried to make their way back to the main road.

"We want justice to be done" and for the killers to be "brought to justice", Martin told reporters. "We understand the separation of powers. But we are concerned at the slow pace of the trial. And the Irish people want justice"

GDP growth likely to be 6.2 per cent in Q4, 7 per cent in FY24: Ind-RA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India Ratings and Research expects the country's GDP growth rate for the March quarter at 6.2 per cent and around 6.9-7 per cent for the 2023-24 fiscal, its principal economist Sunil Kumar Sinha said. The GDP numbers for the fourth quarter (January-March 2024) and the provisional estimates for the 2023-24 fiscal are scheduled to be released by the government on May 31. The Indian economy grew 8.2 per cent in the June quarter, 8.1 per cent in the September quarter and 8.4 per cent in the December quarter of 2023-24. "We are expecting the fourth quarter growth to be 6.2 per cent and the overall GDP growth for FY24 to be around 6.9-7 per cent," Sinha told PTI in an interview. He said the growth rate in the first two quarters benefited from a low base, though the 8.4 per cent growth rate in the third (October-December 2023) quarter was surprising. "When we analyse the data then what is visible is the wedge between the GVA and GDP. A large impetus to Q3 GDP has come from higher



tax collection, but this phenomenon is unlikely to be repeated in the fourth quarter. The wedge between the GDP and GVA is unlikely to be repeated in the fourth quarter," he noted. While the gross value added (GVA) was 6.5 per cent in the third quarter, the GDP growth rate stood at 8.4 per cent. This wedge is on account of higher taxes collected during the quarter. In the first quarter, the GVA and GDP growth was 8.2 per cent, while in the second quarter, the GVA was 7.7 per

cent and GDP 8.1 per cent. GDP is the total value of goods and services produced in a given period. GVA is GDP minus net taxes (gross tax collection minus subsidy). The Reserve Bank, in its monetary policy review in April, projected GDP growth for 2023-24 at 7 per cent. As regards the economic growth in the current fiscal, Sinha said the GDP is expected to expand at 7.1 per cent. "Even if we set aside the tax component, the momentum witnessed in the first and second quarters has

continued in the subsequent quarters, and the likelihood is that momentum will continue in FY25," he added. The services sector, he said, will continue the momentum, led by construction and electricity, while mining and industrial output will be laggard. "The prediction of above normal monsoon (by the Indian Meteorological Department), if it turns out to be true, will see some revival in rural demand, which will support consumption demand, and make it broad-based, instead of skewed currently," Sinha said. The finance ministry, in its monthly economic review, said resilient growth, robust economic activity indicators, price stability, and steady external sector performance continue to support India's promising economic performance amid uncertain global conditions. Overall, India continues to be the fastest-growing major economy, with positive assessments of the growth outlook for the current financial year by international organisations and the RBI, the ministry noted.

Hero MotoCorp plans to expand electric model range

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hero MotoCorp is looking to expand its presence in the electric two-wheeler segment as it aims to introduce new models below its current range to cater to a broader set of customers, as per a senior company official. The country's largest two-wheeler maker currently sells two electric scooters under its Vida range, priced between Rs 1 lakh and Rs 1.5 lakh. "We are expanding our portfolio in the first half of this year (current fiscal). Into the mid and the mass segment as well," Hero MotoCorp Chief Business Officer - Emerging Mobility BU Swadesh Srivastava said in an analyst call. With new product introductions this fiscal, the company is going to be able to play in each of the three segments of premium, mid and mass, he noted. "With this, we are looking at significant growth within this year. And we are also looking to improve our cost structures," he said. The company is going to witness huge growth in the EV segment this year as well



as next year, he stated. "We are looking at steep growth this year and next year, based on the portfolio and the geographical expansion," Srivastava said. Hero MotoCorp has expanded the presence of the Vida brand to more than 120 cities and over 180 touch-points in the country. It has also entered into a partnership with Ather Energy for an interoperable charging network, providing over 2,000 charging points across 200 cities to its customers. To strengthen its global presence, Vida is also expected to make its debut in European and UK markets in FY25. Replying to a query, Hero MotoCorp CEO Niranjan Gupta said the company's capex guidance remains between Rs 1,000 crore and Rs 1,500 crore for the current fiscal.

GST officers working on registration mechanism for shared warehouse for e-commerce suppliers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

GST authorities are working out a mechanism to deal with the taxation and registration issues related to shared warehouses maintained by e-commerce companies, where multiple suppliers store their goods for the last mile delivery, an official said. The issue of taxation for warehouses has cropped up after multiple suppliers have geo-tagged the same warehouse as their 'additional place of business' under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) rules. "We are working to see whether a 'shared workplace' or 'coworking space' concept can be implemented for the warehouses maintained by e-commerce companies to store goods of multiple suppliers," the official told PTI. Under Goods and Services Tax (GST) law, suppliers to an e-commerce platform can store their goods at a common warehouse. However, the suppliers in their GST registration are required to show the warehouse as an additional place of business. The official said that when multiple taxpayers register at a single warehouse, the geo-tag reflects the same address for all. This sends a signal to the tax officer that numerous taxpayers are based at one location and this might be a possible fraudulent registration. The other issue is that the warehouse where multiple suppliers store their goods should not be held accountable for the default of a single supplier. Additionally, there is a risk that tax officers might attribute such risks to the e-commerce operators themselves, potentially affecting their businesses, the official added. The issue of registration of warehouses maintained by e-commerce companies was discussed between the Central and state GST officers at a meeting earlier this month. "It is currently in the phase of discussion. Whether a shared workplace concept can be implemented for e-commerce



