

OPINION 6
AGENDA FOR THE MODI
GOVERNMENT 3.0

WORLD 8
'OVER 1 MN IN GAZA AT RISK
OF STARVATION BY MID-JULY'

MONEY 10
INDIA'S SERVICE SECTOR GROWTH
SOFTENS TO FIVE MONTHS LOW: PMI

Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 20 Issue 153
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

BHUBANESWAR, THURSDAY JUNE 6, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4

Established 1864

the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

CHHETRI'S LAST
DANCE AGAINST
KUWAIT
11 SPORTS



NDA on June 8: Third time is the charm



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP president JP Nadra and other leaders during a meeting of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at 7, Lok Kalyan Marg, in New Delhi, on Wednesday

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners will stake claim to form the Government on June 7. Modi is likely to take oath on June 8. This is the first time since Jawaharlal Nehru that a Prime Minister will be returning to power for a third consecutive term. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners on Wednesday met at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's residence 7 Lok Kalyan Marg

and unanimously elected him as the alliance leader, paving the way for him to take the oath for a third consecutive term, a first for any ruling alliance since 1962. The NDA has won 293 seats in the Lok Sabha election, comfortably above the majority mark of 272 in the 543-member House. Besides, 10 Independents have also extended their support to NDA and its partners, making its tally to 303. Though, the new Government is likely to be different in composition and character with a bigger share

for the BJP's allies. "NDA MPs will meet on June 7 and the alliance leaders will then go to the President of India to submit their letters of support, HAM (Secular) leader and former Bihar Chief Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi said after attending the meeting. How soon the BJP and its allies reach an agreement on matters like the share of Ministries each party may get and other terms of negotiations could also be a factor in deciding the timing of the swearing-in or they could put off the tricky issues for resolution at

a later stage. Sources said the second meeting of the NDA partners' leaders will take place on Friday and on the same day, they will stake the claim to form the Government. Sources said senior BJP leaders JP Nadra, Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah and Piyush Goyal have been assigned to coordinate with NDA partners. Earlier in the day, Modi tendered his resignation to President Droupadi Murmu along with his Council of Ministers after the Cabinet meeting.

'Political loss, moral defeat for Modi'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Struggling for a tally to form a Government at the Centre by dislodging BJP-led NDA claims, the Congress led INDIA Bloc on Wednesday welcomed all parties that share a fundamental commitment to the values enshrined in the Preamble of Constitution towards formation of a government. Indicating for an "appropriate time", the INDIA Bloc in a statement said it will continue to fight against the fascist rule of the BJP-led by Narendra Modi. "We will take appropriate steps at the appropriate time to realise the people's desire not to be ruled by the BJP Govt. This is our decision that whatever promises we have made to the people, we will keep it up," Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said while addressing the Opposition leaders who converged at his residence for the first meeting of the Bloc after its impressive gains in Lok Sabha that pulled down the ruling BJP's mark below the majority figure of 273 of the 543 members of Lok Sabha. "The mandate is decisively against Modi, against him and the substance and style of his politics. It is a huge political loss for him personally apart from being a clear moral defeat as well. However, he is determined to subvert the will of the



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav, DMK supremo and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin amongst other INDIA Bloc partners at a meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday

people," he said. "The INDIA alliance welcomes all parties which share its fundamental commitment to the values enshrined in the Preamble to our Constitution and to its many provisions for economic, social and political justice," the Congress chief said in his opening remarks. Thanking the INDIA Bloc partners, he said, "I welcome all INDIA alliance partners. We fought well, fought unitedly, fought resolutely." The constituents of the INDIA Bloc thanked the people of India for the

overwhelming support received by our alliance. The people's mandate has given a befitting reply to the BJP and their politics of hate, corruption and deprivation, said a resolution. This is a mandate in defence of the Constitution of India and against price rise, unemployment, and crony capitalism and also to save democracy, it further added. Those present in the meeting were Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, KC Venugopal, NCP's Sharad Pawar NCP, Supriya Sule, DMK chief and Tamil Nadu Chief

Minister MK Stalin and his party colleague R Balu, Samajwadi Party supremo Akhilesh Yadav, SP's Ramgopal Yadav, TMC's Abhishek Banerjee, Sanjay Raut and Arvind Sawant from Shiv Sena (UBT), RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, CPIM's Sitaram Yechury CPI(M), D Raja from CPI JMM leader and Jharkhand CM Champai Soren, jailed JMM leader Hemant Soren's wife Kalpana Soren, Sanjay Singh and Raghav Chadha from AAP and National Conference leader Omar Abdullah amongst other constituents of the INDIA Bloc.

Fadnavis takes blame, offers to quit as Dy CM

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Accepting "full responsibility" for the ruling BJP's dismal show in the Lok Sabha polls in Maharashtra, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday offered to resign from his post in the State Government so that he could work "full time" for the party to improve its performance in the State Assembly polls scheduled for October this year. Talking to media persons here, Fadnavis said he would ask the BJP's Central leadership to "relieve" him from all the responsibilities in the Maharashtra Government" so that he could work "full time" for the party ahead of the State Assembly polls. "I take full responsibility for the dismal performance of the BJP in the Lok Sabha polls in Maharashtra. I accept that I fell short somewhere that contributed to the party's setback in the polls," Fadnavis said. "I am going to tell the Central BJP leadership that I want to work full time for the party ahead of the State Assembly polls. I am going to request my party leadership to relieve me from the State Government and give me an opportunity to work for the party," the



senior State BJP leader said. Fadnavis' statement should be seen in the light of the fact that the ruling MahaYuti - comprising BJP, Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and NCP (Ajit Pawar) - collectively won just 17 seats out of total 48 seats against 30 seats won by the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) - comprising Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT) and Shiv Sena (Sharad Pawar). At the individual level, the BJP won mere nine seats against 23 seats it had won in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. In comparison, the Opposition Congress performed very well by winning 13 seats as against just one seat that it had won in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, in which it had put up a miserable performance.

After 24 years, Patnaik bows out as Odisha CM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/BHUBANESWAR

Marking the end of his 24-year-rule in Odisha, BJD supremo Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday resigned from the post of the Chief Minister after the defeat of his party in the Assembly elections in the State. Patnaik handed over his resignation letter to Governor Raghuraj Das at the Raj Bhavan, sources said. Patnaik had for the first time taken oath as the chief minister of Odisha on March 5, 2000. Though a number of BJD leaders had gathered at Patnaik's residence, he came alone to the Governor's house to tender his resignation. The BJD supremo only waved at

waiting journalists and left the premises after submitting his resignation letter. The BJP stormed to power in Odisha by securing 78 of the 147 Assembly seats, while the BJD managed to win only 51 seats. Congress bagged 14 constituencies and CPI (M) secured one, while three Independent candidates also emerged victorious. Patnaik and BJP and Congress State presidents Manmohan Samal and Sarat Pattanayak respectively, had to suffer defeats in the Odisha Assembly elections. Although Patnaik won from his traditional Hinjili Assembly seat in Ganjam district by a slender margin of 4,636 votes, the five-term



Outgoing Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik meets Governor Raghuraj Das to submit his resignation following the defeat of his party in the State Assembly elections at Raj Bhavan in Bhubaneswar on Wednesday

former Chief Minister had to suffer a humiliating defeat to a political novice in Kantabanji constituency in Bolangir. The BJD supremo lost

Kantabanji to BJP's Laxman Bag by 16,344 votes. While Bag got 90,876 votes, Patnaik received 74,532 votes. This was the first time that Patnaik

faced electoral defeat in his political career spanning 26 years. Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee president Sarat Pattanayak suffered a worse fate as he finished fourth in Nuapada assembly segment, bagging only 15,501 votes. The seat was bagged by BJD candidate Rajendra Dholakia, who got 61,822 votes, while Independent nominee Ghasiram Majhi came second, securing 50,941 votes. Amid speculations over who would be the next chief minister of Odisha, state BJP president Manmohan Samal on Wednesday the party's parliamentary board will take a decision on it in a day or two.

World hails Modi on historic third term in office

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A day after NDA scored a victory in Lok Sabha polls, more than 50 world leaders have congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his third-term win. Presidents of Sri Lanka, Maldives, Iran, Seychelles and Prime Ministers of Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Mauritius have sent congratulatory greetings. Among G20 countries, Prime Ministers of Italy, Japan and the President of South Korea have congratulated the Prime Minister. Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also congratulated Modi. China also lauded the victory. French President Emmanuel Macron said, "India has concluded the biggest election in the world! Congratulations Narendra Modi, my dear friend. Together we will continue to further strengthen the strategic partnership that unites India and France." From Africa, Presidents of Nigeria, Kenya, Comoros have extended congratulatory messages.

BJP to decide State CM candidate soon

Ayushman Bharat to replace BSKY: Samal

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

After winning a majority in the Odisha Assembly elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is now gearing up for formation of a government and selection for the post of Chief Minister in the State.

BJP State president Manmohan Samal told reporters on Wednesday that the party's Parliamentary Board would take a decision on the next Chief Minister in a day or two. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had earlier announced that the swearing-in ceremony of a BJP Chief Minister would be held on June 10. Samal said the selection of

CM candidate would be based on the criteria set by the Prime Minister that an Odia who would uphold the culture and tradition of the State. Speaking on the main agenda of the new government, he said the Ayushman Bharat scheme would replace the Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY) launched by the BJD government. Stating that the BSKY has

limited scope, Samal said the BJP government would implement the Ayushman Bharat Yojana which has a larger scope as compared to BSKY cards and it would also benefit around 1.5 crore Odias staying outside the State. Noting that common people would get 100% of Rs 5 lakh coverage and there would be no restriction in implementation of the Ayushman Bharat

Yojana, Samal said all the commitments made by the BJP before the elections would be fulfilled. The BJP would restore Odia Asmita, culture and tradition, he said, adding that the people trusted the BJP's assurances and the new government would certainly work for them. People have rejected the idea of a non-Odia CM and voted for the BJP, Samal said.

'Don't create confusion over BSKY'

Samal urges private hospitals

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The BJP on Wednesday urged the private hospitals to refrain from stopping treatment to poor patients by creating confusion over the State Government's Biju Swasthya Kalyan Yojana (BSKY). BJP State president Manmohan Samal said complaints are being received about various private hospital

refusing treatment to patients under the scheme. "Some private hospitals of the state are returning patients without providing treatment saying that the BSKY has been closed. This is very unfortunate," Samal said in a statement. Stating that patients and diseases have no caste, religion or political parties, he said it is the priority of every government to provide health services to the common citizens.

Describing change of government as a continuous process, Samal said it is a crime to create confusion in people's minds and deprive them of medical services. He urged the administration to look into such social crimes and provide health services to the people under the scheme. Earlier in the day, Samal had said the BSKY would be replaced with the Ayushman Bharat scheme after a BJP government is formed in the State.

Serial accidents by trawler

3 killed, 12 injured in Keonjhar

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

Three people died and 12 were injured in a series of accidents that took place on the National Highway No. 49 under Sadar police station of Keonjhar district when a speedy trawler crushed several bikes, cars and auto. The injured were admitted at the Keonjhar District Headquarters Hospital (DHH). However, as the condition of one

of them deteriorated, he was referred to the SCB Medical College, Cuttack. The incident took place on Wednesday at about 11 am between Thakurdihi and Putulupani Chhak under Sadar police station limits. According to the sources, the trawler coming from Mumbai to Kolkata first crushed a moped killing a man sitting on it on the spot. The deceased, a small scrap trader of Nayagada area,



was not identified. Later, the trawler hit a bike from behind, where one died on the spot and another sustained injury. The deceased was identified as Kusa Behera (36) of Upperkaipur under Town po-

lice station. The injured Khageswar Behera (28) died on the way to the SCB. According to the sources, the accident took place when the trawler was overtaking trucks parked in a long line on the NH. Later, the trawler hit two cars and one auto where 12 persons sustained injury and were admitted at the Keonjhar DHH. IIC Sadar police station

Trinath Sethy said an investigation was going on after registering a case. The vehicle was seized, he said. Sources said that due to illegal parking of trucks for loading of minerals on NH 49, many accidents are taking place on a regular basis in Keonjhar. Despite repeated accidents the administration has failed to check it by taking action against the violators, sources alleged.

Curtains down on 24-yr BJD rule as Naveen resigns

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Naveen Patnaik on Wednesday resigned as Chief Minister of Odisha following the defeat of his party BJD in the Assembly polls, the result of which was announced on Tuesday. He submitted his resignation to Governor Raghubar Das.

Curtains came down on the 24-year rule of BJD in Odisha as the party was reduced to 51 seats from 112 in 2019, which it had improved to 113 by winning the by-elections to Baleswar. The BJP got a majority by winning 78 seats in the 147-member House, an increase of 55 seats since last polls, while Congress improved its tally to 14 from nine in 2019.

Three BJP rebels, who contested as independent, also won from their respective constituencies, while CPI



(M)'s Laxman Munda managed to retain his Bonai seat. The BJD suffered its biggest setback in Kantabanji, where the BJD supremo Patnaik lost to BJP's Laxman Bag by a margin of over 16,000 votes. Naveen won in his stronghold Hinjili but the victory margin was reduced to a mere 4,636 votes. He had never lost since he first fought the Assembly

polls in 2000. In total, 52 MLAs of the ruling party faced defeat in the recently concluded election to the State Legislative Assembly. BJP's landmark victory also thwarted the party's ambition to see Naveen as the longest-serving CM in India, a milestone he would have reached by August this year.

11 Ministers taste defeat in 2024 elections

BJD also loses all Lok Sabha seats

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The BJD, which had won 113 seats in the 2019 Assembly elections, could manage to win only 51 MLA seats in this election amid a huge BJP surge across the State.

At least 11 Ministers in the Naveen Patnaik Cabinet were defeated in the elections. Excluding one seat (Bissam Cuttack), all 10 Ministers lost their seats to BJP candidates.

The Ministers who lost the elections are Forest and Environment Minister Pradip Kumar Amat, Works Minister Prafulla Kumar Mallik, Higher Education Minister Atanu Sabyasachi Nayak, Transport Minister Tukuni Sahu, Science and Technology Minister Ashok Chandra

Panda, Finance Minister Bikram Keshari Arukha, Handlooms and Textiles Minister Rita Sahu, Women and Child Development Minister Basanti Hembram, Skill Development and Technical Education Minister Pritiranjana Ghadai, Law Minister Jagannath Saraka and Revenue Minister Sudam Marndi.

Among these Ministers, Marndi was contesting from Mayurbhanj Lok Sabha seat while others were contesting for MLA seats. In place of Sudam Mrndi, the BJD had nominated his wife Ranjita from Bangriposi, but she could not win. Ranjita lost the seat to BJP candidate Sanjali Murmu.

BJD supremo and Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik himself lost the Kantabanji

Assembly seat to his nearest rival BJP candidate Laxman Bag by 16,344 votes. However, Patnaik won from his traditional Hinjili seat by defeating his nearest BJP rival Sisir Kumar Mishra by 4,636 votes.

BJD organisational secretary Pranab Prakash Das' mother Sandhyarani also lost to her nearest rival candidate Akash Das Nayak of BJP with a margin of 5,646 votes.

BJD general secretary Sanjay Das Burma lost the Satyabadi seat to BJP candidate Om Prakash Mishra by a margin of 17,708 votes.

Senior BJD leader Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo won the Balangir seat despite huge challenges from BJP and Congress.

BJD candidate Sarada Prasad Nayak won the

Rourkela assembly seat by defeating his nearest rival Dilip Kumar Ray of BJP by 3,552 votes.

The other BJD candidates who won the Assembly poll are Braja Kishore Pradhan (Talcher), Adhiraj Mohan Panigrahi (Khariar), Manohar Randhari (Dabugam), Chakramani Kanhar (Baliguda), Devi Ranjan Tripathy (Banki), Sudarshan Haripal (Rengali), Abhimanyu Sethi (Anandpur), Naba Kishor Mallick (Jayadev), Prasanna Acharya (Rairakhol), Romancha Ranjana Biswal (Deogarh), Badri Narayan Patra (Ghasipur), Biswa Ranjan Mallick (Bari), Pradip Kumar Dishari (Lanjigarh), Sunil Kumar Mohanty (Puri) and Ramesh Chandra Behera (Daspalla).

The BJD leaders who also

won the poll are Sujata Sahu (Jajpur), Nalini Kanta Pradhan (Athamalik), Arvind Mohapatra (Patkura), Ganeswar Behera (Kendrapada), Ramakanta Bhoi (Tirtol), and Rupesh Kumar Panigrahi (Paralakhemundi).

The BJD came to zero in the Lok Sabha elections this time from 12 seats won in 2019 polls. BJD organisational secretary Pranab Prakash Das lost Sambalpur Lok Sabha seat to Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan by a huge margin of 1,19,836 votes.

Besides, sitting BJD MPs Manjulata Mandal (Bhadrak), Rajashree Mallick (Jagatsinghpur), Sarmistha Sethi (Jajpur), and Achyut Samant (Kandhamal) were also defeated in the elections.

Naveen lorded over BJD's fall by free reins to Pandian

Messed up his chance of a record 6th term in office

SRIKANTA K TRIPATHY ■ BHUBANESWAR

CM Naveen Patnaik whose trademark as a politician was 'less talk more work' and, thus, who succeeded to make a mark in public life with his one-liners in Odia and, at best, cryptic answers in English or Hindi for the last 24 years, this time around the 2024 elections, however, had begun using multiple lines.

While addressing rallies along with his most trusted aide VK Pandian, he used oft-repeated questions in Odia to gauge the mood of the electorate and met with quick and positive responses with thunderous applause. And, that perhaps gave confidence or may be 'overconfidence' to Naveen that his craze remains undiminished.

But as the results came out on June 4, it was a rude and unexpected shock not only to the BJD boss but to the entire party leaders who till the last few rounds of the counting hoped for a revival of the fortune and registering a victory.

Now, as the real public mood was revealed by the mandate, showing a strong undercurrent of anti-incumbency against the 24-year-old BJD Government, the party may be into a deep soul-searching on the cause of its defeat. Of the various factors that have led to the debacle of the party that enjoyed unstinted support of the Odia people for so long years never



tasting defeat in any elections, the Pandian factor was stated to be the biggest one.

The question is, is VK Pandian responsible for the worst-ever defeat of the BJD? Did CM Naveen Patnaik's over indulgence with the Tamil-born officer lead to the disaster of the party?

From a bureaucrat to a politician of No. 2 rank in the strongest regional party in India, BJD, Pandian has had his full circle thanks to the proximity he enjoyed with the 5-time CM Naveen. That Pandian used to sit behind CM Patnaik in every meeting and function as his private secretary to his elevation to being Patnaik's Man Friday and second-in-command in the BJD enabling him to take all key decisions and keep the entire party and Government at his fingertips explained the trajectory of his rise. Pandian basked in the favour of CM Patnaik for no ostensible reasons though.

From his stint as a district Collector to his private secretary, Pandian exhibited his talent that endeared him to CM Naveen and convinced the latter that he should depend on

him rather than any rank politician in his party. Thus, with this Naveen-Pandian chemistry began a new chapter in the history of governance in Odisha even at the cost of sacrificing conventions. The CM, by and by, grew closer to the bureaucrat in every matter and it appeared as if nothing was possible without Pandian. It was even alleged by the opposition that his party colleagues and even the Chief Secretary and DGP couldn't meet the CM without Pandian's approval. A junior officer held the sway over the administration overtaking the senior ones, by dint of a new arrangement of '5T' of which Pandian was made the Chairman with him being made answerable to none else than the CM.

In a quest for breaking former Sikkim CM Pawan Chamling's record of being the longest CM, Patnaik in his 5th term heavily rallied round Pandian's game plan to win a 6th term in office. As a matter of fact, Pandian became the epicentre in the BJD and the entire administration remained under his command and control. Instead of work-

ing on an action plan that aimed to mitigate the enduring woes of the people of the State, Pandian preferred to have a policy of dole-giving and charity. In addition, in order to keep the Odia voters in good humour, the BJD did not hesitate to play the temple card. Along with fast infrastructural development of the State as part of BJD's pro-people measures, the highlight of the agenda was to renovate and refurbish the old temples across the State. Knowing that it would stir controversies, the projects were single-mindedly pursued to give mileage to the BJD over the BJP as a custodian of the State's culture, heritage and monuments.

To give shape to their plan, the Naveen, instead of coming in direct touch with the people, sent Pandian to various parts of the State to meet and mix with the people and collect their grievances. But Pandian made it more a matter of optics and show-off rather than any issue of consequence. Huge money was spent mindlessly for meetings in the length and breadth of Odisha where people, particularly women and students,

were ferried to and treated with banquets. Since these were issues involving transit, safety, logistics, besides law and order, the district administrations which were asked to facilitate everything to ensure the success of every meeting had to remain engaged in work, forgetting their prime duties. Though many grievances were sorted out, yet the way the meetings were conducted by making Pandian the focal point curated a narrative that Pandian was going to replace CM Naveen, given the latter's age factor. The opposition was hammer and tongs against the very idea of promoting Pandian in politics by huge spending from the public exchequers. His flying to various places, even short distances, by helicopter which involved squandering crores subjected the Naveen Government to severe criticism, but Naveen and Pandian stayed largely unfazed. While none dared to speak against the pomp and show, Khandapada MLA and scribe Soumya Ranjan Patnaik who raised his voice against it had to pay a heavy price. The people of the State came to terms with the 'vengeance' of the 5T as Soumya and his largest media house 'Sambad' was targeted. This was to scuttle rebellion in the BJD in the bud.

While the opposition created a huge outcry over massive corruption in the various projects undertaken through 5T, especially by engaging non-Odia contractors, the BJD dubbed it as sheer 'intolerance' of the opposition to the rapid development of the State. The protests made against the much-hyped

Puri Heritage Corridor Project by the BJP on the grounds of safety of the temple and raising of old mutts and monasteries were also given the colour of being 'anti-development'. In all these, Pandian was projected as a larger-than-life figure for his quick and agile work style, transparency and vision. His overconfidence in him finally prompted him to bite the bait of the opposition that he should quit his IAS job to do politics.

In the run-up to the elections, Pandian's scheme for BJD's coming back to power was half-baked and immature. From selecting candidates to managing the campaigning, it left a lot to be desired. Repeating the old faces, tainted leaders and giving tickets to their kin, besides giving tickets to the turncoats within hours of their joining the BJD, boomeranged. The party failed to manage the dissidence factor in many seats while the Odia Ashmita issue which the BJP raked up to attack Pandian and Naveen did not find convincing answers from the BJD. A 77 years old seasoned politician who remained unbeatable for the whole of his career since he entered politics in 1997, a three-time MP, Union Minister, and five-time CM, Naveen unwittingly took a big risk of letting an immature bureaucrat to be at the driving seat of his party and Government, only to face a humiliating defeat at the hands of the saffron that appeared no match to him and his party in terms of grassroots organisations and public clout, at least till the BJP and BJD were slogging it out for a pre-poll tie-up.

Puri cracker mishap toll rises to 15

SRC begins probe

PNS ■ PURI

Even as the death toll in the Narendra Puskarini firecracker explosion in Puri rose to 15 on Wednesday, the Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) launched an investigation into the incident.

The inquiry by the SRC began at the Puri Circuit House from 3 pm and continued till 7 pm.

Eyewitnesses, officials of the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA), Puri Collector, SP, Fire Service officials and others recorded their statements during the investigation.

As part of the probe, shopkeepers, the people who rescued the patients, the family members of the injured and the deceased would also have to record their statements before the SRC.

On May 29, the explosion occurred during the 'Chapa Khela' of the Holy Trinity in the Narendra pond as part of Chandan Yatra when sparkles from exploded crackers fell on a pile of live crackers on the Devi Ghat-side of the pond.

Many devotees had gathered there to watch the water sports in the holy pond. Several of them jumped into the pond to save their lives.

Upasna State's youngest MLA



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Upasna Mohapatra, daughter of late Congress leader Lalatendu Bidyadhar Mohapatra, has become the youngest leader to win an Assembly seat in the State in the 2024 polls.

Twenty-six-year-old BJP candidate Upasna emerged victorious in the Brahmagiri constituency by defeating Umakanta Samantaray of the BJD by 9,830 votes.

She is the great granddaughter of Baxi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar Mohapatra, who pioneered the Paika Rebellion in 1817. In recent years, Upasna has geared up her activities socially and politically, making her presence felt. She is seen as a person who stands with the people through thick and thin. Her popularity and craze among the elders, youths and women are growing as the political scenario in the State has taken a decisive turn.

HITTING THE BULL'S EYE

Why a wonderful Naveen govt fell from grace

The world was stunned when the BJD was crushed to dust on June 4. Hardly had any reputed poll expert imagined that Naveen, an immensely popular Chief Minister, would face defeat from a nondescript fellow who was once put behind bars after being booked under the NSA.

The bad times had commenced from the moment Naveen's most trusted bureaucrat-aide VK Pandian was asked by Naveen to get around constituencies by chopper. VK is a well-meaning individual. Once given the go-ahead signal by the boss, he was guided by a few super crooks day in and day out on how to impress people.



BISWARAJ PATNAIK

Earlier in life, a wicked filmmaker, who had manipulated government connections to grab a

Padma Shri, somehow kept VK in awe of him. This fellow is actually a master manipulator who claims that he stood by VK whenever he had any domestic issue as he was close to all in VK's family. He talked loose on all personal relationships and showed off that he could put any public official or layman to trouble if he desired if they did not take his orders. This fellow had come across VK while the latter was Sub-Collector in Dharamgarh. The parasitical leech never left VK thereafter and by using machinating tricks, he robbed the State by millions of rupees for routine ad films made actually by professionals hired from the Bollywood world. He became his

media advisor in a way, designing how Naveen be presented in public and what publicity clips be made on him. VK trusted him without once sensing the former's evil designs. Insiders say he is the mastermind behind the most horrific Lungi-clad Naveen displaying by hand the two 'conches', an act that for the first time reduced Naveen to an utterly helpless circus clown. Subsequently, the rascal forced two enslaved BJD guys, an MP and an immature media kid, to do the same shameful 'lungi-conch' act

Meanwhile, a railway officer had materialised in VK's domain. He somehow managed to mesmerise VK into believing that he was a stu-

pendous IT genius who had the skills to decipher field survey data and findings so accurately as to etch easy victory. Accordingly, candidates were chosen and poll strategies were devised. This fellow slowly became so close to VK as even to override VK's highly critical decisions. And whoever said he was horrendously wrong, VK would dismiss this cautioning as if it were plain nonsense. The other guy, insiders say, is Pranab Prakash Das who would go with the railway officer's decisions and also advise VK on critical political matters. No one among the public knows until now who advised Naveen to fight from two constituencies, Hinjili and Kantabanji.

Naveen suffered defeat in Kantabanji from a nondescript man, who was once booked under the NSA by the District Magistrate.

Naveen, in all good faith, trusted VK as the best aide. VK is a workaholic; Pranab is a fantastic errand runner, kind of a self-styled trouble shooter though he does not go deep into any matter to ensure moves don't go wrong and turn counterproductive. He is kind of a 'happy go lucky' childish guy.

VK had also picked a mid-level IPS officer called DS Kute, who is extremely well-behaved and suave talker. When VK began his indiscriminate chopper rides, not one in the BJD fold told him that the masses

are reacting violently. The railway officer had convinced VK that 2024 is the BJD's electoral 'record breaking' year. Junior officers like Aditya Mahapatra at the Naveen Niwas had hinted many times about the oncoming disaster. But VK trusted the railway officer like mad.

All said, it is true that VK was never guided properly, for which he went on highflying overconfidence, which was taken for arrogance by the masses and eventually a great party like the BJD under the stewardship of a demigod crumbled like a house of cards. A great era has come to a tragic end. But Naveen shall dwell in people's hearts for all times to come.

'People fought battle of trust by defeating CM'

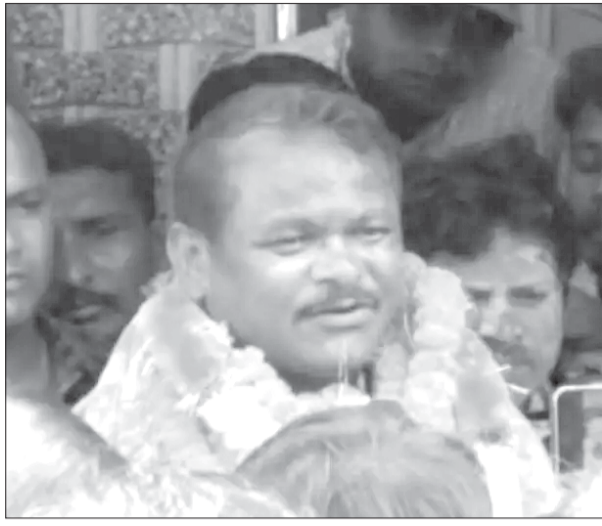
Says BJP's Laxman Bag who won in Kantabanji

PNS ■ BALANGIR

The Kantabanji Assembly seat is now the most talked-about segment in Odisha where five-term Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik was handed a crushing defeat by BJP's Laxman Bag with a margin of 16,344 votes.

"The people of Kantabanji wanted a change and have silently given their mandate to the saffron party. This victory not only created ripples in Kantabanji but also across the State," said Bag, the newly elected MLA from Kantabanji.

After his electoral success against the BJD supremo, an air of celebration prevailed



across Khutulunda village under the Kantabanji seat on Wednesday. Speaking to the media, Bag said that the people fought a battle of trust and showed it by defeating the Chief Minister, who served for 24 years.

"What issues of

Kantabanji we will tell you? There is unemployment, labour migration, lack of education and healthcare infra. All these problems are going to end. A new beginning is going to happen as the new Government will be formed on June 10," Bag observed.

He also pointed out that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already invited the people to the occasion. "People did all that they had to do and the Prime Minister will reciprocate. You all will be proud. The PM will show the path of development," he said, adding that he was extremely happy over the BJP's electoral success.

"The people of Kantabanji wanted a change and have silently given their mandate to the lotus symbol. The victory margin was 16,344 votes. This victory not only created ripples in Kantabanji but also across the State. The mandate shook the incumbent Odisha Government. People have dreams and the dreams got fulfilled," he observed.

Bag celebrated the electoral victory at his village along with party workers and villagers

In Jagatsinghpur BJD wins JSpur, Paradip seats

BJD retains Tirtol, Balikuda-Erasama

PNS ■ JAGATSINGHPUR

The BJP surprised everyone by emerging as a powerful force in Jagatsinghpur district when party nominees in Paradip and Jagatsinghpur Assembly constituencies won both the seats by defeating their BJD counterparts.

Official reports informed that after the counting of votes ended on Tuesday, saffron party candidate Sampad Swain defeated BJD candidate Geetanjali Rout by a margin of 15,619 votes in Paradip Assembly seat. Swain polled 84,097 votes, while Geetanjali scored 68,478 votes.

Similarly, in Jagatsinghpur

Assembly constituency, Amarendra Das, a BJP nominee, emerged victorious, defeating BJD stalwart and seating MLA Prashanta Muduli by 21,683 votes. Das secured 91,650 votes while Muduli got 69,967 votes. The Congress candidate had to be satisfied with a mere 5,876 votes.

The BJD, nonetheless, retained the Tirtol reserved Assembly segment in the 2024 elections. Party candidate Ramakanta Bhoi defeated BJP candidate Rajkishor Behera by a margin of 28, 341 votes, while the Congress finished third with 42,570 votes.

In Balikuda-Erasama seat, BJD candidate Sarada Jena won the by defeating BJP candidate Satya Sarathi Mohanty by 25, 904 votes. Jena polled 92,984 votes against Mohanty's 67, 080 votes.

Jajpur: 20 arrested over poll-related violence

PNS ■ JAJPUR

Police on Monday arrested 20 persons in connection with the protests and clashes on June 1 in Dharmasala and Rasulpur blocks of Jajpur district on Monday.

Following the incidents, the Dharmasala and the Kuakhia police registered cases against over 100 people in two cases.

The Dharmasala police arrested six persons while the Kuakhia police apprehended 14 persons. All the accused were produced in court.

Notably, on June 1, a group of people staged a road block-

ade in Dharmasala, alleging that some EVMs were taken to the block office instead of the strong room. They suspected EVM tampering. The situation was brought under control only after the district administration clarified that those EVMs were not used for polling but were reserved ones.

A similar incident was reported from Rasulpur. The protestors staged demonstrations in front of the vehicles engaged in the poll duty. Besides, tension was also reported after a vehicle, carrying election officials and EVMs from the Barchana area to Jajpur Town, halted near a hotel at Jaraka.

24 yrs' BJD dominance ends in S Odisha

As BJP sweeps B'pur, Aska LS seats, most Assly seats

KRUSHNA CHANDRA PANDA ■ BRAHMAMPUR

In a historic political shift, the BJP achieved a clean sweep in the Brahmampur and Aska Parliamentary constituencies, signalling a new era in Odisha's political landscape.

The results from Ganjam district, a crucial heartland, decisively favoured the BJP, breaking the long-standing dominance of the BJD.

BJP candidate Pradeep Panigrahi triumphed in the Brahmampur Lok Sabha seat with a substantial margin of 1,63,805 votes, while in the Aska Lok Sabha constituency, BJP's Anita Subhadarsini secured victory by a margin of 98, 235 votes.

In the Assembly seats, BJP saw significant wins: Nilamani Bisoyi won Sorada by 28,224 votes, Saroj Kumar Padhi secured Aska with a margin of 8,059 votes, and Purna Chandra Sathy emerged victorious in Khallikote with a margin of 23,057 votes. Other notable BJP wins include Bibhuti Bhushan Jena in

Gopalpur by 8,527 votes, K Anil Kumar in Brahmapur by 8,527 votes, Krishna Chandra Nayak in Chhatrapur by 11,265 votes, and Pratap Chandra Nayak in Kabisurjanagar with a significant margin of 30,173 votes.

There were some notable exceptions: BJD's Naveen Patnaik won in Hinjilicut by a narrow margin of 4,649 votes, a stark contrast to his 2019 victory margin of approximately 60,000 votes. In Sanakhemundi, INC candidate Ramesh Chandra Jena won by 10,599 votes, while BJD candidate Rupesh Kumar Panigrahi won

Paralakhemundi by 4,107 votes, and Dasharathi Gamang won in Mohana with 4,281 votes. In the Polasara Constituency, BJP candidate Gokulananda Mallik was leading by 20,738 votes as counting approached the final rounds.

The 2024 elections marked a historic moment as Naveen Patnaik, the second longest-serving Chief Minister of India, faced his first significant political defeat. After 25 years of uninterrupted leadership, Patnaik's fortress finally collapsed, making way for the BJP to form the Government in Odisha for the first time.

In Baleswar Bhogra, Basta remain saving grace for BJD

UBACHAK MOHANTY ■ BALEESWAR

The BJP performed extremely well across Baleswar as the results of the 2024 simultaneous elections were declared on Tuesday while on the contrary, the BJD had to suffer severe jolts in many seats including its fort, Jaleswar.

According to the information received so far, Brajamohan Pradhan of BJP made Awani Patra of BJD bite the dust in Jaleswar seat. In a close contest, Pradhan defeated him by a margin of 752 votes. While the BJD was able

to save the Bhogra seat though by a close margin, the party won the Basta seat comfortably. Gautambuddha Das of BJD won the Bhogra seat by a margin of over 6,500 votes after being closely chased by Satyasiba Das of Congress. However, Subasini Jena, the wife of former MP Rabindra Jena, registered a victory over Congress candidate Bijan Nayak by routing him with a margin of about 34,000 votes in Basta.

The BJP comfortably wrested the Sadar seat from BJD. Manas Dutta of BJP won the seat by margin of about

30,000 votes by defeating sitting MLA Swarup Das of BJD. Reports also said the BJP was well ahead of BJD in Remuna and Simulia. In Soro, the BJD was leading till the last information came in. MP candidate of BJP Pratap Sarangi was also far ahead of Lekhasri Samantsinghar of BJD while Srikant Jena remained in the distant third. Under the Baleswar Parliamentary constituency, Badasahi seat was retained by BJP after it registered a magnificent victory over the BJD. Sanatana Bijili of BJP retained the seat comfortably, reports said.

Keonjhar: Man mauled to death by bear

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

Panic gripped the Ghatagaon Forest Range area in Keonjhar district after a wild bear attacked a 58-year-old man and killed him in Binajhari village under the Ghatagaon police station of Keonjhar district on Wednesday.

The deceased was identified as Chaitanya Naik of Binajhari.

Naik had gone to a pond in the morning surrounded by the Ate Reserve Forest. Later, villagers found his mutilated body in a pool of blood some distance from the road and informed the Forest Department.

Forest officials rushed to the spot. Police also went to the site and sent the body to the Ghatagaon Community Health Centre for postmor-

tem. Additional Conservator of Forests, Ghatagaon Range, Pravat Kuanar said there is no close family relative of the deceased. Therefore, no compensation can be paid. The wild bears often come from the Ate forest to the villages to eat ripe mangoes. Therefore, people have been warned to be careful not to go out in the morning or in the evening.

Pattnaik retains PPBS chief post till June next

PNS ■ PRADIP

President of Paradip Port Banika Sangha (PPBS) Santosh Kumar Pattnaik had announced his resignation from the post citing personal reasons. However, his resignation was not accepted by the union members, who unanimously requested him to continue in the post until June 2025.

In a Press conference held at the union office on Monday, key members of PPBS, including Surya Narayan Sahu, Anadi Charan Parida, Bibhuti Bhushan Mohanty, Chandra Shekhar Mahapatra, Ayaskant Samal, Kshirod Kumar Swain and Chaitanya Sahu, urged Pattnaik to re-



main in his post. They highlighted his significant contributions during his 16-year tenure such as the protection of traders, establishment of the business association office, installation of the Maa Durga idol, rituals and construction of a guesthouse with facilities.

The members emphasised the need for his continued leadership to address critical issues, including the registration of old and new traders,

rent hikes for shops, modernisation of the old market, construction of a modern market complex and housing provisions for traders. They collectively requested Pattnaik to oversee these urgent matters.

In response, Pattnaik assured the members that he would continue as PPBS president until June 2025. His decision was met with applause from the merchants present.

Brahmapur summer boxing camp ends



PNS ■ BRAHMAMPUR

A summer boxing training camp, which started on May 19 at the Mahatma Gandhi Stadium, Brahmampur, ended on Sunday. As many as 75 boys and 25 girls took part in the camp which was organised jointly by the Ganjam District Athletic Association (GDAA) and Ganjam Boxing Club.

State Boxing Athletes Association secretary Anil Bahidar, GDAA joint secretary Basanti Panigrahi, treasurer Upendra Patnaik, coach Surendra Kumar Patnaik, stadium in-charge Sanjeev Kumar Sahu and basketball coach Kajal Sahu were the guests of the concluding event. All the new players who joined the boxing camp were given certificates by the guests.

Among others, Ganjam Boxing Club joint secretary K Prabhakar Rao, State Boxing referee and coach Shibaram Patra, Ladu Kishore Sahu, senior boxers Bulu Patra, Babula Nayak, Suman Das, Muna Gaud, N Madhav, Bipini Gaud, Satish Patra, members of Ganjam Boxing Club Aditya Mohanty, Rita Rao and S Sai Pratap were present.

INBRIEF

EX-EXECUTIVE ENGINEER GETS 2-YR RI

Cuttack: Special Judge, Special Court, Cuttack convicted Narahari Panda, former Executive Engineer, Brahmani, Subarnarekha, Baitarani Basin, Laxmiposi, Baripada in Mayurbhanj district for possession of disproportionate assets and sentenced him to two years' rigorous imprisonment. The court also directed Panda to pay a fine of Rs 50,000 and in default to undergo another six months' imprisonment. The Vigilance would now move the competent authority for stoppage of pension of Panda following his conviction.

GAJAPATI MIGRANT WORKER'S DAUGHTER TOPS +2 ARTS

Paralakhemundi: Dharitri Bisoyi, daughter of a migrant worker, topped the +2 Arts exam wherein she secured 84% of marks. She studied at the Harbhanga Higher Secondary School under Mohana block of Gajapati district. Her parents are working at a cotton mill in Surat. She wants to be a teacher in life and help the poverty-stricken students. She also expressed her indebtedness to her teachers whose support helped her achieve the feat.



YOUTH DIES AFTER JUMPING FROM MOBILE TOWER IN G'PATI

Paralakhemundi: A youth jumped from a mobile phone tower at Nuagada village under the Sherang police station in Gajapati district in public view. The deceased was identified as Tnu Subudhi (28). He had climbed the tower and threatened to jump from it. Though locals and Fire Service personnel pleaded with him to come down, he jumped from it. He was rushed to the Khaguripada Community Health Centre. But the doctor there pronounced him dead. The deceased was married and is survived by his wife and his two children.