warehouses would be discussed at the law committee and then presented before the GST Council," the official said. The law committee under the GST Council comprises officers from central and state taxes. Moore Singhi Executive Director Rajat Mohan said the evolution of e-commerce has necessitated many companies to maintain shared warehouses for multiple suppliers, with some facilities accommodating thousands of suppliers. GST authorities have recently implemented geo-tagging, requiring taxpayers to provide geo-tags for all registered premises. This allows tax officers to pinpoint the exact locations of registered taxpayers. "A scenario of multiple taxpayers showing the same address can lead to undue scrutiny for both the taxpayers operating within these warehouses and the companies managing them. It presents a significant challenge that warrants resolution at the industry level," Mohan said. He said GST authorities should consider implementing a mechanism to separately identify warehouses and train tax systems to avoid conflating the tax payment score of these facilities with those of the suppliers registered there. "A refined tax system should enable geotags to distinctly represent warehouses and individual taxpayers, facilitating more accurate risk assessments by tax officers and minimising unwarranted harassment," Mohan added.

India has sufficient domestic tyre capacity: ATMA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has sufficient tyre manufacturing capacity and imports should not be liberalised through FTAs by way of duty concessions, industry body Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association said on Monday. The automotive tyres rank at the forefront of those sectors where domestic manufacturing capabilities can render imports unnecessary, Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association (ATMA) has communicated to the Centre. This was in response to the government seeking feedback about sectors in which India has capabilities to be self-reliant so that upcoming



FTAs could be drafted while safeguarding the interests of domestic industry, ATMA said in a statement. The industry body has pointed out that imports should not be liberalised through FTAs by way of duty concessions.

Despite adequate manufacturing capacities, over Rs 2,000 crore worth of tyres were imported in the country in the first three quarters of FY24, an increase of 27 per cent over the same period in the preceding year, ATMA said. "Over the last few years, the tyre sector has witnessed substantial investments, by leading manufacturers allocating over Rs 35,000 crore towards capacity expansion, technology upgrades, and research and development. As the new capacities go on stream, it is important to meet the demand from domestic manufacturing rather than importing tyres," ATMA Chairman Arnab Banerjee said.

He further said the domestic tyre industry is today geared to meet all the requirements of domestic and international auto OEMs (original equipment makers) by way of design, development and ensuring regular supply of tyres for all categories and types of vehicles manufactured in the country. "The industry is ahead of the demand curve in production of all types of tyres. As soon as a vehicle is conceived, tyre companies are ready with the fitments. As a result, auto OEMs are not importing tyres and the domestic tyre industry is meeting the requirements," Banerjee added. ATMA said the domestic tyre industry is a significant

employer, providing livelihoods to over 5 lakh people directly and indirectly employed in manufacturing, distribution, and related services. "Prioritising domestic manufacturing of tyres is also essential as the livelihood of over 10 lakh rubber growers in the country depends upon the tyre industry that consumes over 70 per cent of the domestic natural rubber," it said. By fostering domestic production and leveraging technological advancements, India can strengthen its position as a global leader in the tyre industry while generating employment, promoting sustainability, and driving economic growth. ATMA asserted.

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Training Programme on Artificial Intelligence and Robotics organised

PNS ■ AMRITSAR

Under the esteemed leadership of Prof. (Dr) Jaspal Singh Sandhu, Vice Chancellor, "Artificial Intelligence and Robotics" laboratory is established in the Department of Mechanical Engineering funded by RUSA grant, Govt. of India, New Delhi. Five-day Training Programme was conducted on "Factory Automation and Robotics Programming using FluidSim Software and CIROS Software of Germany based FESTO Company" at Artificial Intelligence and Robotics laboratory with the support of Professor Dr PK Pati, coordinator, Golden Jubilee Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation GNDU. In this five-day training programme, students were given hands on training practice of AI based factory automation and robotic programming techniques. Dr Pati, emphasised that this kind of training can bridge the



gap between academics and latest technologies used in the industry. Dr Harminder Singh, Head, Department of Mechanical Engineering welcomed the Resource Person, Er. Chandrashekar V. Varkerkar, Manager Didactic at Festo India Pvt. Ltd. Varkerkar completed Mechatronics Trainer Level 1 & Level 2 Certification from Siemens Technik Academy, Berlin, Germany. He has 15 Years experience in core manufacturing industry at TATA Steel Wire Division in Electrical Maintenance Dept. and 9 Years core training experience in an Indo-German JV company, ChristianiSharpline Technical Training Pvt. Ltd as an AGM Training with specialisation in Mechatronics.