DRIVER DIES AS TRUCK OVERTURNS IN GAJAPATI

Paralakhemundi: The driver of a turmeric-laden truck was killed when the vehicle overturned at Taptapani Ghat near Palukhela village on the Gajapati-Ganjam district border. The deceased was identified Suresh Guru of Etamati in Naygarh district. The truck was on its way from Gajapati to Bhubaneswar when it overturned while negotiating a turn and fell off the road. Fire Service personnel rescued Suresh from the truck and rushed him to the Dighapahandi Community Health Centre. But he was declared dead by the doctor.

NAVEEN JINDAL WINS KURUKSHETRA LS SEAT

Bhubaneswar: Chairman of Jindal Steel & Power (JSP) and BJP leader Naveen Jindal has won from the Kurukshetra parliamentary constituency in Haryana. He secured 5,42,175 votes, defeating his closest rival from INDI alliance. Jindal expressed gratitude to the people of Kurukshetra constituency, the top BJP leadership and the party workers for their support.



Missing Malkangiri doctor traced in Karnataka

Police refute kidnapping charge

PNS ■ KORAPUT

Doctor Amlan Bhoi, who had gone missing from his official residence in Malkangiri district from June 1, has been traced by police from Karnataka.

Bhoi, who was posted at the Kalimela Community Health Centre (CHC), had attended hospital duty and returned to his government quarters in the afternoon on the fateful day. However, he was found missing from his residence the next morning.

The Malkangiri police traced the missing doctor from Mysore in Karnataka, said Malkangiri SP, refuting the Maoist abduction angle in the

case. Based on a complaint filed by the health officials of the CHC, the Kalimela police initiated an investigation and launched an operation to trace Bhoi.

It was learnt that miscreants had abducted the doctor for carrying out a postmortem on an unidentified body in Karnataka. A police team will be sent to Karnataka to bring him back to Odisha.

The Malkangiri SP said, "Dr Amlan Bhoi has been located. He is safe and sound. He is being brought to Malkangiri from Karnataka."

Earlier, media reports had suggested that Bhoi was abducted by Maoists. But Malkangiri SDPO Sachin Patel refuted any role of Maoists in Bhoi's disappearance.

Its traditional fort 4 of 5 Assly seats in Kendrapada in BJD's kitty

BJP wins Lok Sabha seat, Mahakalpada Assembly seat

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

The BJD managed to win four out of five Assembly seats in Kendrapada Lok Sabha constituency which was a solace for the party that suffered huge setbacks across Odisha in the 2024 simultaneous elections the results of which were out on Tuesday.

The BJD nominees won Aul, Rajnagar, Patkura and Kendrapada Assembly segments, whereas the BJP won the lone Mahakalpada Assembly constituency. In Mahakalpada, stalwart leader and Minister, Atanu Sabyasachi Nayak failed to retain his seat as he was van-



quished by BJP's Durga Prasanna Nayak. Durga Prasanna defeated Atanu with a huge margin of 33,951 votes, excluding postal ballot votes.

"I will try my level best to solve the problems of Mahakalpada and will carry out the developmental work," said Durga Prasanna.

BJD's Pratap Keshari Deb created history this time as he won for the fifth time from his home turf and retained the Aul seat. He defeated his rival Congress candidate Dr Debasmita Sharma, daughter of former Aul

MLA Debendra Sharma, by a margin of 19,628 votes. While Deb got 73,678 votes, excluding postal ballots, Sharma got 54,050 votes, excluding postal ballots.

Similarly, BJD candidate for Kendrapada Assembly segment, Ganeswar Behera defeated BJP's Gitanjali Sethy by a margin of 35,418 votes. Behera got 90,173 votes vis-à-vis Sethy's 54,755 votes.

The Patkura Assembly seat once again proved to be the BJD citadel as BJD Aravinda Mohapatra, son of veteran leader

Bijoy Mohapatra, won by defeating BJP's Tejeswar Parida by a margin of 13, 822 votes. While Mahapatra got 90,905 votes, Parida secured 77,083 votes. "I will try to develop the Patkura segment and will work for the people of my segment. I'm sure I will win the hearts of my voters and bring smiles to their faces," said an elated Mohapatra, who contested his debut election this time.

In Rajnagar Assembly constituency, BJD candidate Dhruva Charan Sahu defeated BJP candidate Lalita Kumar Behera by a

margin of 18,241 votes. Sanu got 81,237 votes against Behera's 62,996 votes.

The Kendrapada Lok Sabha seat which is stated to be the BJD's bastion has crumbled for the first time as the BJP party won the prestigious Kendrapada Lok Sabha seat. BJP nominee Baijyanta Panda defeated the BJD candidate Ansuman Mohanty with a margin of 66,536 votes. According to official sources, Panda got 6,15,705 votes whereas Mohanty bagged 5,49,169 votes.

73 WOMEN ELECTED TO LOK SABHA, LOWER THAN 2019

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 73 women have won the Lok Sabha elections, a slight dip from 78 elected in 2019. Of the total women MPs elected to the Lower House from across the country, West Bengal is leading with 11 female MPs.

A total of 797 women candidates had contested the elections with the BJP fielding the maximum at 69 followed by the Congress at 41. This is the first election since the passage of the women's reservation bill in the Parliament to reserve one-third of seats in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies for women. The law is yet to come into effect.

According to an analysis of the Election Commission data, BJP's 30 women candidates won the polls this time, Congress' 14, TMC's 11, four of the Samajwadi Party's, three of the DMK, and two each of the JDU and LJP(R). With over 13.44 per cent female MPs, the 18th Lok Sabha will have one of the highest number of women

members since 1952. The 17th Lok Sabha had the highest number of women parliamentarians at 78, constituting over 14 per cent of the total strength.

In the 16th Lok Sabha, 64 women were its members, while 52 women were elected to the 15th Lok Sabha. BJP's Hema Malini, TMC's Mahua Moitra, NCP's Supriya Sule, and SP's Dimple Yadav retained their seats in the Lok Sabha polls, but candidates like Kangna Ranaut and Misha Bharati stole the show with their victories.

Samajwadi Party's 25-year-old candidate for Machhlishahr, Priya Saroj, and 29-year-old Iqra Choudhary of Kairana seat, were among the youngest nominees to secure a victory. Notably, the parties like Naam Tamilar Katchi has achieved equal gender representation with 50 per cent women candidates.

Other parties with significant female representation included Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) and Nationalist Congress Party, each with 40 per cent women candidates. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and Biju Janata Dal



(BJD) both had 33 per cent female representation, while the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) had 29 per cent. The Samajwadi Party had 20 per cent, and the Trinamool Congress (TMC) 25 per cent. A total of 8,360 candidates were in the fray in the parliamentary polls.

Three transgender candidates contested the elections independently. But all of them lost in the polls. There were 24 women MPs each in the first and the second Lok Sabha. Meanwhile, four candidates are set to become the youngest members of parliament (MPs) after scoring victory in the Lok Sabha polls. All of them are 25 years old. Pushpendra Saroj and Priya Saroj fought on Samajwadi Party's ticket, while Shambhavi Choudhary and Sanjana Jatav were fielded by the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) and the Congress respectively.

Shambhavi Choudhary is the daughter of Ashok Choudhary, a minister in the Nitish Kumar cabinet in Bihar. She won from the Samastipur constituency after defeating her nearest rival — Sunny Hazari of Congress — by a comfortable margin. Sunny Hazari is the son of JD(U) minister Maheshwar Hazari.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had earlier praised Shambhavi as the youngest NDA candidate while addressing a campaign rally. Sanjana Jatav won from the Bharatpur constituency in Rajasthan. The 25-year-old defeated BJP's Ramswaroop Koli by a margin of 51,983 votes. She had also fought the 2023 assembly elections but lost to BJP's Ramesh Khedi by just 409 votes. Sanjana is married to Kaptan Singh — a Rajasthan police constable.

Pushpendra Saroj entered the political battlefield as a SP candidate from the Kaushambi parliamentary seat — previously held by the BJP. He won by defeating sitting BJP MP Vinod Kumar Sonkar by a margin of 103,944 votes. Pushpendra is the son of five-time MLA and former Uttar Pradesh Minister Inderjit Saroj.

Priya Saroj won from the Machhlishahr seat by a margin of 35,850 votes. She had been pitted against sitting BJP MP Bholanath. Priya is the daughter of three-time MP Toofani Saroj.



Two jailed on terror charges win Lok Sabha polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Two candidates currently lodged in prison on terror charges emerged winners in the just-concluded parliamentary election, giving rise to an unusual situation for the 18th Lok Sabha to be formed in the coming days.

While the law will keep them from attending the proceedings of the new House, they do have the constitutional right to take oath as Members of Parliament.

The Election Commission declared the results of the Lok Sabha polls on Tuesday. While radical Sikh preacher Amritpal Singh won Punjab's Khadoor Sahib seat, terror financing accused Sheikh Abdul Rashid, also known as Engineer Rashid, emerged victorious on Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla seat. Engineer Rashid has been lodged in Tihar jail since August 9, 2019, on charges of terror financing. Singh was arrested in April 2023 under the National Security Act and sent to the Dibrugarh prison in Assam.

The question now arises if these jailed newly elected MPs will be allowed to take the oath, and if yes, how. Explaining the legalities involved, Constitution expert and former Lok Sabha secretary general PDT Achari emphasised the importance of following the constitutional provisions in such cases. Being sworn in as a Member of Parliament is a constitutional

right, he said. But because they are currently in prison, Engineer Rashid and Singh must seek permission from authorities to be escorted to Parliament for the oath-taking ceremony. Once they have taken the oath, they will have to return to prison.

To further explain the legalities, Achari cited Article 101(4) of the Constitution which deals with the absence of members from both Houses of Parliament without prior sanction of the Chair. He said after they have taken oath, they will write to the Speaker, informing him or her about their inability to attend the House. The Speaker will then refer their requests to the House Committee on Absence of Members.

The committee will recommend whether the member should be allowed to remain absent from House proceedings or not. The recommendation is then put to vote in the House by the Speaker.

If Engineer Rashid or Singh are to be convicted and jailed for a minimum of two years, they would lose their seats in the Lok Sabha immediately as per the Supreme Court judgment of 2013, which holds that MPs and MLAs would be disqualified in such cases. This decision struck down section 8(4) of the Representation of the People Act, which earlier allowed convicted MPs and MLAs three months to appeal against their convictions.

MoU signed to set up dedicated Tele MANAS cell for Armed forces

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Armed forces beneficiaries will have direct access to mental health care with the Union Health Ministry inking an MoU with the Ministry of Defence for operating a special cell of the national telemental helpline at the Armed Forces Medical College in Pune. The special Tele-MANAS cell will operate on a pilot basis for two years at the medical college in Pune.



Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and Ministry of Defence sign MoU to set up dedicated Tele MANAS cell for Armed forces in presence of Aradhna Patnaik, AS & MD of MoHFW and Lt General Daljit Singh, Director General of Armed Forces Medical Services, in New Delhi

extension of the District Mental Health Programme (DMHP), offering comprehensive, integrated, and inclusive 24x7 tele-mental health services. The initiative provides toll-free number, 14416, in each State and Union Territory for easy access to mental health support.

Currently, there are 51 operational Tele MANAS cells functioning across all 36 states and UTs, offering services in 20 different languages. Since its launch in October 2022, it has received over 10 lakh calls and is managing more than 3,500 calls daily. The data indicate a significant demand for mental health services and underscores the importance of addressing mental health issues comprehensively and inclusively, particularly in specialised contexts like the armed forces, the statement said.

With the signing of the MoU, the mental health and well-being of armed forces personnel and their families will be addressed and the armed forces beneficiaries will have direct access to specialised care, ensuring their unique mental health needs are addressed promptly and effectively," the statement said. Lt General Daljit Singh, Director General of Armed Forces Medical Services, said there has been a long-standing need for mental health counselling for armed forces personnel, and now, with the dedicated Tele MANAS cell, armed forces personnel and their families will receive crucial mental health assistance 24x7, addressing their mental health concerns more effectively. Tele MANAS is the digital



Army Chief visits Thal Sena Bhawan construction site

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Army chief also inaugurated a state-of-the-art living barrack for troops at the Army HQ Camp at Delhi Cantonment.

The barrack has a capacity of 400 beds and was constructed with the latest light gauge steel frame technology through which speedy and sturdy construction has been undertaken. "The building was completed in "record time of one year". It has state-of-the-art amenities for all weather conditions, including a central cooling system, and is equipped with modern technologies such as CCTV cameras and biometric attendance systems. General Pandey expressed satisfaction with both projects.

These endeavours underscore the Indian Army's unwavering resolve to modernise infrastructure, prioritise sustainability and improve the quality of life for its personnel, the officials said.

The eight-storey state-of-the-art structure of the Army headquarters' new building will "complement" the overall Central Vista redevelopment project, and its architectural design draws inspiration from the official emblem of the Army, senior officials said in April 2023. The work is due to finish in 27 months at an approximate cost of Rs 760 crore, a top Army official had earlier said.

The starting of the construction work got delayed after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, sources had said, adding the building will be a green structure and fully quake-resistant and "will be built to last 100 years".

Two-day Varshik Niti Samvad Shivir held

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A two-day "Varshik Niti Samvad Shivir" (annual meet) of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) took place in New Delhi on June 04-05, Defence Ministry said here. The conference's primary focus was to review the progress of the ongoing expansion plan of NCC as per the government directives to meet the aspirations of the youth.

Giving details of the meet, officials said it was inaugurated by Director General NCC Lt General Gurbirpal Singh and attended by Additional Directors General and Deputy Directors General representing NCC Directorates from across the country.

During the meeting, DG NCC highlighted the substantial efforts made in the last one year to enhance training, infrastructure and logistics functions of the NCC. He emphasised on the need for institutionalised training to be the raison d'être (reason for being) of all directorates in order to meaningfully contribute towards nation building, social awareness and community



development programmes. He reiterated NCC's unwavering commitment to motivate young Indians and transform them into responsible citizens, in sync with the government policies towards making the country 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047.

The conference was held at the newly-renovated Pratap Conference Hall, DG NCC Camp, Cariappa Parade Ground in New Delhi. The hall is named after Cadet Sergeant Pratap Singh of the 10th Punjab Battalion NCC, Gurdaspur who was awarded the Ashok Chakra Class III for his gallantry and selfless devotion to duty during firefighting operations at Gurdaspur Railway Station on September 13, 1965 during the war.

Manipur sent powerful signal by electing Congress MPs: Jairam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday said the long-suffering people of Manipur have sent a "very powerful signal" by electing its leaders as MPs in both constituencies of the State, and asserted that this was a tribute to Rahul Gandhi's visits to the violence-hit State. The Congress won both the Lok Sabha seats in strife-torn Manipur on Tuesday. Alfred Kangam S Arthur won the Outer Manipur seat by 85,418 votes, defeating his nearest rival Kachui Timothy Zimik of the NPF.

In the Inner Manipur seat, Angomcha Bimol Akoijam defeated his nearest rival Thounaojam Basantakumar of the BJP by 1,09,801 votes. In a post on X, Congress



general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "The long-suffering people of Manipur, whose resilience and strength has been under major strain since the state began burning on the night of May 3rd 2023, have sent a very powerful signal by electing Congress MPs in both Inner and Outer

Manipur." It is also a tribute to Rahul Gandhi's visit to Manipur on June 29 and 30, 2023, and to the launch of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra on January 14, 2024 from Thoubal, when the state government refused permission for it to start from Imphal, Ramesh said.

"It is also a tight slap on the face of Mr. Narendra Modi, who simply refused to reach out to the people of Manipur and did not visit the state even for a few hours," the Congress leader said.

The two Congress MPs have a huge responsibility, and with their election, hopefully, the process of reconciliation will get a big boost, Ramesh added. Manipur has been strife-torn since May last year when ethnic violence broke out after a march by Kuki tribals in the hill districts to protest against the valley-dominant Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribes status. Since then, over 220 people belonging to both the communities, including security personnel, have been killed in the continuing violence.

Army to provide skill opportunities to families of personnel

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Army has joined hands with a Sikkim-based university to provide educational and skilling opportunities to the families of Army personnel by earmarking seats in its skill-based academic programmes and offering fee concessions, according to an official statement.

An MoU was signed between the Indian Army with the Medhavi Skills University (MSU), Sikkim, during a ceremony held at the South Block here. This pact is to "provide educational and skilling opportunities to the families of army personnel by reserving seats and offering fee concessions", the statement said.

Under the MoU, the university will earmark seats and offer special fee concessions in its skill-based undergraduate and postgraduate degree



programmes for the wards and spouses of serving, deceased and retired Army personnel, it added. MSU will provide a cut in tuition fees and hostel accommodation fees for these beneficiaries with additional concessions based on their scores in the national entrance examinations, the statement said.

The MoU was signed by Major General Ravindra Singh in the presence of Adjutant General of the Indian Army Lt

General C B Ponnappa and Kuldip Sarma, co-founder and pro-chancellor of MSU. MSU has become India's first skills university to collaborate with the Indian Army, it added.

"MSU views the defence forces as a significant partner in its journey of upskilling India. We are dedicated to enhancing the learning, development and employability for the families of those who serve our nation so bravely. This initiative stands as a testament to our unwavering support for India's guardians and their families," Sarma was quoted as saying in the statement.

Singh highlighted the importance of the MoU. "This partnership with Medhavi Skills University is a commendable step towards empowering the families of our Army personnel. It is our duty to support the educational and professional aspirations of the families who sacrifice so much for the nation's security," he said.

Congress vote share dips in Madhya Pradesh, that of BJP, NOTA rises marginally

PTI ■ BHOPAL

The vote share of the Congress in the Lok Sabha elections in Madhya Pradesh went down by more than two per cent while that of the BJP increased marginally by over one per cent as compared to the figures in the previous parliamentary elections, a top official said on Wednesday. In the results of the Lok Sabha polls declared on Tuesday, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) clinched all 29 seats, including the Congress bastion Chhindwara, in Madhya Pradesh.

A total of 5,33,705 voters pressed the NOTA (none of the above) option, with the highest number of 2,18,674 such votes being registered in Indore seat alone, Madhya Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Anupam Rajan said in a Press conference. A total of 369 candidates were in the fray from the 29 seats, including 343 men, 25 women and one transgender (in Damoh). Rajan said the Indian National Congress (INC) had got 34.50 per cent



vote share in the 2019 elections. But this time, its vote share stood at 32.44 per cent, down by 2.06 per cent. The BJP bagged 59.28 per cent votes this time as compared to 58 per cent it had received in 2019, he said. The vote share of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) also went up to 3.28 per cent from 2.38 per cent it registered in the last general elections, he added.

According to Rajan, the vote share of NOTA also went up from 0.92 per cent to 1.40 per cent. "Of the 5,33,705 NOTA votes received across 29 constituencies in Madhya Pradesh, 2,18,674 votes were polled in Indore Lok Sabha seat alone," he said. Of the total NOTA votes in Indore Lok Sabha seat, 2,18,355 votes were polled on EVMs and 319 through postal ballots, he said.

He said Indore's BJP candidate Shankar Lalwani, who won by the highest margin of 11.75 lakh votes, got 78.54 per cent of the total votes polled. In the Vidisha seat, former state chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan won by a margin of 8.21 lakh votes. He received 76.70 per cent of the total votes polled.

On the third place in this list, BJP's Lata Wankhede got 68.49 of total votes in the constituency, he said. BJP's Jyotiraditya Scindia (Guna) and the party's state unit president V D Sharma (Khajuraho) received 67.21 per cent and 67.75 per cent of total votes respectively, the official said.

Across all 29 seats, the lowest victory margin was recorded in the Morena Lok Sabha constituency, where BJP candidate Shivmangal Singh Tomar won by a margin of 52,530 votes, he said. Responding to a question, Rajan said EVMs were foolproof and there was no scope of tampering due to procedural checks. The model code of conduct will come to an end on Thursday, he said.

BJP-led Mahayuti clinches seven out of 12 seats in Mumbai-Konkan belt

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Mumbai-Konkan coastal belt in Maharashtra stood firmly by the BJP-led Mahayuti alliance even as results in the rest of the state jolted the ruling allies. The coastal region, comprising 12 parliamentary seats, saw Mahayuti bagging seven. The BJP triumphed in Palghar, Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg, and Mumbai North, while the NCP, led by Ajit Pawar, had a face-saver in Raigad where its leader Sunil Tatkare retained his seat. Chief Minister Eknath Shinde won Mumbai North West seat and retained his hold over Thane and Kalyan constituencies in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR).

On the other hand, Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena maintained its hold in Mumbai, winning three of the four seats it contested, but lost its former bastions of Raigad and Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg in Konkan.

Out of six Lok Sabha seats in Mumbai, Shiv Sena (UBT) won three, while the rest three were bagged by Shiv Sena led by Shinde, BJP, and the Congress. Shiv Sena (UBT) candidates Arvind Sawant, Anil Desai, and Sanjay Dina Patil, clinched Mumbai South, Mumbai South Central, and Mumbai North-East



constituencies, respectively. The three other seats, namely, Mumbai North West, Mumbai North, and Mumbai North Central were won by the Shinde-led Shiv Sena, the BJP, and Congress, respectively. The see-sawing battle for Mumbai North West seat was won by Ravindra Waikar who defeated his Shiv Sena (UBT) rival Amol Kirtikar by a wafer-thin margin of 48 votes. The Congress opened its account in Mumbai after a decade with city unit chief Varsha Gaikwad defeating renowned advocate Ujjwal Nikam, who contested on a BJP ticket, from Mumbai North Central. Out of the four seats in the Mumbai Metropolitan Region

(MMR), NCP (SP) won Bhiwandi, while Thane and Kalyan were bagged by Shiv Sena led by Shinde. The BJP won Palghar constituency. The BJP contested the Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg constituency for the first time and will look to consolidate its presence here for the upcoming state polls, while Shiv Sena, led by Shinde, will focus on strengthening its hold in the Thane-Kalyan belt, competing with Shiv Sena (UBT). Union minister Narayan Rane defeated his Shiv Sena (UBT) rival Vinayak Geete from Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg constituency. Since 2014, BJP and the undivided Shiv Sena dominated the Lok Sabha and assembly constituencies in Maharashtra.

However, with the splits in Shiv Sena and NCP, the political landscape has become a level playing field for all parties.

Rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, pollution, traffic congestion, and the need for affordable housing are some of the issues dominating these constituencies. The Congress faces an uphill task of revitalising itself in Mumbai to ensure it does not cede more ground to Shiv Sena (UBT) in the metropolis without harming the alliance. In 2019, the Congress won only four assembly seats in Mumbai.

The region, with its 72 assembly segments, remains crucial as state polls are scheduled later this year. Out of the 72 assembly seats, BJP holds 26, Shiv Sena 28, NCP 6, Samajwadi Party 2, Bahujan Vikas Aghadi (BVA) 3, CPM and MNS 1 each, with an independent supporting Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena. Since the splits in Shiv Sena and NCP, the majority of MLAs are with Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar. Of 48 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra, the Maha Vikas Aghadi of Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) and Congress, won 30 seats, while the Mahayuti of BJP, Shiv Sena, and Ajit Pawar-led NCP was restricted to 17.

JD(S) leader HDK eyes Agriculture portfolio in new NDA Government

PTI ■ BENGALURU

JD(S) leader and former Chief Minister HD Kumaraswamy on Wednesday hinted that his party was interested in the Agriculture portfolio in the new NDA Government. JD(S), headed by his father and former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, joined the NDA last year.

JD(S) and JD(S) fought the Lok Sabha elections together in Karnataka, which has a total of 28 seats. BJP won 17 seats and JD(S) two. Asked about JD(S)' "demands" ahead of government formation, he said: "we don't have any such demand. Our priority is resolution of issues concerning Karnataka that have been there for long from the Centre. About giving representation (Cabinet berth) to Karnataka at the Centre, Narendra Modi will decide."

On his Ministerial aspirations, Kumaraswamy said the NDA leadership will decide. "Let's speak about it when the time comes. Delhi leaders know what is the appropriate decision that needs to be taken for the situation there (in Karnataka). They will decide," he said. Regarding speculation in some quarters that he will be the Agriculture Minister, with similar desire being expressed by several other JD(S) leaders, he acknowledged that his party's interest is in the Agriculture department, "Let's see what decisions will happen." "Our party's interest is in the Agriculture department. Our fight since the beginning has been towards doing good for the farming community," Kumaraswamy, who arrived in New Delhi to attend today's NDA meeting, told reporters.

Success eludes TN richest candidate, AIADMK's Ashok

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Atral Ashok Kumar, the AIADMK's Erode candidate was said to be the richest of the 950 MP aspirants who contested the April 19 Lok Sabha polls in Tamil Nadu and he had declared assets worth over Rs 500 crore. Despite putting up a good fight, the debutant was swept away in the DMK wave, with the ruling party-led coalition netting all 39 Lok Sabha seats in the state.

According to the results published by the Election Commission, DMK's KE Prakash trumped Kumar by 2,36,566 votes and emerged victorious from the western constituency. Kumar received 3,25,773 votes out of the 10,93,423 votes polled. The AIADMK candidate had

earlier declared net assets worth Rs 583.48 crore while filing nomination. The 53-year-old resident of Erode had then shown movable assets valued at Rs 526.53 crore while the immovable assets — both acquired and inherited — were worth Rs 56.95 crore. Kumar is the founding member and director of The Indian Public School (TIPS) and Amex Alloys Private Limited. He is also the founder of TIPS School of Architecture, TIPS School of Management, TIPS College of Arts and Science and the TIPS Global Institute. After his graduation in electrical engineering in Coimbatore, he completed a Master's from the University of Louisville, Kentucky, USA, and obtained an MBA from the University of Indianapolis, Indiana, USA.

Of 12 MLAs in fray, two each from BJP, JMM make it to Lok Sabha from Jharkhand

PTI ■ RANCHI

Four of 12 legislators, who contested the Lok Sabha polls in Jharkhand, emerged victorious, according to the election results. The INDIA bloc had nominated seven sitting legislators — four by JMM, two by Congress and one by CPI (ML), while the BJP chose three MLAs as its Lok Sabha poll candidates. Two rebel JMM legislators also fought the elections as Independent candidates.

According to election results declared on Tuesday, two JMM legislators — Joba Majhi and Nalin Soren — and two BJP MLAs— Dulu Mahto and Manish Jaiswal — registered victory in the Lok Sabha polls. JMM's Manoharpur MLA Joba Majhi won by a huge



margin of 1.68 lakh votes, defeating her nearest rival Geeta Kora of the BJP in Singhbhum. Kora, wife of former Jharkhand chief minister Madhu Koda, joined the BJP just ahead of Lok Sabha polls. She was the lone Congress MP in the state in 2019. In Dumka, JMM's seven-time MLA from the Shikaripara assembly seat Nalin Soren defeated BJP's Sita Soren by 22,527 votes. Sita Soren is the sister-in-

law of jailed former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren. Sita, three-time JMM MLA from Jama, joined the BJP in New Delhi on March 20, citing "isolation" and "neglect" by the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha since the death of her husband Durga Soren in 2009. On BJP's side, Dhanbad-Baghmara legislator Dulu Mahto won the Dhanbad Lok Sabha seat by 3.31 lakh votes against Congress' Anupama Singh. The saffron party's MLA Manish Jaiswal defeated Congress' JP Patel by 2.76 lakh votes in Hazaribagh. Patel, a BJP legislator from the Mandu assembly seat, switched to Congress just before the Lok Sabha polls. With four MLAs making it to Parliament, the total strength of the 81-member Jharkhand Assembly is set

to reduce to 76 from its current position of 80. Since Kalpana Soren, wife of jailed former chief minister Hemant Soren, won the Gandey by-poll, the total strength of the House will rise to 77. Kalpana won the Gandey by-poll by 27,149 votes over her nearest BJP rival Dilip Kumar Verma. Re-election to the four seats, which would fall vacant, is unlikely, as the state will go to assembly polls this winter. Currently, the ruling alliance, led by JMM, has 47 MLAs in the 81-member state assembly, while the BJP has 26 legislators and the AJSU Party has three. The NCP and CPI(ML) have one lawmaker each, alongside two Independents and a nominated member. Within the ruling alliance, the JMM has 29 MLAs, the Congress has 17, and the RJD has one.

Four women candidates win LS polls in Gujarat as compared to six in 2019

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

In the Lok Sabha elections held this year, four women candidates have emerged victorious in Gujarat as compared to six in 2019. Results of the parliamentary elections were declared on Tuesday. Of the total 26 seats in Gujarat, the BJP won 25, while the Congress could bag one seat. Of the four women who won the elections, three belong to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) while one is from the Congress, the Election Commission of India's data showed. In 2019, six women candidates had won the

elections and all of them were from the BJP that had clinched all the 26 seats in the state. As per the results, four out of five women candidates from the BJP won the Lok Sabha elections this time. Rekha Chaudhari, who was fielded by the ruling party in Banaskantha seat, was defeated by Congress' Geniben Thakor. Thakor became the only non-BJP candidate to emerge victorious from Gujarat this year. With her victory, the Congress has registered its first win in the Lok Sabha elections in Gujarat in a decade. Banaskantha was the

only seat where women candidates of two prominent parties faced each other in a contest that turned out to be close and nail-biting. She defeated BJP's Rekha Chaudhari by a margin of 30,406 votes, the EC data showed. Congress had fielded three women candidates, two of whom — Prabhaben Taviyav and Sonal Patel — were defeated in Dahod and Gandhinagar seats respectively. Apart from Thakor, BJP's Nimuben Bambhaniya defeated Aam Party's Umesh Makwana to win the Bhavnagar seat by a margin of over 4.55 lakh votes.

BJP's Poonam Maadam managed to retain the Jamnagar seat for the third consecutive term as she defeated Congress candidate J P Maraviya by a margin of 2.38 lakh votes. BJP's Shobhanaben Baraiya defeated Congress' Tushar Chaudhary by a margin of 1.55 lakh votes in Sabarkantha, a seat reserved for the Scheduled Tribes (ST) community. After her victory, Bambhaniya said that people trust Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. "Under Modi's leadership, women have been given priority. Women are emerging

leaders in all fields, and he has worked to empower women in political representation as well. My priority will certainly be to address the issues faced by the women in my constituency," she said. Congress leader Thakor thanked the people of her constituency for treating her as their sister and helping her out in every way possible to contest and win the election. "I thank them for coining the slogan 'Banasi ni be Geniben' (Geniben, the sister of Bansanaktha), and promise to serve them as long as I live," said Thakor, who is a Congress MLA from Vav seat. She said she will try to fulfil

the promises made to the people and work together with them. In the 2019 elections, Shardaben Patel (Mehsana seat), Poonaben Maadam (Jamnagar), Bharti Shiyal (Bhavnagar), Ranjanben Bhatt (Vadodara), Gitaben Rathva (Chhota Udepur) and Darshana Jardosh (Surat) had emerged victorious. Of them, only one candidate — Maadam — was fielded by the BJP this time. The then BJP MP Ranjan Bhatt from Vadodara was offered a ticket to contest the election, which she later declined and pulled out of the race after which the party fielded Hemang Joshi.

Kangana only fourth woman from Himachal to be elected to Lok Sabha

PTI ■ SHIMLA

Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut has become only the fourth woman ever to be elected to Lok Sabha from Himachal Pradesh, and the first woman who is not from an erstwhile royal family. BJP's Kangana defeated her Congress rival Vikramaditya Singh, scion of Rampur state and the incumbent state public works minister, by a margin of 74,755 votes from the Mandi Lok Sabha constituency. Earlier, Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, the first health minister of the country and hailing from the erstwhile royal family of Kapurthala, was elected to Lok Sabha from the Mandi constituency in 1952. Chandresh Kumari from the erstwhile royal family of Jodhpur, who was married in Himachal, won from Kangra seat in 1984. State Congress chief Pratibha Singh, who belongs to the erstwhile royal family of Rampur, won from the Mandi seat in 2004, 2013 and 2021. Kangana is only the third woman to be elected from the Mandi seat.

The scions of the erstwhile princely states have won from Mandi 13 out of 19 times but this time the people voted for Bollywood "Queen" film fame actor Kangana, who also became the first celebrity to contest and win elections in the state. One out of three women in the fray for the Lok Sabha seats have won this time. The women voter turnout exceeded the men in three out of the four Parliament



constituencies of Kangra, Mandi and Hamirpur in Himachal Pradesh, according to the state election department. The BJP won all the four Lok Sabha seats, including Shimla, in the state. The total number of electorates in the state is 57,11,969 including 29,13,075 males, 27,98,859 females and 35 third gender voters. The election was held simultaneously on June 1 and results were declared on June 4. A total of three women candidates contested the Lok Sabha elections. Besides Kangana of the BJP, they included Rakhee Gupta (Independent) from Mandi Parliament seat and Rekha Chaudhary (BSP) from the Kangra seat. Women were the focus of election campaigns of the two major political parties, the BJP and the Congress, in the run up to the Lok Sabha polls and while the Congress promised Rs 8,500 per month, the BJP asked about the status of Rs 1,500 per month to women in Himachal as promised by the Congress in last assembly polls.

Lok Sabha polls mark rise of Bharat Adivasi Party in Rajasthan's tribal belt

PTI ■ JAIPUR

The just-ended elections marked the rise of the Bharat Adivasi Party (BAP) in Rajasthan's tribal belt with the party making its debut in the Lok Sabha and also winning the Bagidora assembly by-election. Rajkumar Roat, the BAP MLA from the Chaurasi seat, secured a decisive win in the Banswara-Dungarpur Lok Sabha constituency, defeating BJP nominee Mahendrajeet Singh Malviya by 2.47 lakh votes. Roat's victory highlights the party's growing appeal among tribal voters. It was the Banswara-Dungarpur parliamentary segment where Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggested that if the Congress came to power, it would



redistribute the wealth of people to Muslims and cited former PM Manmohan Singh's remark that the minority community had the first claim on the country's resources. "This urban-naxal mindset, my mothers and sisters, they will not even leave your 'Mangalsutra'. They can go to that level," Modi had said, addressing a rally in Banswara ahead of the elections.

The BAP made its presence felt in the 2023 Rajasthan Assembly election by winning three seats, indicating its significant potential to shape regional politics. Its origins can be traced back to the Bharatiya Tribal Party (BTP), established by Chhotubhai Vasava in Gujarat in 2017. Roat and Ramprasad Dindor, formerly BTP MLAs, broke away to form the BAP in September 2023. BAP candidate Jaikrishn Patel won the recent Bagidora assembly by-election with a significant margin of 51,434 votes, cementing its presence in Rajasthan's political landscape. According to the Election Commission, Patel polled 1,22,573 votes, while BJP candidate Subhash Tambolia secured 71,139 votes. The

Congress extended support to the BAP in this contest. The Bagidora seat fell vacant following the resignation of Congress MLA Mahendrajeet Malviya, who joined the BJP and contested the Lok Sabha election from the Banswara seat. The BAP's rise reflects the increasing political mobilisation and aspirations of Rajasthan's tribal communities. With this by-election victory, the number of BAP MLAs in the Rajasthan Assembly has now increased to four. The BJP has 115 MLAs in the state Assembly, Congress 69, Bahujan Samaj Party two and the Rashtriya Lontantrik Party and Rashtriya Lok Dal one each. There are eight independent MLAs in the House.

Party presidents suffer defeat in Odisha Assembly polls

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

BJP supremo Naveen Patnaik and BJP and Congress state presidents Manmohan Samal and Sarat Pattanayak respectively, had to suffer defeats in the Odisha assembly elections. Although Patnaik won from his traditional Hinjili assembly seat in Ganjam district by a slender margin of 4,636 votes, the five-term former chief minister had to suffer a humiliating defeat to a political novice in Kantabanji constituency in Bolangir. The BJD supremo lost Kantabanji to BJP's Laxman Bag by 16,344 votes. While Bag got 90,876 votes, Patnaik received 74,532 votes. This was the first time that Patnaik faced electoral defeat

in his political career spanning 26 years. While the BJP stormed to power in Odisha by securing 78 seats in the assembly, the party's state unit president Manmohan Samal suffered defeat in Chandbali segment to BJD's Byomakesh Ray by a margin of 1,916 votes. While Ray secured 83,063 votes, Samal could manage to get 81,147 votes. Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee president Sarat Pattanayak suffered a worse fate as he finished fourth in Nuapada assembly segment, bagging only 15,501 votes. The seat was bagged by BJD candidate Rajendra Dholakia, who got 61,822 votes, while Independent nominee Ghasiram Majhi came second, securing 50,941 votes.



www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer | @TheDailyPioneer | instagram.com/dailypioneer/

PAPER WITH PASSION

The enigma

The BJP 'loss' amid victory and Congress 'win' in defeat is a perplexing question

Predicting the course Indian politics will take is akin to forecasting monsoon or betting on the next World Cup winner — notoriously unpredictable. Election results routinely buck conventional wisdom, leaving even the most astute political pundits perplexed and scratching their heads. This time round, these pundits may want to hang their boots as well; they have no clue as to what happened, or what will happen, for that matter. Intriguing is also the fact that no one knows for sure which side won and who lost; and if there was a clear winner. The latest results present a paradoxical landscape where victories feel like defeats and losses masquerade as triumphs. The BJP seemingly tasted defeat despite emerging the single largest party, while the Congress celebrated a moral victory despite just about touching the 100-mark. This electoral paradox underscores the nuanced dynamics at play beyond mere seat counts, reflecting the intricate interplay of factors such as voter sentiment, strategic alliances and the evolving political narrative. The BJP, known for its formidable electoral machinery and strategic acumen, found itself grappling with an unexpected conundrum: It falls short of reaching the coveted '300 ke paar,' let alone Narendra Modi's ambitious target of '400 ke par.'



Despite securing the most seats in Parliament, the party failed to meet its lofty expectations. This phenomenon can be attributed to several factors, including anti-incumbency sentiment, regional variations in voting patterns and the emergence of INDIA bloc, economic hardships of people, disgruntled elements in the party and many more. One crucial aspect contributing to the BJP's "loss despite victory" narrative is the erosion of its traditional vote base in certain constituencies. Issues such as agrarian distress, unemployment and socio-economic inequalities have fuelled disenchantment among segments of the electorate, leading to a dent in the BJP's support base. Additionally, the party's religious undertones, emphasis on the construction of the Ram temple and attempts at polarisation along religious and caste lines failed to resonate with the electorate. Lastly, what we observe is a noticeable decline in the appeal of 'Brand Modi'. For the first time under his leadership, the party must rely on its allies to form a Government, thereby subjecting it to the whims of these allies. At the other end, the Congress is desperately gasping for an oxygen mask. Despite facing a decline in its traditional support base, the Congress has pulled off a moral victory from the jaws of defeat. This paradoxical triumph stems from the party's ability to exceed dismal expectations, mount a credible challenge to the ruling dispensation and portray itself as a resilient Opposition force, though it needs to work more on it. In every conflict, perception often outweighs tangible triumphs. The NDA lost the battle of public perception, while the Congress ascended to the moral high ground, validating its political approach and ideology.

ing to the BJP's "loss despite victory" narrative is the erosion of its traditional vote base in certain constituencies. Issues such as agrarian distress, unemployment and socio-economic inequalities have fuelled disenchantment among segments of the electorate, leading to a dent in the BJP's support base. Additionally, the party's religious undertones, emphasis on the construction of the Ram temple and attempts at polarisation along religious and caste lines failed to resonate with the electorate. Lastly, what we observe is a noticeable decline in the appeal of 'Brand Modi'. For the first time under his leadership, the party must rely on its allies to form a Government, thereby subjecting it to the whims of these allies. At the other end, the Congress is desperately gasping for an oxygen mask. Despite facing a decline in its traditional support base, the Congress has pulled off a moral victory from the jaws of defeat. This paradoxical triumph stems from the party's ability to exceed dismal expectations, mount a credible challenge to the ruling dispensation and portray itself as a resilient Opposition force, though it needs to work more on it. In every conflict, perception often outweighs tangible triumphs. The NDA lost the battle of public perception, while the Congress ascended to the moral high ground, validating its political approach and ideology.

PICTALK



A pedestrian walks past a mural, made to create awareness on the environment and reforestation, in Mumbai

Agenda for the Modi Government 3.0



KALYANI SHANKAR

If Modi gets his next term, he might bring about transformative changes and ambitious plans to navigate India's diverse challenges and opportunities

Elections have resulted in surprises and upsets before. India's stability lies in its ability to transition power smoothly. The verdict is out now and the winner is announced. To fortify its democracy, India requires a stable government and strong Opposition.

After the seven-phase elections, the June 4 results indicate that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will likely be the next prime minister. The INDIA bloc, a coalition of regional parties, also competed, but its chances were slim. Election results often surprise. 2004, the U.P.A. formed the government even though the B.J.P.'s "India Shining" campaign did not click. Regardless of the outcome, the winning party and the Opposition bloc will face challenges. Modi has claimed that his last ten years in office have been the appetizer, and the main meal will come in his third term. Modi stated, "Wait for bigger decisions in the third term. I'm already working on a roadmap that will be completed soon."