India Cements narrows net loss to ₹50.06 crore in Q4

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India Cements Ltd on Monday reported a narrowing of consolidated net loss to Rs 50.06 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 31, 2024, helped by improved sales volume. The company had posted a net loss of Rs 243.77 crore in the same quarter a year ago, India Cements Ltd said in a regulatory filing. Consolidated revenue from operations in the quarter under review was at Rs 1,266.65 crore as against Rs 1,485.73 crore in the corresponding period a year ago. "With the improved sales volume, India Cements Ltd could turn out a better operating performance and pared the losses for the fourth quarter under review," the company said. The cement and clinker volume for the fourth quarter was 24.36 lakh tonne as compared to 27.85 lakh tonne

in the same period of the previous year, it added. Together with the profit arising from the sale of land, the company has made a cash profit of Rs.24 crore for the quarter despite the setback caused by the fall in selling prices of cement, the company said. India Cements further said after muted capacity utilisation in the previous two quarters caused by the stressed working capital conditions, the same could be improved in the fourth quarter due to infusion of working capital and it was 63 per cent from 51 per cent in the third quarter of the current year. Total expenses in the fourth quarter were lower at Rs 1,351.84 crore as compared to Rs 1,637.65 crore in the corresponding period previous year. For the fiscal ended March 31, 2024, the consolidated net loss was at Rs 215.76 crore. It was at Rs 169.82 crore in the previous fiscal, the

company said. In FY24 consolidated revenue from operations was at Rs 5,112.24 crore, down from Rs 5,608.14 crore in FY23. On the outlook, the company said after Lok Sabha elections and assembly elections in some states, the centre and states are expected to retain their focus on the development agenda. The construction activity is expected to be brisk in the coming months driven by continued infrastructure spending by the government, private sector housing and commercial segments. "This presents a healthy demand outlook for cement and the industry, especially in the South, has built adequate capacity to meet the firm demand," India Cements said. At the same time, it said, "Increasing cost pressure, high cost of logistics and severe competition in the market are also hanging over the head which will affect the margins."

PGIM India Asset Management aims to double AUM to ₹50,000 crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

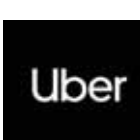
PGIM India Asset Management aims to more than double its assets under management to Rs 50,000 crore within the next 2-3 years, which will be driven by efforts to complete the product basket coupled the strong focus on SIP, its top official said on Monday. The asset management firm, which forayed into the Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) space in October 2023, is also looking to complete its product basket with the launch of new schemes including a special opportunities fund. The fund house, which has an Asset Under Management (AUM) of Rs 23,240 crore at present, expects to touch Rs 50,000 crore mark AUM in the next 2-3 years, Abhishek Tiwari, Chief Business Officer of PGIM India Asset Management, told PTI here. "Factors that will drive the growth of PGIM India Asset

Management are — the organic growth of the asset management industry in India and our focus on completing our product basket along with the continued focus on SIP which is a very healthy part of our business growth," he said. Apart from this, having licenses and in turn products across the mutual fund, PMS (Portfolio Management Services) and AIF (Alternative Investment Fund) on the public market is a big enabler for being relevant across the distribution and client segments, he added. PGIM India Mutual Fund is a fully-owned subsidiary of the US-based Prudential Group's Prudential Global Investment Managers. Overall, the 44-player mutual fund industry has an asset base of Rs 57.26 lakh crore as of April this year, marking a growth of 37 per cent from Rs 41.62 lakh crore in April 2023, according to data available with the Association Mutual Funds in India (Amfi).

Uber gets licence to operate buses in Delhi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Riding app Uber has received an aggregator licence by the Delhi Transport Department to operate buses in the national Capital under the Delhi premium Bus Scheme, the company said in a statement. Delhi becomes the first state to award a licence for bus operations and Uber becomes the first aggregator to be granted a licence under the Delhi Premium Bus scheme, the statement said. "Following a successful pilot programme, where we witnessed significant demand for buses, we are thrilled to officially introduce the convenience of Uber rides to buses in Delhi," Uber Shuttle India head Amit Deshpande said. Customers will be able to pre-book seats on their preferred route by choosing the 'Uber Shuttle' option on the Uber app.



Godrej Properties acquires 10 land parcels in FY24 to build ₹21,000 crore worth projects

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a bid to expand the business, Godrej Properties acquired 10 land parcels, of which eight were outright, last financial year to build housing projects worth over Rs 21,000 crore and has set a target for this fiscal to buy more parcels that can generate sales bookings of Rs 20,000 crore. In its investors presentation, Godrej Properties informed that it "added 10 new projects with an expected future booking value of Rs 21,225 crore". For the last 2023-24 fiscal, Godrej Properties had given a guidance of Rs 15,000 crore for new business

development, which means acquiring land parcels through an outright basis and joint development with land owners. Godrej Properties has given an annual guidance of Rs 20,000 crore for this fiscal year under the new business development. In investors call Godrej Properties Executive Chairperson Pirojsha Godrej said there is no upper cap for business development and the company would acquire more land if there are right opportunities. "...If we see great opportunities, Rs 20,000 crore is not going to form any kind of upper cap certainly. And we have seen in past years, for



example, in FY23, where I think we guided around Rs 15,000 crore and ended up doing 35,000 crore or so. "So, certainly I would not look at this Rs 20,000 crore as an upper cap and we would hope to if we see the right opportunities, go well past this," he said. The company, which is part of

Godrej Industries group, is one of the leading real estate developers in the country. It has a major presence in four markets — Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Delhi-NCR (National Capital Region), Pune and Bengaluru. It recently entered the Hyderabad property market. Out of the 10 land parcels acquired in the 2023-24 fiscal, the presentation showed that four land parcels are in Delhi-NCR, two each in Bengaluru and Hyderabad, and one each in Kolkata and Nagpur. The total saleable area in these 10 future real estate projects is estimated at 18.93 million square feet. On the new supply guidance, Godrej Properties plans to

launch residential projects worth Rs 30,000 crore this fiscal across major cities to achieve 20 per cent growth in sales bookings. In the last fiscal, the company's sales bookings jumped 84 per cent to a record Rs 22,527 crore, from Rs 12,232 crore in the preceding year. This is the highest sales reported so far by any listed entity for FY24. According to investors presentation, Godrej Properties plans to launch 21.9 million (219 lakh) square feet area this fiscal with an estimated sales booking value of Rs 30,000 crore. Earlier this month, Godrej Properties reported its highest-ever quarterly profit

as earnings jumped 14 per cent annually to Rs 471.26 crore in the March quarter. Its net profit stood at Rs 412.14 crore in the year-ago period. Total income rose to Rs 1,914.82 crore in the fourth quarter of FY24, from Rs 1,838.82 crore in the year-ago period. "During the 2023-24 fiscal, the company's net profit increased to Rs 725.27 crore, from Rs 571.39 crore in the preceding year. Total income rose to Rs 4,334.22 crore in FY24, from Rs 3,039 crore in 2022-23. The company delivered 12.5 million square feet area in the last fiscal and is targeting to scale it up to 15 million square feet in 2024-25.

Entrepreneurship course organised

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Entrepreneurship Development Cell at IIT Delhi (eDC, IIT Delhi), in collaboration with some distinguished Institute alumni, conducted the first season of Venture Studio, an entrepreneurship course to support IIT Delhi students in their journey to build successful startups from scratch. The course was designed to empower the students with the knowledge and skills to enable them to become successful entrepreneurs. Drawing from a pool of over 350 registrations, 40 outstanding students from diverse academic backgrounds were selected to



participate in the first season. These students were handpicked for their passion, creativity, and drive to make a difference in the entrepreneurial landscape. The curriculum of Venture Studio Season-I was meticulously crafted to cover a wide range of topics critical to entrepreneurship, including ideation, market research, business model development, funding strategies, product development, marketing, and scaling.



Be it sports or education, discipline is necessary: Gopichand to students

PTI ■ PATNA

Discipline defined him both as a player and coach. So, it was hardly a surprise that Pullela Gopichand stressed on the virtue as he delivered a motivational speech to youngsters preparing for competitive exams here, drawing sporting analogies to drive home his point. The 50-year-old former All England champion, who is also a Droncharya awardee, was addressing a gathering of students preparing for

competitive exams in streams such as engineering and medicine. "Be it sports or education both are same. In both, discipline as well as dedication is necessary. With time, another need has been added to both these fields and that is mentoring," Indian badminton's chief national coach said. "Only when there is training along with teaching, a student becomes capable of competing in the present times. Similarly, in sports also, if coaching becomes good along with discipline and dedication, then

the player moves ahead," he added at an event held at the Allen Career Institute here. The Hyderabad, who is credited for shaping Olympic medallists Saina Nehwal and P V Sindu among others, said he foresees bright future for youngsters growing up in cities like Patna. "One-sided results cannot always be expected in sports. Sometimes you may be the best with your best performance and sometimes the player in front of you may be better, this does not mean that we should stop working

hard. "Even in studies, if the results are not as per expectations then we should not stop. Try to learn more, solve problems, your hard work will never go in vain, one day you will be able to fulfill your dream," he told the gathered students. "Cities like Kota and Patna are modern-day Gurukuls of India nurturing dreamers with potential like you into world champions in field of engineering, medicine and beyond. It takes a good coach to know when he sees a world champion," he added.