Modi's aspiration for a third term is not just about securing his legacy across all sectors. It's a daring attempt to surpass Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's three-term record. However, this ambitious pursuit has challenges, including public opinion and internal party dynamics that could significantly influence the political landscape.

While Modi's previous terms have seen significant achievements, his 'Modi 3.0' government will not be without its challenges. These include navigating the post-pandemic recovery, addressing social unrest, managing foreign policy issues, and meeting the diverse expectations of the electorate.

Modi has an unfinished agenda of BJP's core issues. This means implementing a Uniform Civil Code, 'one nation-one poll', propelling India to become the third largest economy and continuing to make essential changes to land and labour policies. Over the past three months, the Modi government has been working on a '125-day plan' for the next phase of governance. Initially, the plan was for 100 days, but it was



extended by another 25 days, with a focus on the youth. The agenda is expected to cover 50 to 70 key objectives and will set out the direction and priorities of the new government.

Modi might discredit his opponents and potentially break up the Indian coalition, which could significantly change India's political landscape. Modi wants to simultaneously hold all elections in the country, from local to national, which he calls 'one nation, one poll.' This change could make the electoral system more efficient and organized, but it could also concentrate power in the hands of the ruling party and reduce the frequency of elections. Modi has already laid the groundwork for this proposal. A committee under former president Ramnath Kovind's leadership has suggested holding Lok Sabha and all state elections together.

However, the delimitation exercise involves redrawing the boundaries of parliamentary and assembly constituencies. The decennial census must be completed before that. The delimitation could have significant political implications, especially for the



NO DOUBT, THE CLAIM "MY KURTA IS WHITER THAN HIS" EXTENDS TO POLITICS. BUT IT SHOULD NOT LEAD TO AN EXERCISE OF ABUSING AND BELITTLING THE RIVALS. THE SPEECHES DELIVERED BY SOME OF THE LEADING POLITICAL PARTIES WERE DEPLORABLE AND DESPICABLE

Southern states. An affidavit submitted to the Supreme Court stated that the delimitation is expected to increase the number of Lok Sabha seats from 543 to 888 and Rajya Sabha seats from 250 to 384. Modi has ensured that there will be enough seating in the new Parliament building.

The South's population control policy has led to a decrease in its population, potentially resulting in a loss of at least 100 seats for Southern states in the delimitation process. This could create a North-South divide, causing contention among regional parties in the South.

The BJP is pushing for a Uniform Civil Code applicable to all citizens of India, regardless of religion. Uttarakhand, governed by the B.J.P, is taking steps to implement it, and other BJP-ruled states will soon follow. However, this raises concerns about potential social disruption and backlash from religious communities. During the campaign, the Opposition expressed concerns that the B.J.P. might change the Constitution to remove the word 'secular.' A Modi government with a substantial majority could alter the

Preamble and eliminate the terms 'socialist' and 'secular' added by the 42nd Amendment but that did not happen.

Modi aims to make India the world's third-largest economy through 'Viksit Bharat', prioritizing manufacturing, technology, infrastructure, and clean energy. However, funding, implementation, and public acceptance challenges could impact its success and the Indian political landscape. Despite being hamstrung by arrests and other crackdowns, the Opposition mustered its most united front in years. Still, exit polls indicated it could not cut into the BJP's parliamentary majority. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh claims that the Opposition bloc will get more than 272 seats and will choose the PM candidate in 48 hours.

If the Indian coalition manages to form a government despite the odds, it could herald a significant shift in India's political landscape. It would face challenges, such as selecting a Prime Minister and executing its ambitious plans.

(The writer is a popular columnist views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SAFEGUARDING GANGETIC DOLPHINS

Madam — Regarding the news story "Small is beautiful for Gangetic dolphin," published on June 4, here are my thoughts. As a daily newspaper reader, it's heartening to see smaller rivers in the Ganga basin finally getting the attention they deserve for their crucial role in preserving the endangered Gangetic dolphin. The joint study by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the National Mission for Clean Ganga highlights the often-overlooked importance of these smaller rivers. Despite covering 1,290 kilometers of tributaries and identifying 620 kilometers of critical habitats, it's clear that these smaller water bodies need more focused conservation efforts.

The dwindling range of the Gangetic dolphin in various rivers, now extirpated from several key areas, is alarming. These smaller rivers harbour significant portions of the dolphin population and contribute to the overall biodiversity and health of the Ganga river system. The study emphasises engaging local communities, addressing their concerns and linking them to broader conservation initiatives. This holistic approach is essential for the long-term survival of these majestic aquatic mammals.

Meera Kakkar | Mumbai

ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES OF CRIME

Madam — Regarding the news story "Crime and Conscience," published on June 4, here are my thoughts. The tragic hit-and-run involving a teenager and two IT professionals is a stark reminder of the complex nature of crime. Criminal psychologists argue that crimes often occur in moments of high tension or uncontrollable passion. This suggests that if individuals could resist these impulses, many crimes could be prevented.

Our legal system punishes criminal actions, but it seldom addresses the psychological state preceding these actions. Anger, jealousy, greed and fear drive

Market volatility amid elections



propos the news story "Uncertainties dwindle investors' confidence," published on June 4, this is my response. The recent stock market plunge from 76,010 to 73,866 highlights the market's sensitivity to political and economic uncertainties. Despite the RBI's 7 per cent growth forecast, investor confidence remains shaky, with major institutions predict-

ing slightly lower growth rates. This cautious sentiment is compounded by rising US bond yields and global market pressures.

Investor anxiety is further aggravated by the prolonged election period. The extended phases, particularly in northern and eastern India, not only increase administrative costs but also disrupt economic activities. Shortening the election duration could help stabilise the market and restore investor confidence. Meanwhile, the RBI's actions, such as targeting 4.5 per cent inflation and addressing banking risks, are steps towards economic stability. However, the ongoing volatility and heavy foreign fund outflows underline the need for innovative financial policies. The new government faces the challenge of navigating these uncertainties to rejuvenate the market and economy, balancing political and economic priorities effectively.

Isha Joshi | Pune

people to commit crimes. To truly reduce crime, society must focus on eradicating these negative emotions through spiritual education and meditation. Such measures could enhance individuals' resilience against stress and temptation, ultimately preventing criminal behavior. The cost of implementing widespread psychological and spiritual education is significantly less than maintaining the legal and penal systems. By addressing the root causes of crime, we could create a more harmonious society, reducing the burden on our judicial and penal systems.

Aryan Nair | Ranchi

WE ARE EXPLOITING OUR PLANET

Madam — Apropos the news story "Is it possible to restore the lost vigour of our planet?" published on June 4, this is my response. Humans often only consider our planet during celebrations or catastrophes. In normal times, we exploit it mercilessly, forgetting that resources are finite and meant for future generations too. Historically, we

have always harmed the environment, but the last two centuries have seen unprecedented destruction due to advances in science and technology. We have abandoned the sustainable practices our ancestors valued for short-term gains. As a daily newspaper reader, it's evident that this neglect is leading us toward a bleak future for our children. We must ask ourselves: What good is wealth if our descendants inherit a degraded planet? Efforts to restore our environment, such as reforestation and wetland restoration, show promise. Successful examples like China's Loess Plateau and Srinagar's Khushal Sar Lake illustrate the potential of coordinated, large-scale environmental rehabilitation. This year's World Environment Day, focusing on land restoration, reminds us of the urgent need to act and reverse the damage for a sustainable future.

Arjun Desai | Chandigarh

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Virtual communication over spoken words

Each one of us needs appreciation, or validation, through a kind or loving word, and sometimes through a touch or even an occasional hug



SANJAY CHANDRA

We were fond of a nursery rhyme during our hostel days. "One for sorrow, two for joy, three for letter, four for toy..." I realised much later that we had tweaked the rhyme to suit us, to help us cope with separation. The original did not have any reference to letters. Most of us had come out of the sheltered life of our familiar surroundings for the first time.

Emails and mobiles were not even on the horizon in 1974. Many homes did not have landline telephones. We were homesick and eagerly looked forward to handwritten letters from home. Each day, we anxiously crowded around the table outside the mess where the postman dumped all the posts. A few would gleefully pull out theirs, while others walked into the dining hall dejected.

A few years later, I was engaged to be married to a young girl within the next five months. It was a long-distance courtship. I was posted in a government job in Calcutta, she was in the final year of her graduation in Delhi. I did not have the benefit of telephone facilities either at the office or



at home. I did the next best thing — write her a letter every day. She also responded, with almost the same frequency. Almost four decades later, I do not recall the contents of our letters; but I am sure they would have served the same purpose that today's practice of youngsters going out several times over months serves. We have begun to rationalise and accept the change in the younger generation for a better understanding before committing to a future relationship; while we did it after we had been engaged in an arranged relationship by our parents. The traditional has given way to the new to suit the changing times. Age and familiarity bring inevitable changes in life. As years rolled on, we also

got busier in our daily lives — jobs, raising children, and many other things, which some may call mundane, but which I call as the flow of life. There would be bickering between the two of us, interspersed with silences, which we had not even envisaged through the rose-tinted glasses that we wore while writing those long letters during our courtship. Now in our sixties — my wife is short of that magical number by less than a year — we even communicate through these silences. We are more like the couple of birds that I recently spotted sitting a little apart from each other on an electric wire looking in different directions, contemplating life, and probably in silent communication with each other.

Technology has also changed our lives in many ways. Virtual communication is the new order over the verbal or the written word. There are more messages of greetings on social media from and to family members living under the same roof. In the earlier days, when we did not have social media at our beck and call, a written note was something to be preserved and cherished.

One might argue that it is better than not communicating at all. My counterpoint is that not all communication should be silent or on the net. Each one of us needs appreciation, or validation, through a kind or loving word, and sometimes through a touch or even an occasional hug. Lord Tennyson said almost two centuries back, "The old order changeth, yielding place to new." Change is inevitable and needs to be welcomed with open hearts. To not change is to stagnate. It is within us to differentiate and embrace the good.

(The writer conducts workshops on creative writing for young adults and corporate executives. Views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

MINIMISE E-WASTE FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Forge a greener future by maximising resources and minimising waste



SHAINY SHARMA

Living in the so-called globalised world, the term electronic waste/E-waste is a time bomb for it comprises electronic devices that are unwanted, not working or have reached the end of their "useful life". However, it is not just a technology-based problem but everyone's problem. Around 80 to 85 per cent of electronic products are discarded in landfills. While it's good to recycle, at the same time it is crucial to prioritise safety and proper practices when handling such waste. No doubt that recycling does aim to reduce pollution, but it should not contribute to environmental harm just because of human irresponsible practices.

However, the serious environmental risks associated with e-waste are significant and multifaceted, affecting ecosystems, wildlife as well as human health.

As per several research studies, the fastest increase in e-waste output is people's insatiable need to own technological devices. With the growing age and generation, the rapid technological innovation has led to frequent releases of new models of electronic devices. Moreover, human greed too has encouraged consumers to upgrade to the latest versions, resulting in the disposal of older but still functional devices. Frequent disposal of small equipment such as microwaves, toasters, mobiles, laptops, computers, printers, and televisions followed by large equipment such as washing machines, dishwashers, refrigerators and many more just to maintain the status quo makes Asia generate the most e-waste by the America, Europe, Africa and Oceania with a recycling rate of just 17.4%. Not only this, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), several adverse health effects are also caused by exposure to e-waste like negative birth outcomes such as premature birth, changes in lung



functions and respiratory issues. And not to be surprised, these challenges are emerging day by day.

With recycling and dumping issues emerging, today many electronic products are often designed with shorter lifecycles due to planned obsolescence, where manufacturers intentionally limit the lifespan of a product to encourage repeat purchases, but improper e-waste disposal leads to habitat destruction. For example, when e-waste is dumped in natural areas, it can disrupt local wildlife habitats, leading to a loss of biodiversity. In some countries, regulations governing e-waste management are either lacking or not effectively enforced, leading to improper disposal and recycling practices. In regions without Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies, manufacturers are not held accountable for the end-of-life management of their products, contributing to the accumulation of e-waste. By addressing these underlying factors through comprehensive policies, public awareness campaigns and improvements in recycling infrastructure, it is possible to mitigate the growing e-waste problem and promote more sustainable practices in electronic consumption and disposal. Also, by addressing the environmental risks of e-waste, one can work towards more sustainable and safer management practices that protect both the environment and public health. While recycling e-waste is generally better for the environment than disposing of it in landfills, some recycling processes are energy-intensive and contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Improving the efficiency of recycling technologies and processes can help mitigate this impact.

It is time to embrace the power of circular thinking as one transforms waste into opportunity, by taking one step at a time. It's time to break free from the linear mindset and forge a path towards a greener future, where resources are maximised and waste is minimized.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Fight to preserve our fragile ecosystems

It is crucial to adopt sustainable practices to protect our environment and ensure a secure future for the coming generations, or it may be too late before we realise it



RAJDEEP PATHAK

The planet is grappling with unprecedented environmental challenges. According to media reports on May 29, 2024, Delhi recorded the highest temperature of over 50 degrees Celsius, a record-breaking event in 80 years. Then, there is the impending water crises, looming large in the Capital City – between politics and their blame game. Meanwhile, forest fires ravage the hills amidst the political fire ignited by the biggest dance of democracy, the Lok Sabha Elections which has finally ended and a new government will soon join the league of service within this 'democratic' panorama.

Not only this, according to media reports, a massive fire broke out in Kashmir's Rannagar forest division early Sunday, June 2, 2024, causing immense damage and an estimated loss of crores of rupees in timber and other natural resources. Another major fire has been raging for three days in Daya Dhar of Ghordi Block, Udhampur District, intensifying, despite continuous firefighting efforts. The Daya Dhar forest, home to a significant population of peacocks, has suffered extensive harm, impacting these birds and other wildlife. The forest fires in Udhampur pose severe threats to the environment, wildlife, and local communities, with the destruction of vegetation and the release of harmful pollutants having far-reaching consequences.

Not just this, the social media 'Instagram' is upbeat with a heart-wrenching visual display of hundreds of people of all age groups raising their solidarity in preventing the authorities from felling over 2000 trees of the Khalanga forest, prominently the Sal trees in the hill state of Dehradun. The reason for felling the trees – to address the water crises faced by the City.

This proposal has sparked significant opposition from local activists and citizens, who are protesting, pleading, and urging officials, including authorities – from the Chief Minister to the bureaucrats – to reconsider this move. They highlight that the Khalanga Forest, a vital green lung for the city, contains century-old trees and diverse species, crucial for maintaining ecological balance. Activists suggest constructing the reservoir in Dwara village, which has barren land and suffers from water scarcity, as a more sustainable alternative.

According to a report, dated May 9, 2024, published at <https://groundreport.in/latest/dehradun-2000-trees-will-be-cut-in-khalanga-forest-to-make-a-reservoir-4550484>, activists are voicing strong opposition, citing the ongoing climate challenges like wildfires, etc. Citizens believe that the plan to cut 2,000 trees from the reserve forest requires serious rethinking. Further, residents of Doon, led by Colonel Vikram Thapa (ret'd), president of Bal Bhadra Khalanga Vikas Samiti, suggest using barren land instead of encroaching on lush green forests. Initially proposed for the Kulhan Mansingh area, the site was shifted to Khalanga. Demonstrators, including 'Nature Buddies', 'Citizens for Green Doon', 'Balbhadra Vikas Samiti', 'Toy Foundation', 'Proud Pahadi', and 'Pahadi Peddlers', symbolically tied "Rakshasutra" (see Instagram video) on marked trees.

Not only this, in another such incident, the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway construction, aimed at improving connectivity, resulted in the felling of over 7,500 trees, along a 16-km section. Approximately 4,983 trees were in Uttarakhand, while



DESPITE COMMITMENTS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 13 BY 2030, CLIMATE CHANGE PERSISTS WITH ESCALATING DEVASTATION. GLOBAL TEMPERATURES ARE RISING, FUELLING CATASTROPHIC EVENTS LIKE EUROPE'S 2019 HEATWAVE AND AUSTRALIA'S 2019-2020 BUSHFIRE SEASON

2,592 were in Uttar Pradesh. To compensate, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) proposes to plant 1.76 lakh trees.

Welcome to the celebrations that marked the 2024 World Environment Day on June 5. Amidst these glaring adversities and threats to the environment, the World Environment Day 2024 celebrations – whose underlying theme this year is "Our land. Our future" – are #GenerationRestoration, calls for global action for protecting the environment and rethinking the decisions, that could be detrimental to Mother Nature and her inhabitants. No doubt, this year's World Environment Day (WED) campaign, focused on land restoration, desertification and drought resilience. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia hosted the 2024 World Environment Day global celebrations.

Despite commitments to Sustainable Development Goal 13 by 2030, climate change persists with escalating devastation. Global temperatures are rising, fuelling catastrophic events like Europe's 2019 heatwave and Australia's 2019-2020 bushfire season. Melting ice caps imperil coastal regions and islands like the Maldives, Miami, and Venice. Extreme weather events, including record-breaking hurricanes and deadly typhoons, wreak havoc, exacerbating water scarcity through prolonged droughts and shifting precipitation patterns.

Addressing climate change requires a comprehensive approach: reducing greenhouse gas emissions, adapting to changing conditions,

and promoting sustainable development. Transitioning to renewable energy sources like solar, wind, and geothermal is crucial, with countries like Germany and Denmark leading in adoption. Enhancing energy efficiency in buildings, transportation, and industries can further reduce emissions.

Sustainable agricultural practices, like agroforestry and organic farming, help lower emissions and enhance food security, while urban farming and vertical agriculture offer innovative solutions. Protecting and restoring natural ecosystems, which act as carbon sinks, is vital. Efforts like the Bonn Challenge and Costa Rica's reforestation initiatives demonstrate the benefits of increasing forest cover and biodiversity.

Promoting a circular economy can reduce resource consumption and greenhouse gas emissions by minimizing waste and reusing materials. The European Union's Circular Economy Action Plan exemplifies this approach, aiming to transition from a linear "take-make-dispose" model. Sustainable urban development, focused on creating resilient, low-carbon cities, emphasizes public transportation, green building practices, and smart city technologies.

Education and awareness are also critical, as schools, universities, and community organizations play essential roles in fostering environmental stewardship. Through environmental education programmes and campaigns, individuals can be empowered to make informed decisions and take action to protect the environment.

In this context, Mahatma Gandhi's poignant reflection on our connection to the Earth resonates profoundly in these times: "If Earth is not we are not. I feel nearer to God by feeling Him through the Earth. In bowing to the Earth, I at once realise my indebtedness to Him, and, if I am a worthy child of that Mother, I shall at once reduce myself to dust and rejoice in establishing kinship with not only the lowliest of human beings, but also with the lowest forms of creation whose fate-reduction to dust I have to share with them." This profound statement encapsulates the essence of environmental stewardship and the need for sustainable development.

James Lovelock, a British scientist, proposed the Gaia hypothesis, which views the Earth as a self-regulating system. This idea aligns with Mahatma Gandhi's view of the Earth as a living entity with which we share a deep connection. Lovelock's work emphasizes the interdependence of all living and non-living components of the Earth, suggesting that harming one part affects the whole system. As we face the pressing issue of climate change, it is imperative to adopt sustainable practices to protect our environment and secure the future for coming generations. Individual actions, combined with collective efforts, can pave the way for a sustainable world, ensuring that future generations inherit a healthy and thriving planet. It is now or never.

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

Reshaping film festivals and cinemas with OTT platforms

By embracing a hybrid approach that combines virtual access with in-person screenings, festivals have the opportunity to broaden their audience reach

In the age of instant communication and paradigm shifts, transformative changes are progressively taking place in the content domain as it is being collated, consumed and distributed across media platforms. The communication landscape is witnessing a sea of opportunities, being available to access content in a form suitable to viewers, audiences and stakeholders. Cinema also is witnessing an innovation & disruption bringing forth a change in the status quo of viewing on the silver screen.

The exponential growth of OTT platforms has redefined the mode & matrix of cinema viewing globally. Apart from promoting binge-watching, and accessible viewing, OTT



CHAITANYA KUMAR PRASAD

has become a convenient pastime for home viewing. Today the OTT domain is a witness to a recalibration of distribution channels, new revenue models, focus on artistic merit and reconfiguration of the content with outreach mechanisms. India has also been seeing a rise in the OTT domain with quality content being produced in huge numbers.

The global film festival circuit is also witnessing winds of change giving rise to new collaborative partnerships, renewed style of storytelling, narration, participation and branding of cinematic appeal. As a consequence, film festivals have repositioned themselves as platforms with broadened appeal, wider audiences and a variety of diverse themes related to storytelling. Cannes Film Festival 2024, is responding to these changes by forging new collaborative partnerships and adopting fresh storytelling techniques. This dynamic is evident as film festivals broaden their thematic scopes and embrace diverse cinematic expressions, integrating OTT content that resonates with global audiences. Notable examples include Alfonso

Cuarón's "Roma" and Pawel Pawlikowski's "Cold War," both of which received significant accolades at major international festivals, underscoring the increasing acceptance and influence of OTT-produced content within the mainstream cinema landscape. This is evident in the case of Indian OTT content representation as well, with many big-name international film festivals accepting its nominations. India's representation at Cannes 2024 exemplifies this trend, showcasing films that bridge traditional Indian narratives with contemporary global themes, thus appealing to a wide array of audiences. The increasing inclusion of Indian OTT content at Cannes highlights a strategic shift

towards embracing digital storytelling platforms, reflecting a broader trend of film festivals adapting to the digital age. This evolution is mirrored in the increased recognition of web series and digital features, which are now celebrated for their creative quality and innovation at such international platforms. Indian presence at Cannes 2024 has been a testament of diversity, talent and unique identity; which was showcased by the multiple nominations in various categories and innumerable wins that Indian creators and films have bagged this year. Since 2023, there has been an increase in the inclusion of OTT content in film festivals showing a shift influenced by the popularity of direct-to-

consumer streaming platforms. Major film festivals are integrating digital content into their programs, recognising the potential of OTT to bring innovative storytelling and diversity. Some have even introduced awards for web series to highlight the creative quality of OTT productions. Over the years IFFI, Goa has created unique templates for integrating the festival with the OTT narrative, reinforcing storytelling with fresh perspective, imagination participation & collaboration. The 51st edition of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) had history by introducing a hybrid format in 2021. This innovative approach allowed attendees to participate both in person and virtu-

ally showcasing the benefits of blending digital components. The pioneering move not only tackled the challenges posed by the pandemic but also set a new gold standard for Film Festivals worldwide. The success of IFFI in 2021 as a hybrid model inspired other prestigious festivals like TIFF to adopt similar formats in subsequent years ensuring ongoing engagement and inclusivity. The 52nd IFFI kept up the momentum. More than 50 films were screened simultaneously on OTT platforms. 10 Masterclasses. For the 54th edition, IFFI introduced the Best Web Series (OTT) Award and honoured "Panchayat Season 2", from Amazon Prime Video, for its authentic depiction of rural Indian life.

This move has fostered bridging the gap between traditional and digital film realms. By embracing a hybrid approach that combines virtual access with in-person screenings, festivals have the opportunity to broaden their audience reach and promote inclusivity. Collaboration between festivals and streaming services could encompass sponsorships, premieres, acquisitions or joint projects with filmmakers enriching the festival experience and aligning with audience preferences for personalised viewing options. (The writer is a Former Addl. DG DFF & Festival Director IFFI, Views are personal. Inputs provided by Zoya Ahmad, and Vaishnavie Srinivasan)

'Over 1 mn in Gaza at risk of starvation by mid-July'

AP ■ CAIRO

United Nations agencies warned Wednesday that over 1 million Palestinians in Gaza could experience the highest level of starvation by the middle of next month if hostilities continue. The World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organisation said in a joint report that hunger is worsening because of heavy restrictions on humanitarian access and the collapse of the local food system in the nearly eight-month Israel-Hamas war. It says the situation remains dire in northern Gaza, which has been surrounded and largely isolated by Israeli troops for months. Israel recently opened land crossings in the north but they are only able to facilitate truck loads in the dozens each day for hundreds of thousands of people. Israel's incursion into Rafah has meanwhile severely disrupted aid operations in the south. Egypt has refused to open its Rafah crossing with Gaza since Israeli forces seized the Gaza side of it nearly a month ago,

instead diverting aid to Israel's Kerem Shalom crossing nearby.

The Israeli military says it has allowed hundreds of trucks to enter through Kerem Shalom in recent weeks, but the UN says it is often unable to retrieve the aid because of the security situation. It says distribution within Gaza is also severely hampered by ongoing fighting, the breakdown of law and order, and other Israeli restrictions.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, the world authority on determining the extent of hunger crises, said in March that around 677,000 people in Gaza were experiencing Phase 5 hunger, the highest level and the equivalent of famine.

The two UN agencies said in their report Wednesday that that figure could climb to more than 1 million — or nearly half of Gaza's total population of 2.3 million — by the middle of next month.

"In the absence of a cessation of hostilities and increased access, the impact on mortality

and the lives of the Palestinians now, and in future generations, will increase markedly with every day, even if famine is avoided in the near term," it said.

On Tuesday, a separate group of experts said it's possible that famine is underway in northern Gaza but that the war, and restrictions on humanitarian access, have impeded the data collection to prove it.

"It is possible, if not likely," the group known as the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, or FEWS NET, which is funded by the US Agency for International Development, said about famine in Gaza. Last month, the head of the World Food Program, Cindy McCain, said northern Gaza had already entered "full-blown famine," but experts at the UN agency later said she was expressing a personal opinion.

An area is considered to be in famine when three things occur: Twenty percent of households have an extreme lack of food, or are essentially starving; at least 30 per cent of

Rights group claims Israel has hit residential buildings with white phosphorous in Lebanon

Beirut(AP): A global human rights group claimed that Israel has used white phosphorous incendiary shells on residential buildings in at least five towns and villages in conflict-hit southern Lebanon, possibly harming civilians and violating international law, in a report published on Wednesday.

Human Rights Watch said in its report that there was no evidence of burn injuries due to white phosphorous in Lebanon, but that researchers had "heard accounts indicating possible respiratory damage". Human rights advocates say it's a crime under international law to fire the controversial munitions into populated areas. Israel maintains it uses the white

phosphorous only as a smoke-screen and not to target civilians. The white-hot chemical substance can set buildings on fire and burn human flesh down to the bone. Survivors are at risk of infections and organ or respiratory failure, even if their burns are small.

The HRW report includes interviews with eight residents in conflict-hit southern Lebanon, and the group says it has verified and geolocated images from almost 47 photos and videos that show white phosphorous shells landing on residential buildings in five Lebanese border towns and villages.

The Lebanese Health Ministry says at least 173 people have

required medical care after exposure to white phosphorous.

The researchers found that the controversial incendiaries were used in residential areas in Kfar Kila, Mays al-Jabal, Boustan, Markaba, and Aita al-Shaab, towns that are among the hardest-hit in eight months of fighting. The New York-based rights group alongside Amnesty International also accused Israel of using white phosphorous in residential areas in October 2023, less than a month after clashes began between the Israeli military and the powerful Hezbollah group along the southern Lebanon-Israel border, a day after the Israel-Hamas war broke out on October 7.

the children suffer from acute malnutrition or wasting, meaning they're too thin for their height; and two adults or four children per every 10,000 people are dying daily of hunger and its complications.

The war began when Hamas and other militants stormed across the border into Israel on October 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking around 250 hostage. Israel's retaliatory

offensive has killed over 36,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials. Most of Gaza's population have fled their homes, often multiple times, and the offensive has caused widespread destruction.

Israeli nationalist march through Palestinian area despite tensions

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Thousands of mostly ultra-nationalist Israelis were expected to take part in an annual march through a dense Palestinian neighbourhood in Jerusalem's Old City on Wednesday in an event that often sees racist chants and brawls.

Jerusalem, the epicentre of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has been mostly calm throughout the Israel-Hamas war, but the march could ignite widespread tensions, as it did three years ago, when it helped set off an 11-day war in Gaza.

The current war began with Hamas' October 7 attack into southern Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 hostages. Israel responded with a massive offensive that has killed over 36,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, displaced most of the territory's population and caused widespread destruction.

The United States has thrown its weight behind a phased cease-fire and hostage release outlined by President Joe Biden last week. But Israel says it won't end the war without destroying Hamas, while the militant group is demanding a lasting cease-fire and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces.

The annual march commemorates "Jerusalem Day," which marks Israel's capture of east Jerusalem, including the Old City and its holy sites sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims, in the 1967 Mideast war. Israel considers all of Jerusalem to be its capital, but its annexation of east

Jerusalem is not internationally recognised. The Palestinians, who seek east Jerusalem as the capital of a future state, see the march as a provocation.

In past years, police have forcibly cleared Palestinians from the parade route, and large crowds of mostly ultra-nationalist youth have chanted "Death to Arabs," "May your village burn" and other offensive slogans. The police say they are deploying 3,000 security personnel to ensure calm.

At the insistence of Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, the march will follow its traditional route, entering the Muslim Quarter through Damascus Gate and ending at the Western Wall, the holiest place where Jews can pray.

As buses bringing young Jewish men in for the march thronged around the Old City's centuries-old walls, Palestinian shopkeepers closed down in the Muslim Quarter in preparation.

The police stressed that the march would not enter the sprawling Al-Aqsa mosque compound, the third holiest site in Islam. The hilltop on which it stands is the holiest site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount because it was the location of the Jewish temples in antiquity.

Perceived encroachments on the site have set off widespread violence on a number of occasions going back decades. Counterprotests were planned throughout the day. An Israeli group, Tag Meir, sent volunteers through the emptying city streets ahead of the march to distribute flowers to Christian and Muslim residents of the Old City.

Biden and Trump win key 2024 primary contests

New York (AP): President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump won Democratic and Republican primaries in a handful of states on Tuesday, among some of the last contests on the 2024 primary calendar. Trump, appearing on the ballot for the first time since his historic conviction for felony crimes, won primaries in New Mexico, where voters could opt for his rivals who have since dropped out, and Montana and New Jersey, where he was unopposed. Biden won Democratic primaries in New Mexico, South Dakota, New Jersey, Montana and Washington, DC. Trump and Biden were both expected to easily prevail in all

of Tuesday's contests as the last major candidates still running. But with many Americans saying in polls that they don't want a rematch of the 2020 election, Tuesday's results were watched for voter concerns about their choices as November's election barrels closer. Trump's domination during the GOP primary season has also been shadowed by support from a minority of GOP voters for former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley, who dropped out in March. Tuesday's contests were the first since Haley said two weeks ago that she would vote for Trump in November. In New Mexico, where she was still on the ballot, several thousand voters cast ballots for

Haley, but she was running below 10 per cent of the vote late Tuesday. Biden has faced his own protest vote in recent contests as Democratic voters unhappy with his handling of Israel's war with Hamas seek to register their disapproval. There are organised campaigns in several states Tuesday to vote for "uncommitted" in the Democratic contests.

In New Jersey's primary, "uncommitted" was on the ballot in many counties above the phrase, "Justice For Palestine, Permanent Ceasefire Now!" More than 35,000 people voted "uncommitted" in New Jersey as of late Tuesday.



Palestinian woman mourns relatives killed in the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip outside a hospital in Deir al Balah on Tuesday. AP/PTI

Hunter's ex-wife is expected to take stand in his gun trial, as First Lady again attends

AP ■ WILMINGTON

Federal prosecutors in Hunter Biden's gun trial have spent hours showing jurors evidence of his drug problem, seeking to reveal through his own words and writing the depth of his addiction to show it was still going on when, they say, he lied on a form to buy a firearm. First lady Jill Biden went to court for the third day to support her son, ahead of her trip to France to meet President Joe Biden, who was in Europe to mark the anniversary of D-Day. Testimony was to continue Wednesday, with Hunter Biden's ex-wife, Kathleen Buhle, expected to take the stand. She was married to the president's son for roughly 20 years. They have three children, divorcing in 2016 after his infidelity and drug abuse became too much to overcome, according to her memoir, "If We Break," about the dissolution of their marriage. Buhle is among several Biden family and friends expected to testify in a trial that has quickly



Hunter Biden, accompanied by his wife, Melissa Cohen Biden, departs from federal court, Tuesday, June 4, 2024, in Wilmington. AP/PTI

become a highly personal and detailed tour of Hunter Biden's mistakes and drug usage as the 2024 presidential election looms and allies worry about the toll it will take on the president, who is deeply concerned about the health and sustained sobriety of his only

living son. Prosecutors argue the testimony is necessary to show Hunter Biden's state of mind when he bought the gun. Hunter Biden has been charged with three felonies stemming from the purchase of a gun in October 2018, accused of lying to a federal-

ly licensed gun dealer, making a false claim on the application by saying he was not a drug user and illegally having the gun for 11 days.

"No one is allowed to lie on a federal form like that, even Hunter Biden," prosecutor Derek Hines told jurors on Tuesday. "He crossed the line when he chose to buy a gun and lied about a federal background check...the defendant's choice to buy a gun is why we are here."

"When the defendant filled out that form, he knew he was a drug addict," and prosecutors don't have to prove he was using the day he purchased the firearm, Hines said.

Hunter Biden's attorney argued that his client did not believe he was in the throes of addiction when he stated in the paperwork that he did not have a drug problem. In the short time that he had the gun, he did nothing with it, and the weapon was never even loaded, attorney Abbe Lowell said in his opening statement. "You will see that he is not guilty," Lowell said.

US conducts first B-1B precision bombing drill in 7 years amid North Korea tensions

AP ■ SEOUL

The United States flew a long-range B-1B bomber over the Korean Peninsula on Wednesday for its first precision-guided bombing drill with South Korea in seven years, the South said Wednesday. The drill — seen as a show of force against North Korea — comes as tensions are rising over the North's recent launches of rubbish-carrying balloons toward South Korea and other provocations. Wednesday's training involved other advanced US and South Korean fighter jets as well as the B-1B aircraft, the second US bomber temporarily deployed over the Korean Peninsula this year. The exercise was meant to demonstrate the US security commitment to South Korea and strengthen the allies' joint defense posture, according to the South Korean Defense Ministry. During the training, the B-1B dropped Joint Direct Attack Munitions while being escorted by South Korean jets, the first such bombing drill for

a US bomber since 2017, a ministry statement said. It said South Korean fighter jets also conducted live-firing exercises to demonstrate the country's readiness to punish North Korea if provoked, it said.

The JDAM bombs include "bunker-busters." JDAM is a guidance system that converts unguided, conventional bombs into more precise, GPS-guided weapons. All US fighter jets, bombers and drones can use JDAMs, and the munitions are among the weapons systems the United States has been providing to Ukraine to help it fight Russia's invasion. North Korea is extremely sensitive to drills using bunker-buster bombs, which could threaten its leadership and complex web of underground military tunnels and structures. North Korea has previously responded to the flights of powerful US aircraft in South Korea with its own missile tests. A B-1B is capable of carrying a large conventional weapons payload. North Korea has previously called the bomber's

deployment proof of US hostility.

In the past week, North Korea floated hundreds of huge balloons to drop manure, cigarette butts, scraps of cloth and waste batteries across South Korea. In response, South Korea vowed "unbearable" retaliatory steps and suspended a fragile tension-reducing military deal with North Korea, restoring its front-line military activities.

The suspension of the 2018 inter-Korean deal allows South Korea to resume live-fire drills or anti-North Korean propaganda broadcasts via loudspeakers in border areas. Such steps will likely prompt North Korea to take provocative steps in response.

Recently, North Korea launched a rocket in an attempt to place a second spy satellite into orbit in violation of UN resolutions, but it blew up shortly after liftoff. It also test-fired nuclear-capable weapons for a drill simulating a pre-emptive strike on South Korea, and allegedly jammed GPS navigation signals in South Korea.

S Africa's ANC in early coalition talks with five other parties

Johannesbur (AP): Top officials in South Africa's African National Congress have had initial talks with representatives of five other parties over a coalition or other agreement to form a government, but no decision has been made and the talks are at an early stage, the ANC said Wednesday.

South Africa faced an election deadlock after the long-ruling ANC lost its 30-year majority in an election last week but no party managed to overtake it.

The ANC remained the biggest party. ANC spokesperson Mahleghi Bhengu-Motsiri told reporters that there had been "exploratory" talks with the main opposition Democratic Alliance, the far-left Economic Freedom Fighters and three other smaller parties. She said the ANC had "repeatedly" reached out to the new MK Party of former President Jacob Zuma for talks, but there had been "no positive response." Zuma is a former ANC leader who has turned his back on the party and become fiercely critical of current President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Will Biden's new border measures be enough to change voters' minds?

AP ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden tried to address a major liability for his reelection campaign by taking executive action to significantly restrict asylum at the US-Mexico border. But it's unclear whether his efforts will be enough to change the minds of voters who have increasingly voiced alarm over the record influx of migrants on his watch. Polls have found immigration and border security to be a top issue this election year and one that has been seized on by former President Donald Trump and his campaign.

Biden has shifted far to the right on immigration since his winning campaign four years ago, when he criticised Trump's immigration priorities and promised he would restore asylum protections. Many Democrats acknowledge Biden now faces a wholly different political reality, even as key parts of his base push him to repudiate border restrictions and compare his move to

Trump's policies as president. Sue-Ann DiVito, a 61-year-old realtor from the Philadelphia suburb of Jenkintown who became an immigration advocate during the Trump administration, says Republicans have been successful at spreading anti-immigrant messages in communities like hers, making some of her friends who are Democrat worry about the high number of people arriving in the US.

"I think that's why we see people who would normally support immigrants are now more quiet," DiVito said.

A challenge for Biden among Democrats and Latinos The border has been a top issue for voters throughout the presidential campaign so far. According to Gallup's monthly data, Americans named immigration as the top issue facing the country in February, March, and April, surpassing even the share who cited the economy despite persistently higher prices. Immigration came up less frequently as a top issue in Gallup's May poll as attention

turned to Trump's criminal trial and as the number of illegal crossings ebbed. The issue was still tied with the government and the economy as what voters saw as the nation's most important problem.

Most Americans, 56 per cent, say Biden's presidency has hurt the country on the issue of immigration and border security, according to an AP-NORC poll conducted in April. That's far higher than the number — 37 per cent — who said the same about Trump's time in office.

Even among Democrats, only about 3 in 10 say that Biden's presidency has done more to help the country on immigration and border security, while about the same share say it has hurt. Nearly 9 in 10 Republicans say Trump's presidency helped on this issue.

Hispanic adults are also more likely to think Trump's presidency helped the country with immigration and border security, compared to Biden's. About half of Hispanic adults in March said that Biden's presidency had

done more to hurt the country on immigration and border security — a potentially alarming number as Trump's campaign works to chip away at Democrats' advantage with Hispanic voters.

"President Biden had no choice. He saw what was going on at the border. The numbers were higher than ever in terms of people trying to come here to seek asylum, and he knew he had to do something," said Maria Cardona, a Democratic strategist.

Frank Luntz, a longtime pollster who has previously worked for Republicans, said immigration seemed to be especially resonating earlier this spring across the political spectrum in a way it never had before.

He said he believes Biden is especially vulnerable with African American men under 40 who are worried about newcomers competing for jobs and Latinos who may resent those entering illegally. "The reason why immigration matters so much to so many is that it is a living, breathing illus-

tration of the failure of Washington to solve what everyone else in America sees as a crisis," he said on Tuesday. "Biden's decision seems too little and too late. The public doesn't think he cares, and therefore thinks he doesn't get it."

Trump's record includes family separation Trump has been campaigning on the border and immigration since he launched his 2016 bid with a speech in which he cast migrants from Mexico as criminals and rapists and vowed to build a southern border wall. While in office, his administration separated immigrant parents and children to try to deter families from illegally crossing the border, a measure that drew widespread condemnation.

Border crossings hit record highs — albeit far below the marks they've reached under Biden — until falling sharply as the COVID-19 pandemic began. As he runs to return to the White House again this year, Trump has escalated his already

alarmist rhetoric, accusing Biden of orchestrating a "border bloodbath" and highlighting cases of women and children killed by people who entered the US illegally. He's vowed to carry out the largest deportation operation in US history if elected again.

His campaign quickly tried to cast Biden's effort as ineffective and one that would permit thousands of migrant crossings each week. "This executive order from Biden can only be understood as a pro-invasion, pro-illegal migration executive order," said former Trump senior adviser Stephen Miller, who orchestrated some of Trump's most hard-line immigration policies, during a call with reporters organised by the campaign ahead of Biden's announcement.

Trump pollster John McLaughlin said the campaign believes the issue resonates especially among a group he calls "safety moms" — suburban, college-educated women who are worried about crime and the safety of their families.

"There's a sense of insecurity," he said. "It's not just the border communities, it's all over the country." Trump has always turned to alarmist rhetoric on the border in election years. The difference now, according to Trump campaign aides and pollsters, is the reality voters are seeing day to day.