Zverev's stock rising for French Open

AP ■ ROME

Top-ranked Novak Djokovic hasn't won a tournament all year. Record 14-time French Open champion Rafael Nadal has been far from his best. Jannik Sinner and Carlos Alcaraz have been out injured. And Daniil Medvedev has won only one clay-court title in his career. Considering the state of his rivals in the top five, Alexander Zverev's credentials entering Roland Garros are looking pretty good following his second Italian Open title. The clay-court Grand Slam in Paris starts this weekend. "I'm somebody that I know when I don't play well, I can lose to anyone, but when I play well, I know I can beat anyone. That's my mindset. That's how I think about it," Zverev said after raising the trophy in Rome. "I know I have to focus on myself, to find my rhythm in Paris the way I did here. Then everything is on my own racket." Zverev won 44 of his 49 service points in a 6-4, 7-5 victory over 24th-ranked Nicolas Jarry 6-4, 7-5 in Rome on Sunday to earn his biggest trophy since a gruesome ankle injury two years ago. It's been a long road of recovery for the fifth-ranked Zverev after tearing three ligaments in his right ankle during the 2022 French Open semifinals against Nadal. In all, Zverev has reached three consecutive semifinals at Roland Garros — which has led him to declare it's the tournament he wants to win more than any other. "It's the one where I have the most memories, good or bad," Zverev said. "U.S. Open, yes, I was two points away from winning the title. Of course, that's also one that kind of sticks out. (But) Roland Garros, so close to being in the final in 2021, I felt like I was playing some of the best tennis of my life in 2022. Those kind of things, they are still in the back of my mind. That's the one that I want to do well in." That loss in the 2020 U.S. Open final to Dominic Thiem

remains the closest that the 27-year-old Zverev has come to winning a Grand Slam title. Having been in the top five of the rankings for years, claimed Olympic gold in Tokyo three years ago and won the ATP Finals twice, a Grand Slam title is the only big thing missing in his career. And if Zverev is going to contend in Paris, he's going to have to do it while dealing with a major distraction. Zverev has disputed a penalty order from a German court over allegations that he caused bodily harm to a woman and he will go on trial in his home country starting on May 31 — entering the middle weekend of the French Open. Zverev is accused of physically abusing and damaging the health of a woman during an argument in Berlin four years ago. He said in Rome that he won't attend the start of the legal proceedings. Zverev, who moved up one spot to No. 4 in the rankings released on Monday, shared an emotional moment over the weekend with his father and coach, who is also named Alexander Zverev. While Zverev kept his composure on the court, dad was teary eyed in the stands during the trophy ceremony. "A father is always important, no matter who it is," Zverev said. "Obviously in my career super important. It's funny because we actually have a great relationship — which is not always the case, a father-son, father-daughter relationship when they're coaching them as well. You see it a lot of times, it's very shaky. But we have a great relationship outside as well." A few years ago, the elder Zverev was missing from the player's box due to medical issues. "I'm going to have him around as long as he wants to," the younger Zverev said. "It's obviously a special moment for all of us, given the circumstances that this is my first Masters after the injury. There was obviously a lot of uncertainties whether I was going to be back at this level."

Taunted for being mentally impaired once, Para world champion Deepthi is now feted in village



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

For a long time, Deepthi Jeevanji's parents were taunted by fellow villagers for having a "mentally impaired" child. But now they are counting the compliments as the same bunch converged at their modest house in Telangana's Kalleda hamlet to celebrate her world record-breaking gold medal in the Para Athletics World Championship in Kobe, Japan. Born to daily wage labourers at in Warangal district of Telangana, the 20-year-old Deepthi on Monday clinched gold with a world record time of 55.07 seconds in the women's 400m T20 category race. She also qualified for the upcoming Paris Paralympics. The T20 category is meant for athletes who have intellectual impairment. Deepthi's coach Nagpuri Ramesh said her parents were at the receiving end of taunts from the villagers, who would often say that she will never get married since she is "mentally impaired". "Deepthi's parents were daily wage labourers and they were struggling to run the family. On top of that they faced constant taunts from the villagers that a mentally impaired girl cannot get married," Ramesh told PTI from Hyderabad, where Deepthi trains currently. "After Deepthi won gold in the Hangzhou Asian Para Games last year, the scenario changed. Now, the same villagers are praising them for being parents of Deepthi. They told me this when they came in Hyderabad after the Para Asian Games. "They told me even the district collector and politicians of the area visited their house which was a shock to them, considering how things have changed." She had won gold in 400m T20 category in the Hangzhou Para Asian Games with Asian record time of 56.69 seconds. Deepthi's father J Yadagiri and mother J Dhanalaxmi were so poor that they did not even have money to afford bus fare to send their child to Hyderabad from Warangal

when Ramesh wanted to train her. "She was spotted in a school meet through a PET teacher in Warangal. When I told them to send Deepthi, they said they didn't have money for bus fare. I told them to just board a bus and give me the phone number of the conductor. "After that I explained to the bus conductor to let her board the bus and told him I will pay the fare when she reaches Hyderabad. During the 130km journey from Warangal to Hyderabad I kept calling the bus conductor inquiring about her safety," Ramesh said. Deepthi's parents had earlier sold their half acre land due to financial difficulties but they bought an identical piece of land with the Rs 30 lakh reward she got for winning the Para Asian Games gold medal. "Deepthi's parents are now doing better. They have bought land with the money Deepthi got as reward for her achievements and they have started farming," said Ramesh. After Deepthi was brought to Hyderabad, she was enrolled at the Sports Authority of India's Training Center in Hyderabad where Ramesh is a coach. She was studying in ninth standard at that time. Ramesh, who is also the Athletics Federation of India's national junior team coach, said he had a tough time initially in training Deepthi because she could not communicate. "You cannot teach her too many techniques as she is slow in learning things. If you do that she will get confused," he said. Her parents once told Ramesh that Deepthi fell down from the roof of a building but acted as if she didn't feel any pain because of the inability to express her feelings. Chief national badminton coach Pullela Gopichand also played a role in Deepthi's career. It was Gopichand who suggested Ramesh to take her to the National Institute for the Empowerment of Person with Intellectual Disability in Hyderabad. After medical tests, she was certified as "mentally impaired" and that allowed her to compete in para meets.

Format C-1
(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 and address of candidate : **JAGDISH RAWANI**
Name of political party : **INDEPENDENT**
(Independent candidate should write "Independent" here) Name of Election: **LOK SHABHA-2024**
*Name of Constituency : **07-DHANBAD**

I **JAGDISH RAWANI** (name of candidate), a candidate for the above mentioned election, declare for public information the following details about my criminal antecedents:*

(A) Pending criminal cases				
Sl. No	Name of Court	Case No. and dated	Status of case(s)	Section(s) of Acts concerned and brief description of offence(s)
(1)	Sri Vivek Raj, J.M. 1st class, Dhanbad	Sindri Ps Case No. 92/2022 Dated- 25/08/2022	Pending	147/148/149/341/323/3 07/353/332/333/337/39 3/480/427/506/120(b) IPC and 27 Arms Act Pending That the informant of the case lodged a complaint that Santosh Mahto and others including the present petitioner by forming an unlawful assembly restrain the public servant to perform their public duty along with others 1000 persons by arm with deadly weapons like gun, katta, countrymade revolvers and also broken various vehicles including the ambulance and they have also damaged the Property of 32 to 35 lakhs and they especially Santosh Mahto and Jagdish Rawani especially attacked police and hurt them very badly own 25.08.2022 at about 2 to 3 PM
(2)	Sri Vivek Raj, J.M. 1st class, Dhanbad	Sindri Ps Case No. 93/2022 Dated- 25/08/2022	Pending	147/148/149/452/427 Pending 341/323/307/379/IPC & 27 Arms Act That the informant of the case lodged a complaint that Santosh Mahto and others including the present petitioner by forming an unlawful assembly restrain the public servant to perform their public duty along with others 1000 persons by arm with deadly weapons like gun, katta, countrymade revolvers and also broken various vehicles including the ambulance and they have also damaged the Property of 32 to 35 lakhs and they especially Santosh Mahto and Jagdish Rawani especially attacked police and hurt them very badly own 25.08.2022 at about 2 to 3 PM
(3)	Ms. Pooja Pandey, J.M. 1st class, Dhanbad	Baliapur PS Case No.143/2022 Dated- 25/08/2022	Pending	The informant Varna Oraon lodged a complaint that one Bablu Mahto and other 23 persons on an unlawful assembly attacked on the house of the Lucky Singh situated at Sindri along with other 600 to 700 persons armed with deadly weapons like danda, garsa, bhala, cattar, hockey sticks and own interrogation they desecrated that they were rushing to the house of Lucky Singh to kill him and the mob has restrained the police to perform their duty and own scuffle they uniform were torn and from the mob there was voice that they were gathered as per the inspection of Jairam Mahto and Santosh Mahto and accordingly a case was instituted against the candidate and others.

(A) Details about cases of conviction for criminal offences

Sl. No.	Name of Court & Date(s) of order(s)	Description of offence(s) & punishment imposed	Maximum Punishment imposed
No	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT APPLICABLE
No	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT APPLICABLE
No	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT APPLICABLE	NOT APPLICABLE

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

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

Note:

- The particular regarding criminal cases pending against the candidate shall be in bold letters.
- The matter in newspaper shall be published in front size of at least 12.
- Details should be given separately for each case in separate rows.
- If a candidate is contesting an election on the ticket of a particular party, he/she is required to inform the party about the criminal cases pending against him/her.
- The candidate shall report about publishing of declaration regarding criminal cases immediately after such publication to the Returning Officer, In addition, shall submit a report about publishing of the declaration regarding cases in Formate C-4 along with the account of election expense within 30 days of declaration of result of election. (a) In case of elections of Lok Shabha and the Legislative Assemblies, This shall be submitted to District Election Officer concerned, (b) In case of election to the Rajya Shabha and the State Legislative Council, This shall be submitted to the Returning Officer concerned

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



Salt less KKR take on Sunrisers Hyderabad in power hitting slugfest

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

High-flying Kolkata Knight Riders and an unpredictable Sunrisers Hyderabad, teams that have built their IPL 2024 campaign on power-hitting, will look to outmuscle each other in Qualifier 1 here on Tuesday. If KKR were the first team to make IPL playoffs this year, SRH gave themselves a huge boost by inflicting a four-wicket loss on Punjab Kings on Sunday to eventually finish second with 17 points, ahead of Rajasthan Royals. While the two top teams from the 70-match league round have enjoyed some time off courtesy incessant rains during their respective clashes over last 10 days, the lack of turnaround time to compete in a high-intensity playoff game will also pose a unique challenge. KKR and SRH will get only a day's time to traverse thousands of kilometres and get here for the first half of the playoffs as they both featured on the final day of the league round on Sunday. SRH would feel they have hit their strides following a comprehensive win over PBKS and having also got recent game-time, which isn't the case for KKR whose last complete game was on May 11. Shreyas Iyer's KKR had won four games on the trot before rains washed away their last two league games and the two-time winners. Table-toppers KKR (19 points) will also have to fill in the huge void at the top with their second-highest run-



scorer and wicketkeeper Phil Salt (435 runs) leaving the camp for national duties with England ahead of the T20 World Cup. Salt had forged a devastating partnership with Sunil Narine (461) at the top and KKR were immensely benefited by their ultra-aggressive approach with the bat, backed up well by a potent middle-order even though skipper Iyer (287) was not had a major impact yet. The washed out contest against