Crime overall is down and immigrants — even those who entered the country illegally — commit fewer crimes than those born in the US, according to studies of available data. But in Democratic-led cities like New York, local news reports were flooded earlier this year with images of migrants clashing with police and alarm over strained city budgets and resources to care for an influx of people coming from the border. Conservative media and Trump's campaign also seized on high-profile incidents like the killing of nursing student Laken Riley. A Venezuelan man in the US illegally has pleaded not guilty to charges in her death. Splits in the Democratic base

Biden's announcement laid bare lasting divisions among Democrats, with some left-leaning lawmakers and immigration advocates that form a key part of his coalition criticizing Biden's actions as a return to the measures that marked Trump's tenure. Rep. Pramila Jayapal, the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said she was "profoundly disappointed". During a news conference with immigration advocates outside the Capitol, Jayapal pushed the administration to take action that would provide relief for immigrants already in the US. Jayapal, D-Wash., said Tuesday's order "means that we have people, desperate people seeking asylum who should be able to apply, and yet they will not be able to". Sen. Alex Padilla, a California Democrat who has been involved in the Biden campaign's outreach to Latino communities, cast the order as a revival of "Trump's asylum ban" in a release on Tuesday. "You can build a wall as high as you want.

Sunak and Starmer clash over tax, health in televised debate

AP ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer sparred Tuesday over tax, the cost of living and the country's creaking health system in an inconclusive televised debate ahead of a July 4 election expected to make one of them the country's next leader.

Sunak tried to boost his center-right party's dismal outlook by urging voters to back the stability of continued Conservative government. Starmer hoped to cement his status as favorite by arguing that Britain desperately needs change. Both acknowledged the country's many problems, from fraying public services to a broken immigration system. But neither could say outright, when asked, where the money would come from to fix them.

Sunak stressed his stewardship of the economy, which has seen inflation fall to just over 2% from a peak of more than 11% in late 2022. He said should



stick with him because his "clear plan" for the economy was working.

Starmer said the election was a choice between more "chaos and division" with the Conservatives and "turning the page and rebuilding with Labour."

Polls currently give center-left Labour a double-digit lead. To win, Starmer must persuade

voters who previously backed the Tories that Labour can be trusted with the U.K.'s economy, borders and security.

Speaking in front of a live audience on a sleek, futuristic set at the studios of broadcaster ITV in Salford, northwest England, both Starmer and Sunak appeared nervous. Voters may have got the impression their choice is between two cautious

and rather dull managers. Both stuck to familiar themes. Sunak argued Labour would raise taxes because "it's in their DNA."

Sunak said he would stop people making dangerous journeys to the U.K. in small boats by sending asylum-seekers on a one-way trip to Rwanda, and suggested he'd be willing to take the U.K. out of the European Convention on Human Rights if its court blocked the deportations.

Starmer dwelled on the Conservatives' record during 14 years in power, especially the chaotic last few years, which saw Prime Minister Boris Johnson ousted amid money and ethics scandals. Successor Liz Truss, elected by party members, rocked the economy with her uncensored tax-cutting plans and quit after 49 days. Sunak took over, without a national election, in October 2022.

"This government has lost control. Liz Truss crashed the economy," Starmer said. "We cannot have five more years of this."

Sharif guarantees fool-proof security of Chinese personnel from terror attacks

PTI ■ BEIJING/ SHENZHEN

On a mission to seek investments from China to revive Pakistan's cash-strapped economy, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday assured full security to the Chinese personnel from the recurring terrorist attacks targeting them. Sharif reached the high-tech southern city of Shenzhen on Tuesday on the first leg of his five-day official visit to China. The 72-year-old leader embarked on his first visit to China after he took over as prime minister for the second term after his Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party-led coalition government assumed power in March.

Addressing the Pakistan-China Business Forum, Sharif assured all-out facilitation to Chinese investors and security of Chinese individuals, projects, and investments in Pakistan, state-run Associated Press Pakistan reported.

He said his government had taken various measures to ensure fool-proof security to

protect the lives of Chinese workers in Pakistan.

"I will spare no effort to protect the lives of Chinese workers and assure and guarantee that we will provide them security more than our children. This will never happen again," he said.

Referring to the March terrorist attack in Besham in Pakistan, in which five Chinese personnel and their Pakistani driver were killed, he said it was "one of the saddest" days of his life when the whole nation felt saddened. The latest was the March suicide attack in Dasu in which five Chinese nationals and a Pakistani driver were killed. Pakistan paid USD 2.58 million as compensation to the families of those killed in the attack.

He told the forum that Pakistan had mineral deposits of around USD 10 trillion while the country's exports stood at only USD 30 billion. The mineral deposits offer huge potential to dig out and convert them into finished and semi-finished goods for

exports, he said, inviting them to invest in mining.

Sharif drew comparisons of economic development between Shenzhen city of 13 million people which has a GDP of USD 500 billion, and Pakistan with 250 million people which has a GDP of USD 380 billion.

Sharif reached Beijing on Wednesday for talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping and other officials in the next two days to seek more investments and aid to shore up Pakistan's deteriorating economic situation.

Cash-strapped Pakistan's economy is facing severe headwinds, and it has formally requested the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for the next bailout package between USD 6 and USD 8 billion with the possibility of augmentation through climate financing.

Ahead of his visit to China, Sharif, on Tuesday said he is visiting Beijing with "serious plans" to deepen the all-weather ties amid China's concerns over deadly terror attacks on its nationals in Pakistan and deep-

ening political and economic crisis undermining its stability. Sharif's visit also coincides with the end of the general elections in India, which both view as a strategic rival and the advent of the new government in New Delhi.

Pakistan considers China one of the most trusted friends around the globe, Sharif told the Chinese state-run Xinhua news agency in an interview, stating that besides being iron brothers, unshakable friendship, "our hearts beat together". Ahead of his visit, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said that during the trip, both Xi and Sharif would jointly draw a blueprint, without providing any details. China, which, according to reports, has spent about USD 28 billion on the estimated USD 62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CEPC) since it was started in 2013, is increasingly wary of committing itself to more investments in much talked about its second phase in view of the deteriorating security, political and economic crisis in Pakistan.

Court halts execution of five ex-navy officers in Dockyard attack case

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A top court in Islamabad has stayed the execution of five former Pakistan Navy officers previously sentenced to death by a military court in connection with the 2014 Navy Dockyard attack case.

Islamabad High Court (IHC) Judge Babar Sattar on Tuesday issued the written order for the hearing held a day earlier on the request of Navy officers who said they were not provided legal assistance during the general court-martial order, Dawn News reported.

The Navy Tribunal had sentenced the five Navy officers after they were arrested in 2016 in connection with the Navy Dockyard attack case.

They were found guilty of the attack and conspiracy against the Navy leadership.

The Navy Dockyard in Karachi was attacked in September 2014. The responsibility for the attack was claimed by the banned militant outfit Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan.

According to the statement issued by the Pakistan Navy at that time, two militants and one

Navy personnel were killed in the attack. It also said that four attackers were also arrested.

The counsels for the petitioners argued the documents permissible to be shared with their clients, including the abstract of evidence and court of inquiry, were also not shared with them.

The lawyers asserted that the appeal was filed against the death sentence without access to these documents and was dismissed, adding that the reasons for the appeal court upholding the sentence were not shared with the petitioners.

The lawyers also said they were given limited access to documents despite a court order and this prevented the petitioners from defending their rights.

Meanwhile, Assistant Attorney General (AAG) Akeel Akhtar Raja said that Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf had the authority to access the documents and, according to rule 193 of the Pakistan Navy Rules, 1961, discretion was vested with him to form "an opinion that supply of any proceedings may be prejudicial to the safety or interests of the state".

The AAG said that in terms of the above rule, the naval chief had formed an opinion in the cases that sharing details of the proceedings, including the findings recorded by the general court-martial and the order passed in appeal upholding the death penalty, "would be detrimental to the safety or the interests of the state".

When asked as to whether the naval chief's opinion was placed on file, the AAG replied in the negative and Deputy Judge Advocate General Hamid Hayat said that it would be available with the Pakistan Navy headquarters. The Islamabad High Court directed that "given that the fundamental question of protection of the right to life and due process is in question, the petitioners shall not be executed till the disposal of the petition".

The order instructed the respondents to file the naval chief's opinion within three weeks, along with the reasoning about why he formed the opinion that sharing the proceedings about the petitioners would be detrimental to the state's interests.

UAE leader meets 'wanted' Taliban official

AP ■ DUBAI

The leader of the United Arab Emirates met on Tuesday with an official in the Taliban government still wanted by the United States on an up-to USD 10 million bounty over his involvement in an attack that killed an American citizen and other assaults.

The meeting highlights the growing divide internationally on how to deal with the Taliban, who seized control of Afghanistan in 2021 and since have barred girls from attending school beyond the sixth grade and otherwise restricted women's role in public life.

While the West still doesn't recognise the Taliban as Kabul's government, nations in the Mideast and elsewhere have reached out to them.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the ruler of Abu Dhabi, met Sirajuddin Haqqani at the Qasr Al Shati palace in the Emirati capital, the state-run WAM news agency reported. It published an image of Sheikh Mohammed shaking hands with Haqqani, the Taliban's interior minister who also heads the Haqqani network, a powerful network within the group blamed for some



of the bloodiest attacks against Afghanistan's former Western-backed government.

"The two sides discussed strengthening the bonds of cooperation between the two countries and ways to enhance ties to serve mutual interests and contribute to regional stability," WAM said. "The discussions focused on economic and development fields, as well as support for reconstruction and development in Afghanistan." For their part, the Taliban described the two men as discussed "matter of mutual interests", without elaborating. It added that the Taliban's spy chief, Abdul Haq Wasiq, also took part in the meeting. Wasiq had been held for years

at the US military's prison at Guantanamo Bay and released in 2014 in a swap that saw US Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, captured after leaving his post in 2009, released.

Haqqani, believed to be in his 50s, has been on the US radar even after the Taliban takeover. In 2022, a US drone strike in Kabul killed al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, who had called for striking the United States for years after taking over from Osama bin Laden. The house in which al-Zawahiri was killed was a home for Haqqani, according to US officials. While the Taliban argued the strike violated the terms of the 2020 Doha Agreement that put in motion the US with-

drawal from Afghanistan, the accord also included a promise by the Taliban not harbor al-Qaida members or others seeking to attack America.

The Haqqani network grew into one of the deadliest arms of the Taliban after the US-led 2001 invasion of Afghanistan following the September 11 attacks. The group employed roadside bombs, suicide bombings and other attacks, including on the Indian and US embassies, the Afghan presidency and other major targets.

They also have been linked to extortion, kidnapping and other criminal activity. Haqqani himself specifically acknowledged planning a January 2008 attack against the Serena Hotel in Kabul, which killed six people, including US citizen Thor David Hessa.

The US State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment over Haqqani's visit. The US Embassy in Abu Dhabi is about 5 kilometers (3 miles) from the palace where the meeting took place. The US long has been a security guarantor for the UAE, a federation of seven hereditarily ruled sheikhdoms also

home to Dubai, and has thousands of troops working out of Al Dhafra Air Base and other locations in the country since the Taliban takeover. China is the most-prominent country to accept a diplomat from the group. Other countries have accepted de facto Taliban representatives, like Qatar, which has been a key mediator between the US and the group. American envoys have met multiple times with the Taliban as well.

UAE, which hosted a Taliban diplomatic mission during the Taliban's first rule in Afghanistan, has been trying to solidify ties to the group even as it sent troops to back the Western coalition that fought for decades in the country. The low-cost carrier FlyDubai has begun flying into Kabul International Airport again, while an Emirati company won a security contract for airfields in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the international community led by the United Nations has tried to provide aid to Afghanistan, as millions struggle to have enough to eat, natural disasters kill those in rural areas and the country's economy has drastically contracted.

In France, D-Day evokes joys of liberation

AP ■ CARENTEN-LES-MARAIS

Shortly after D-Day in 1944, the American soldiers heading out to more fighting against Adolf Hitler's forces couldn't help but notice the hungry French boy by the side of the road, hoping for handouts. One by one, the men fished fragrant, brightly-colored spheres from their pockets and deposited them in Yves Marchais' hands. The 6-year-old boy had never seen the strange fruits before, growing up in Nazi-occupied France, where food was rationed and terror was everywhere. Thrilled with his bounty, the young Marchais counted them all — 35 — and dashed home for his first taste of oranges. But also seared into survivors' memories in Normandy are massive Allied bombing raids that pulverized towns, vil-

lages and the cities of Caen, Rouen and Le Havre, burying victims and turning skies fire-red. The 80th anniversary this week of the June 6, 1944, Allied invasion on D-Day that punched through Hitler's western defences and helped precipitate Nazi Germany's surrender 11 months later brings mixed emotions for French survivors of the Battle of Normandy. They remain eternally grateful for their liberation but cannot forget its steep cost in French lives. Marchais remembers his family's house in Carentan, Normandy, shaking during bombardments that sounded "like thunder" and how his mother stunned him by gulping down a bottle of strong Normandy cider when they were sheltering in their basement, declaring as she finished it: "That's another one that the



Germans won't drink!" "The Americans, for us, were gods," Marchais, now 86, recalled. "Whatever they do in the world, they will always be gods to me." Some 20,000 Normandy civilians were killed in the invasion and

as Allied forces fought their way inland, sometimes field-by-field through the leafy Normandy countryside that helped conceal German defenders. Only in late August of 1944 did they reach Paris.

Allied casualties in the Normandy campaign were also appalling, with 73,000 troops killed and 153,000 wounded. Allied bombing was aimed at stopping Hitler from sending reinforcements and at prying his troops out of the "Atlantic Wall" of coastal defences and other strongpoints that German occupation forces had built with forced labour. The list of Normandy towns left ruined and counting their dead grew with the Allied advances: Argentan, Aunay-sur-Odon, Condé-sur-Noireau, Coutances, Falaise, Flers, Lisieux, Vimoutiers, Vire and others. Leaflets scattered by Allied planes urged civilians to "LEAVE IMMEDIATELY! YOU DON'T HAVE A MINUTE TO LOSE!" but often missed their targets.

Russian cyber gang thought to be behind ransomware attack that hit London hospitals

London (AP): A Russian cyber gang is believed to be behind a ransomware attack that disrupted London hospitals and led to operations and appointments being cancelled, the former head of British cybersecurity said Wednesday.

A group known as Qilin is most likely behind the attack on Synnovis, which provides pathology lab services for several hospitals run by the National Health Service, said Ciaran Martin, former chief executive of the National Cyber Security Centre.

Martin said it was one of the more serious ransomware attacks in the UK because it disabled operations. "It's the more serious type of ran-

somware where the system just doesn't work," Martin told BBC Radio 4. "If you're working in healthcare in this trust, you're just not getting those results so it's actually seriously disruptive." The incident Monday affected King's College and Guy's and St Thomas' hospital trusts, which run several south London hospitals, as well as clinics and doctors' practices across a swath of the city, the NHS said.

A memo to staff called it a "critical incident" and said it had a "major impact" on services, particularly blood transfusions. Procedures and operations were cancelled or redirected elsewhere. The incident

was reported to police. Synnovis Chief Executive Mark Dollar said Tuesday that it was still trying to understand what happened. The company offered no further comment Wednesday. Ransomware involves criminals paralyzing computer systems with malware, then demanding money to release them.

Ransomware is the costliest and most disruptive form of cybercrime, affecting local governments, court systems, hospitals and schools as well as businesses. It is difficult to combat as most gangs are based in former Soviet states and out of reach of Western justice.

Italian premier Giorgia Meloni visits Albania

AP ■ TIRANA

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni is travelling to Albania to thank the country for its willingness to host thousands of asylum seekers and tour the sites of two migrant detention centres, a visit coming just days before local and European Parliament elections, where migration is a top campaign issue.

In November, Meloni and Albania's Prime Minister Edi Rama signed a 5-year deal in which Albania agreed to shelter up to 3,000 migrants rescued from international waters each month while Italy processes their asylum claims. With asylum requests expected to take around a month to process, the number of asylum seekers sent to Albania could reach up to 36,000 in a year.

Meloni has defended the controversial plan as a necessary component of her crackdown on migration, aiming to deter

would-be refugees from paying smugglers to make the dangerous Mediterranean crossing. Human rights groups and opposition lawmakers have warned that refugee protections could be compromised.

Meloni will kick off her visit to the tiny Western Balkan nation at Gjader, a former military airport, 80 kilometers (50 miles) north of the capital, Tirana, and where work for one of the two migrant centres has started. Then she moves to the port of Shengjin, 20 kilometers (12 miles) southwest of Gjader, where an accommodation center is set in a rectangular area covering 4,000 square meters (4,800 square yards). Shengjin's migrant reception centre is ready to host migrants.

Meloni's visit comes a day before the June 6-9 European elections in which migration has been a key campaign issue. Meloni and her right-wing allies have



long demanded European countries share more of the migration burden, and have held up the Albania agreement as an innovative solution to a problem that has vexed the EU for years. Meloni, of the far-right Brothers of Italy party, has also championed her so-called

Mattei Plan to fund projects in African countries along migrant routes in exchange for better controls, while pressing ahead with plans to run migrant centres in Albania.

The two processing centres in Albania will cost Italy more than 600 million euros (about USD

650 million) over 5 years. The facilities would be fully run by Italy while it fast-tracks migrants' asylum requests. They are expected to become fully operational later this year.

Both centres are under Italian jurisdiction while Albanian guards will provide outside security.

Italy would welcome the migrants if they are granted international protection or organise their deportation from Albania if refused. Those picked up within Italy's territorial waters, or by rescue ships operated by nongovernmental organisations, would retain their right under international and EU law to apply for asylum in Italy and have their claims processed there.

Data from the Italian Interior Ministry show the number of migrants arriving in Italy is way down compared to the same period last year: As of Tuesday,

21,574 had arrived in Italy via boat so far this year, compared to 51,628 during the same period in 2023.

Albania is not a European Union member, and the idea of sending asylum seekers outside the bloc is controversial. The deal was endorsed by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen as an example of "out-of-the-box thinking", but has been widely criticised by rights groups.

Rama, of Albania's left-wing governing Socialist Party, has said the deal is a sign of gratitude on behalf of Albanians who found refuge in Italy and "escaped hell and imagined a better life" following the collapse of communism in the 1990s.

Albania. Tirana has refused other countries' requests for deals similar to that of Italy, according to Rama. Italy's centre-left opposition has called the deal an expensive exercise in

propaganda ahead of European elections and a shameful bid to turn Albania into Italy's "Guantanamo".

A group of 30 Albanian opposition conservative lawmakers took the case to the Constitutional Court in an unsuccessful effort to block the Italy-Albania deal on the grounds of human rights.

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION (M)
e-TENDER CALL NOTICE
No.-CE/PHD(M)/ACTS-21/23/237 Dt.29/5/2024
Name of the Work: "Construction of Reservoir, Intake Well and Pump House and Ancillary Structures, Supply, Delivery, Erection, Testing and Commissioning of related Electro Mechanical & Piping works including 1 Month Trial Run and Two year Operation & Maintenance" Estimated cost: Rs. 21,63,80,074.91. The last date & time of submission: 15.07.2024 upto 17:30 Hrs.
Refer our website for details:
eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app
Executive Engineer, PH Division, (M)
Paradip Port Authority
PPA/PR/06/2024-25 dtd.04.06.2024

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
PARADIP-754142, ODISHA (INDIA)
(An autonomous body under Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways, Govt. of India)
No. AD/RSC-22-68/2024/1132 Dated, the 03rd June, 2024
Advertisement
Applications are invited from Indian Nationals for engagement 02 nos. of **Manager (Legal)** on contractual basis in Paradip Port Authority.
For further details, visit our website
<https://paradipport.gov.in/Carrer.aspx>
PPA/PR/07/2024-25
Dt. 04/06/2024
Sd/- Sr. Asst. Secretary,
Paradip Port Authority

India's service sector growth softens to five months low: PMI

New export orders at 10 years high, says PMI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's service sector growth eased to a five-month low in May amid fierce competition, price pressures and a severe heatwave, even as new orders from international markets expanded at the steepest pace in a decade, according to a monthly survey released on Wednesday. The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services Business Activity Index fell to 60.2 in May from 60.8 a month earlier, its lowest mark since last December. Survey participants attributed the figures to domestic new orders easing slightly while remaining robust, implying strong demand conditions and successful advertising. In the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction. May data showed that robust increases in new business intakes continued to underpin output growth across India's service economy. As per the survey, another positive takeaway was a rebound in business confidence to its strongest in eight months. Growth was reportedly supported by rising sales, productivity gains, and demand strength. The upturn was somewhat hampered by competitive and price pressures.