RR in particular robbed KKR of an opportunity to give expected replacement Rahmanullah Gurbaz a go at the top with Narine, something that would have settled a few concerns certainly. For KKR, the form of Nitish Rana adds more solidity to the middle-order while a fiery Andre Russell among the finishers promise them vital runs. In many ways, SRH match KKR's firepower on paper and

that is what adds more to the lure of this contest. Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma have both got their runs at a strike rate exceeding 200 while inspiring their side to rewrite a few records. Australian southpaw Head has in many ways redefined aggressiveness with the bat while also remaining successful (533 runs with one century and four fifties). His fearlessness has also brought the best out of the

young Indian batter Abhishek (467), who has clobbered an overall 41 sixes this IPL - 10 more than his overall tally of 31 in the previous six seasons. SRH have also managed to find answers to a couple of questions which were lingering on for a while. At No 3, the 2016 winners have found a dependable option in Rahul Tripathi who can both accelerate as well as weather storms when bowlers are on-song. Additionally, Heinrich Klaasen has rediscovered his form after a dip in the middle of the tournament. With a crucial knock of 42 against PBKS, Klaasen has signalled having found his mojo back, which only makes SRH even more formidable. At Ahmedabad, as seen in the World Cup final last year, teams batting second have had more success, winning four out of six completed games while only twice the team which batted first could defend successfully. Also, against the style of play for both these teams - to bury oppositions under mountains of runs - this venue has had only two scores of 200 or above in 12 innings, which means the bowlers will also have their say. If KKR have a battery of spinners to back their fast bowlers led by Mitchell Starc, SRH's pace bowling attack led by skipper Pat Cummins has time and again produced unified efforts to make their mark. In their only meet earlier this season back in late March, KKR had pipped SRH by four runs in a high-scoring game.



Swapnil Singh contemplated quitting cricket until RCB picked him up in IPL auction

PTI ■ BENGALURU

When Swapnil Singh went unsold in the initial rounds of the 2024 IPL auction, the dejected left-arm spinner felt it was time to end his 18-year-old-career. But then Royal Challengers Bengaluru raised the paddle late in the auction to add a welcome twist to his cricketing journey. "The day of the IPL auction I was travelling to Dharamsala for a game. It was around 7-8 pm after I landed. Nothing had happened by then and the last rounds were on. When I missed out at first, I thought that's it. Frankly I thought it was all over," Swapnil told RCB Bold Diaries. "I thought I would play out the ongoing (domestic) season, and if needed, I would end my career after playing the next season because I did not want to keep playing all my life," he said.

"There are other things to do well in life as well. I was very disappointed," said Swapnil, who made his debut in 2006 and had even shared the dressing room with RCB teammate Virat Kohli at one point in time. Bought at a base price of Rs 20 lakh, the 33-year-old has repaid the faith the franchise showed in him. Swapnil has played a pivotal role in RCB's recent string of wins which have propelled them into the playoffs, with the 2016 finalists set to face a struggling Rajasthan Royals in Ahmedabad in the Eliminator on Wednesday. Swapnil said it was an emotional moment for his entire family after they learnt that he was picked up by RCB. "As soon as my family called, we broke down. Because no one else understands how emotional the journey has been."

Swapnil has also credited former Zimbabwe captain and RCB head coach Andy Flower for showing the faith in him. "Before RCB picked me in the auction, they had organised a trial-cum-camp. I spoke to Andy sir and told him all about how my (domestic) season had gone. I told him, 'Just give me one chance. This might be my last chance. Just have faith in me.' He told he had faith in me. He called me for the camp," Swapnil said. Swapnil also revealed his wish that he expressed to his brother, that he wanted to contribute with the bat in IPL. The moment eventually arrived when he smacked a four and a six against Sunrisers Hyderabad. "I would tell my brother that I have neither scored a four nor a six in the IPL, and I have taken only one wicket. So I really want to hit a four and a six," he said.

OTHER SPORTS

Rohan to pair with either Balaji or Yuki at Paris Games

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's top doubles player Rohan Bopanna will pick either N Sriram Balaji or Yuki Bhambri as his partner for the Paris Olympics and All India Tennis Association (AITA) will most likely approve his choice even as the combinations will be discussed by the selection committee. Ranked four in the world, 44-year-old Bopanna, being a top-10 player, can pick a player of his choice as per the rules. The men's doubles draw at the Paris Games will be a 32-team affair, where one nation can have a maximum of two teams. The qualification criteria gives top-10 players the privilege to pick their partners, who should be inside top-300 on the ATP and WTA ranking charts. The rankings of June 10 after the conclusion of the French Open will be considered for qualifications.

According to AITA sources, Bopanna had recommended names of Balaji and Bhambri to the national federation for inclusion in TOPS as his potential partners for Paris Olympics. "Usually, it's the player's choice (to pick his partner). The selection committee will ask him about his choice and discuss that. Whoever Rohan wants to play with, will be considered positively," AITA Secretary General Anil Dhupar told PTI when asked if the national federation will allow Bopanna to play with the partner of his choice or impose its own choice on him. Both Balaji and Bhambri have got some decent results on clay in lead up to the Roland Garros, where the action will unfold during the Summer Olympics from July 27. Balaji won the Cagliari Challenger event with German partner Andre Begemann apart from reaching the semifinals at Francavilla al Mare in Italy.



Bhambri won the ATP 250 event in Munich with French player Albano Olivetti in April and reached the semifinals of the Bordeaux Challenger - the only event he competed this month. The nominations for Olympics or other multi-sporting events have often created controversy in Indian tennis. In 2012, a huge controversy had erupted when both Mahesh Bhupathi and Bopanna had refused to pair with Leander Paes, who was forced to play with

Vishnu Vardhan. Sania Mirza was then asked to pair with Paes in the mixed doubles event and the top woman player of the country had chastised the AITA for using her as bait to placate Paes. In the 2018 Asian Games, Paes had pulled out of the continental event just two days before the start of tennis competition, saying he was not given a specialist player to pair with. AITA had nominated Bopanna and Divij Sharan as a team, leaving Paes with no option but to pair with one of the singles players in the squad. It will be Bopanna's last shot at winning an Olympic medal, having come close to a bronze medal with Sania Mirza in the mixed event of the 2016 Rio Games. In the singles, Sumit Nagal will need a good run at the French Open to boost his ranking. He is placed 94 as of Monday. In a draw of 64, the organisers will accept 56 direct entries

and out of six ITF places, awarded to winners of Games, African Games and three men's quotas have been continental events - Asian Pan-American Games.



Nagal bows out of Geneva Open after loss to world number 19 Baez

PTI ■ GENEVA

India's top-ranked singles player Sumit Nagal made a first round exit from the Geneva Open after going down fighting against Argentina's Sebastian Baez. The world no.94 went down 6-7 (7) 3-6 to the Argentine, who is a clay court specialist, in a match that lasted one hour, 52-minutes here on Sunday. "Gutted with the loss today. But good preparation ahead of Roland Garros. Paris next," Nagal, who has qualified for the French Open, tweeted after the loss. Nagal started off brightly taking an early 4-1 lead over Baez. He also had a set point. But world no. 19 Baez, who has already won two titles on clay this season, showed his class to force a tiebreaker owing to his fantastic first serve performance. In the second set, Baez continued to bank on his superb first serve, and wrapped up the proceedings in 38 minutes.

Focus on Sindhu as she looks to end title drought at Malaysia Masters

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR

Back from a break, P V Sindhu will look to hit the right notes in her quest for some confidence-boosting wins ahead of Paris Olympics when she spearheads India's campaign in the Malaysia Masters badminton tournament starting here on Tuesday. Sindhu, a former world champion, returns to the international circuit after skipping the Uber Cup and Thailand Open, and she will aim to go deep in the women's singles draw of the BWF World Tour Super 500 event. The 28-year-old from Hyderabad hasn't been able to hit top form after recovering


from a knee injury sustained in October last year. A silver and bronze-winner at the Olympics, Sindhu's return hasn't been smooth and she has endured a series of narrow losses. Sindhu has just two quarterfinal finishes to show in her six competitive appearances so far. The last title win for her came in the 2022 Singapore Open though she did come close to claiming the Spain Masters last year when she reached the finals in Madrid. Sindhu, who had also suffered a stress fracture on her left ankle en route to the 2022 Commonwealth Games gold, will look to hit the ground running when she opens against Scotland's Kirsty

Gilmour this week. Top stars such as An Se Young, Chen Yu Fei, Akane Yamaguchi or Carolina Marin are not participating this week and Sindhu will be desperate to test her preparation against the next generation players, who have troubled her recently. With a new set-up under mentor Prakash Padukone, Sindhu has shown glimpses of her menacing game but she hasn't been consistent with her shot-selection. Ashmita Chaliha, Aakarshi Kashyap and Malvika Bansod too will look to produce some good results after having been in the circuit for quite sometime now. Chaliha has played some quality matches against the

likes of Han Yue and Aya Oshiro, both of whom she had pushed to three games recently. In men's singles, Kiran George is the lone Indian in fray and he will open against Japan's Takuma Uemura. While Thailand Open champions Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty have opted out and it will be a chance for Krishna Prasad Garaga and Sai Pratheek K to show their prowess in men's doubles. In mixed doubles, the husband-wife duo of B Sumeeth Reddy and N Sikki Reddy, and Sathish Kumar Karunakaran and Aadya Variyath would be carrying India's hopes.

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न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः ॥

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