Maitreyi Das, Global Economist at HSBC, said: "India's service activity rose at a slightly softer pace in May, with domestic new orders easing slightly, but remaining robust, implying strong demand conditions and successful advertising. "On the price front, cost pressures ticked up in May led by higher raw material and labour costs. Firms were only able to transfer a part of the price rise to customers." Like for output, new orders rose at a substantial pace, but were the slowest in the calendar year-to-date, even as fierce competition and extreme heat across the country dampened growth. One area that improved

substantially in May was new export orders, with growth climbing to the fastest seen since the inception of the series in September 2014. Survey participants noted strong growth of demand from Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and the US. Cost pressures intensified in May. According to panel members, outlays on materials and labour rose — while some companies suggested that additional labour costs stemmed from overtime payments and upward salary revisions due to demand strength and productivity gains, several firms indicated having taken on extra staff. Not only did employment rise markedly, but also to the

greatest extent since August 2022, the survey said. Outstanding business volumes rose at the quickest pace in nearly three-and-a-half years, it said, adding that the overall level of positive sentiment climbed to an eight-month high. Meanwhile, the HSBC India Composite Output Index slipped to 60.5 in May from 61.5 in April, highlighting the slowest rate of expansion since last December. There were softer increases in both factory production and services activity and aggregate sales rose at the weakest pace in the calendar year-to-date, albeit one that was historically sharp. Goods producers outperformed service providers, though growth softened in both cases. "Good news is the level of optimism about the year-ahead outlook rose at the fastest pace in eight months, leading service firms to increase their staffing levels. Overall composite output rose at a slightly slower pace, led by slower rises in both factory production and service activity," Das added. Composite PMI indices are weighted averages of comparable manufacturing and services PMI indices. Weights reflect the relative size of the manufacturing and service sectors according to official GDP data.

Government looking to develop more airstrips, calibrate airport regulations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The civil aviation ministry is looking at developing more airstrips as well as calibrating regulations for major and small airports to boost air connectivity, a senior official said on Wednesday. India is one of the fastest growing civil aviation markets in the world, with domestic air traffic on the rise and airlines expanding their fleet as well as operations. Civil Aviation Secretary Vumlunmang Vualnam said the number of airports in the country has increased to 157 from 74 in the last ten years. The ministry has reviewed



the full list of 453 airstrips in the country and around 157 of them are operational, he said and added that more airstrips would be developed as brownfield projects. Also, efforts will be made to jointly develop more defence airfields for civil aircraft operations.

Speaking at the CAPA India Aviation Summit 2024 in the national capital, the secretary said the ministry would look at calibrating regulations for major and small airports. These are steps aimed at further boosting air connectivity, especially to Tier 2 and 3 cities. IndiGo and Air India have placed huge aircraft orders, including for wide-body planes. The ministry would ensure a conducive ecosystem for airlines and their expansion. Among others, the ministry is working to ensure that "taxation would not be a bottle neck" for the MRO (Maintenance, Repair and

Overhaul) organisations, the secretary said. With efforts on globally to reduce carbon emissions, Vualnam said the government is committed to ensure the use of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) to keep pace with the requirements. With respect to the Cape Town Convention (CTC) that pertains to leasing of aircraft, he said the paper work is ready for enacting the legislation in order for India to ratify it. In its outlook for FY2024-25, Capa India said domestic air traffic is projected to rise 6-8 per cent to 161-164 million and international traffic by 9-11 per cent to 75-78 million.

Sebi makes process of securities payout directly to client account mandatory

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

To enhance operational efficiency and reduce the risk to clients' securities, markets regulator Sebi on Wednesday decided to make the process of direct payout of such securities to the client's account mandatory. This will become effective from October 14, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in a circular. Currently, the clearing corporation credits the payout of securities in the pool account of the broker, who then credits the same to the respective client's demat accounts.

Further, a facility of direct delivery to investors was introduced in February 2001. After extensive deliberations with the stock exchanges, clearing corporations (CCs) and depositories, Sebi has decided that "the securities for pay-out shall be credited directly to the respective client's demat account by the CCs". Moreover, clearing corporations should provide a mechanism for trading member (TM) or clearing members (CM) to identify the unpaid securities and funded stocks under the margin trading facility. In case of any shortages "arising due to inter se netting

of positions between clients" — internal shortages — Sebi suggested TM or CM should handle such shortages through the process of auction. Moreover, in such cases, the brokers should not levy any charges on the client over and above the charges levied by the clearing corporations. In May 2023, Sebi specified various processes for handling of clients' securities with regard to pay-in and pay-out of securities. This was to protect clients' securities and to ensure that the stock broker segregates securities of the client or clients so that they are not vulnerable to misuse.

Rupee rebounds 14 paise to 83.37 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee recovered 14 paise to close at 83.37 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, tracking strong buying in domestic equities and lower crude oil prices in international markets. However, a surging greenback against major crosses overseas and fresh foreign fund outflows restricted gains in the local currency, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.50 and touched the intra-day peak of 83.28 against the domestic unit during the session. It finally settled at 83.37 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 14 paise from its previous close. On Tuesday, the domestic currency plunged 37 paise to settle at 83.51 against the dollar.

Suraksha Group takes control of bankrupt Jaypee Infratech

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a big relief to over 20,000 homebuyers, Suraksha Group has taken control of the debt-ridden realty firm Jaypee Infratech by constituting a three-member board and will soon infuse Rs 125 crore equity fund to start construction of stalled housing projects across Delhi-NCR. The takeover follows insolvency appellate tribunal NCLAT decision on May 24, upholding Suraksha Realty's bid to acquire Jaypee Infratech while directing it to pay an additional Rs 1,334 crore as farmers' compensation. According to a regulatory filing by Jaypee Infratech on Wednesday, Suraksha Group informed the IMC (Implementation and Monitoring Committee) that May 24, 2024, i.e., the date of the NCLAT order should be treated as the 'Approval Date' as defined in the approved

resolution plan. The IMC in its meeting held on Tuesday approved the appointment of Sudhir V Valia, who is promoter of Suraksha Group, as a Non-Executive Director. It approved the appointment of Aalok Champak Dave as Executive Director and Usha Anil Kadam as independent director. Dave has also been appointed as Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer. According to the filing, Valia was an Executive Director in Sun Pharmaceuticals Industries Ltd. He is a co-founder of Sun Pharmaceutical Industries, one of the leading pharmaceutical companies and world's fifth largest generic pharmaceutical company. Valia is a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India and has more than three decades of experience in taxation and finance. He has experience of more than a decade in

managing the real estate development activity and infrastructure business through Suraksha Realty and other associates having activity in real estate. According to sources, Suraksha Group will infuse an equity fund of Rs 125 crore in Jaypee Infratech by June 15 and will soon start the construction process. It will also start making payment to YEIDA as per the schedule. Upholding the National Company Law Tribunal's (NCLT) decision of March 2023, the NCLAT on May 24 had said the decision was made to avoid any further delay in the implementation of the resolution plan and also to take care of the interests of all stakeholders, including home buyers and claim of Yamuna Express development authority YEIDA for additional compensation of the farmers. The Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) against Jaypee Infratech Ltd



(JIL) was started in August 2017 over an application by the IDBI Bank-led consortium. On March 7 last year, the NCLAT approved the bid of the Mumbai-based Suraksha group to buy JIL. However, many parties, including YEIDA, filed a petition in the NCLAT TO challenge the NCLAT order.

In its 99-page order, the NCLAT had said, "The impugned order passed by the adjudicating authority (NCLT) insofar as it deals with the claim of the appellant (YEIDA) of Rs 1,689 crore of additional farmers compensation is set aside and the rest of the order approving the resolution plan is upheld".

"Successful Resolution Applicant (Suraksha Group) is directed to make payment to the appellant of its secured operational debt of Rs 1,689 crore in the ratio of 79 per cent, which has been paid to other secured creditors, which amount comes to Rs 1,334.31 crore." In its final resolution plan, the Suraksha group offered to bankers more than 2,500 acres of land and nearly Rs 1,300 crore by way of issuing non-convertible debentures. It also proposed to complete all pending flats over the next four years. Lenders of Jaypee Infratech had submitted a claim of Rs 9,783 crore. In the fourth round of the bidding process to find a buyer for Jaypee Infratech in 2021, the Suraksha group won the bid with 98.66 per cent votes. As many as 12 banks and more than 20,000 homebuyers had voting rights in the Committee of Creditors (CoC). The company had got 0.12

per cent more votes than state-owned NBCC, which was also in the fray. In the first round of insolvency proceedings in 2018, the Rs 7,350 crore bid of Lakshadweep, part of the Suraksha group, was rejected by the lenders. The CoC had rejected the bids of Suraksha and NBCC in the second round held in May-June 2019. In November 2019, the Supreme Court directed that the revised bids be invited only from NBCC and Suraksha. Then, in December 2019, the CoC approved the resolution plan of NBCC during the third round of the bidding process. In March 2020, NBCC got approval from the NCLT to acquire JIL. However, the order was challenged before the NCLAT and later in the Supreme Court. On March 21, 2021, the apex court ordered a fresh round of bidding between NBCC and Suraksha Group only.

RBI rate-setting panel starts deliberations on monetary policy, decision on Friday

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rate-setting panel of RBI on Wednesday started its three-day deliberations to decide the next monetary policy amid expectations of continuation of the current interest rate. Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das will announce the decisions taken by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on Friday. Experts are of the view that the central bank is unlikely to cut the benchmark interest rate (repo) as inflation still remains a matter of concern. The MPC may also refrain from rate cut as economic growth is picking up, notwithstanding the elevated repo rate of 6.5 per cent prevailing since February 2023. The central bank last hiked repo rate to 6.5 per cent in February 2023 and since then it has maintained status quo 7 times in a row. According to a SBI research paper, the central bank needs to continue the current stance of withdrawal of accommodation. The report titled 'Prelude to MPC Meeting' expects RBI to cut repo rate in third quarter of the current fiscal and "such rate cut cycle is likely to be shallow". It also said CPI-based retail



inflation is expected to remain close to 5 per cent in May (data to be released later this month) and decline thereafter to 3 per cent in July. Inflation is expected to stay below 5 per cent beginning October till the end of 2024-25 fiscal, it added. On expectations from RBI, Dhruv Agarwala, Group CEO, Housing.Com & Proptiger.Com said India's economy continued its robust performance, achieving an impressive growth rate of 8.2 per cent in 2023-24, up from 7 per cent in 2022-23. "In light of this, it is expected that the RBI MPC will maintain its current policy stance amid ongoing inflationary pressures, with a rate cut looking increasingly unlikely this year," he said.

Anantharam Varayur, co-founder, Manasum Senior Living, too expects status quo or reduction in interest rate by the central bank in the upcoming bi-monthly policy. "We hope for measures that ease liquidity constraints in the market and boost consumer confidence, which can positively impact real estate sales," Varayur added. The government has mandated Reserve Bank to ensure retail inflation at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent on either side. Retail inflation was 4.83 per cent in April this year. Saurabh Rai, CEO Arahahs has RBI needs to focus on monetary policy to facilitate funding and incentives for geospatial technology, sustainability solutions. "Such initiatives will not only drive innovation but also significantly contribute to our national goals of sustainable development and economic resilience. A favourable monetary policy can accelerate the adoption of green technologies, fostering a more sustainable future for India," Rai said. The MPC consists of three external members and three officials of RBI. External members of the rate-setting panel are Shashanka Bhide, Ashima Goyal, and Jayanth R Varma.

Gold slips ₹80; silver plunges ₹1,200

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices slipped Rs 80 to Rs 72,820 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday in line with weak trends globally, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal had closed at Rs 72,900 per 10 grams in the previous session. Silver prices also plunged Rs 1,200 to Rs 91,900 per kg. In the previous session, it had

settled at Rs 93,100 per kg. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,332 per ounce, down USD 3 from the previous close. "Gold prices dropped due to a firm US dollar and technical selling pressure, even though there were indications of a weakening US labour market. This has further strengthened the expectations that the US Federal Reserve

will lower interest rates soon," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In addition, silver also dropped to USD 29.75 per ounce. Moving forward, traders will focus on macroeconomic data, including ADP non-farm employment and ISM non-manufacturing PMI data, which will be released later on Wednesday, Gandhi

added. According to Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst of Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, nonfarm payroll and unemployment data are also due later this week. "...The primary focus remains on the US Federal Reserve's policy decision on June 12th which will further provide more direction on the bullion prices," Trivedi said.

IP University bags Rising Star award

New Delhi: Delhi's Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University has been awarded with the Rising Star award by the QS World Ranking for showing the highest improvement among Indian institutions in the last 12 months after debuting in the QS rankings in the previous edition. Ben Sower, the Senior Vice President of the QS, presented the honor to the University at the QS EduData Summit 2024 in Washington D.C., where the QS World University Rankings 2025 were released on June 4, 2024. PNS

Novelis postpones US IPO due to market conditions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hindalco Industries on Wednesday announced that its US arm Novelis Inc has postponed its initial public offering (IPO) due to market conditions. Novelis will continue to evaluate the timing of the offering in the future, Hindalco said in a filing to BSE. Few days back, Novelis Inc had said it would launch an IPO to raise up to USD 945 million, with an estimated equity valuation of up to USD 12.6 billion. It had also filed papers with the US securities regulator, the Securities and Exchange Commission.



In the proposed public issue, around 45 million shares would be sold by Novelis Inc's sole shareholder A V Minerals (Netherlands) NV, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Hindalco. The company will not receive any proceeds. At present, Hindalco owns 100 per cent of Novelis through A V Minerals. Post-IPO, Hindalco will own around 92 per cent stake in Novelis.

According to sources, the sole shareholder of Novelis would receive proceeds of USD 810-945 million. If the greenshoe option is exercised, proceeds are estimated at USD 931.5 million to USD 1.08 billion. This will be the second company from the Aditya Birla group to go for listing overseas after Birla Carbon (Thailand). Novelis, which operates an integrated network of technically advanced rolling and recycling facilities across North America, South America, Europe and Asia, posted a turnover of USD 16.2 billion in FY24. Hindalco's turnover stood at Rs 2,15,962 crore in 2023-24.

"...OPEC+ decision has somewhat darkened the outlook for crude oil demand ahead, triggering sharp sell-off in WTI and Brent counters, which are down 4 per cent in last two sessions and fallen 9 per cent in last seven days," said Mohammed Imran, Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. On the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 2,303.19 points, or 3.20 per cent, to close at 74,382.24. The broader NSE Nifty soared 735.85 points or 3.36 per cent to 22,620.35. Foreign investors were net sellers of Indian equities on Monday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 12,436.22 crore on a net basis. FII's bought shares worth Rs 26,776.17 crore and sold equities worth Rs 39,212.39 crore in the cash segment.

CHHETRI'S LAST DANCE IN INDIA'S MUST WIN MATCH AGAINST KUWAIT

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Emotions will run high when the talismanic Sunil Chhetri leads India out one last time in a crucial FIFA World Cup qualifying match against Kuwait here on Thursday, hoping to propel his team into the next round as a parting gift after dominating the national football landscape for 19 years. The 39-year-old Chhetri will hang his boots at the end of this match and would like to ensure that the team enters the final-18 stage of the World Cup qualifiers for the first time. The top two teams from nine groups of four teams each will go on to make the third stage. This round will decide FIFA's increased allocation of eight World Cup berths for Asia. It will be a little far-fetched to imagine India in the 2026 World Cup in North America, but a win over Kuwait will take the team into the uncharted territory of being up against the best of Asia in at least 10 matches. That would also translate into some quality friendly games. Occupying the second spot behind Qatar (12 points) in Group A with four points from four games, India are ahead of Afghanistan on goal difference and Kuwait, who have three points. A victory here will put India firmly ahead of Afghanistan, who face Qatar in a tough fixture later on Thursday. Afghanistan have a seven-goal deficit against India and a win against Kuwait will virtually keep the equation out of their reach. India face Qatar, while Afghanistan take on Kuwait in the final round fixtures on



Tuesday. For 19 years, Chhetri has carried the footballing hopes of a nation labelled as the 'sleeping giant' of world football. With 94 goals from 150 appearances and a dozen trophies in his cabinet, the diminutive Indian captain is a bonafide legend of the game. And it will be an evening of high emotions at the venue where his professional football career took shape with Mohun Bagan in early 2000s. A packed crowd is expected

at the Salt Lake Stadium to celebrate Chhetri's last dance. Chhetri has happy memories against Kuwait, having played a key role in the equaliser by Sahal Abdul Samad that forced a penalty shootout and eventually a 5-4 triumph for India in the 2023 SAFF Championship in Bengaluru. That India had defeated Kuwait by a solitary goal from Manvir Singh in their group league opener in the away fixture in November last year will also be a

morale-booster for Igor Stimac's side, who then suffered a slip-up by going down to Qatar 0-3. Then came the Asian Cup shock where the team drew a blank, losing all its three matches and failing to score even a single goal. It went from bad to worse for India, who resumed their World Cup qualifiers against Afghanistan, and failed to score in a goalless draw. More misery was in store in their home match in Guwahati where the Blue Tigers suffered a 1-2 defeat,

conceding a late goal to the South Asian neighbours. The struggles against Afghanistan reveal deeper issues plaguing the national team. Despite creating opportunities, India's inability to finish crucial chances will be a significant concern. The shortcoming was quite pronounced against Afghanistan as the team managed just one shot on target compared to Afghanistan's five in their shock 1-2 defeat in Guwahati

Midfielders Anirudh Thapa and Lallianzuala Chhangte also failed to make an impact, exacerbating the problem. Their lack of creativity and precision, made worse by ineffective ball control and passing, contributed to India's misery. In between the sticks, Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, who at 71 matches is the next most experienced after Chhetri, will also have to step up. His penalty concession due to a communication failure

resulted in Afghanistan scoring the winner in March. But India will be coming in with solid preparation for this match. They have made some interesting additions in I-League forwards Edmund Lalrindika (Inter Kashi) and David Lalhlansanga (Mohammedan Sporting) who will be aiming to become the first players in five years to make national debuts from the second tier league. The defence, however, will have to cope with the

absence of Sandesh Jhingan who has been sidelined due to an injury from the Asian Cup in January. It remains to be seen if the likes of Rahul Bheke, Anwar Ali and Subhasish Bose will be able to compensate for his absence, especially the aerial strength he has provided over the years. Focus will also be on Lallianzuala Chhangte, who had a strong 2023-24 ISL season, scoring 10 goals and providing six assists for Mumbai City FC. He will look to carry this form against Kuwait, who will have the firepower of Hassan Al-Enezi in the defense. Kuwait are coming to the game after routing Afghanistan 4-0 with their key forward duo of Shabaib Al Khaldi and Mohammed Daham scoring three goals between them. The duo will once again be a big threat to the Indians. Kuwait will also have Mohsen Ghareeb who performed well in their previous encounter, will be tasked with stopping Chhangte if he starts in the left-back position.

SQUADS:

INDIA: Gurpreet Singh Sandhu (GK); Nikhil Poojary, Subhasish Bose, Anwar Ali, Jay Gupta; Jeakson Singh, Anirudh Thapa; Naorem Mahesh Singh, Brandon Fernandes, Lallianzuala Chhangte; Sunil Chhetri.
KUWAIT: Sulaiman Abdulhafour (GK); Rashed Al-Dosary, Khalid El Ebrahim, Hassan Al-Enezi, Salman Bormeya; Eid Al-Rasheedi; Hamad Al-Harbi, Faisal Zayed, Azbi Shehab, Mohammad Daham; Yousef Nasser.



Real Madrid back in the galacticos business with signing of Kylian Mbappé

AP ■ MADRID

A new "galactico" era could be in the making at Real Madrid. After years without high-profile signings, Madrid went after one of the biggest names in soccer and added Kylian Mbappé to the long list of top players who have been part of the Spanish powerhouse's history. The France great is joining a squad that already includes younger stars Vinicius Junior and Jude Bellingham, putting Madrid on the path to achieve even further success - potentially for years to come. Madrid on Saturday won a record-extending 15th Champions League title - and sixth in 10 years. Two days later, it announced it was finally signing Mbappé after a few failed attempts to lure in the playmaker. "Finally, it's official, I am going to be a Real Madrid player for the next five years. It's an immense pleasure, a dream coming true, a lot of emotions," Mbappé said Tuesday in Metz on the eve of France's home friendly against Luxembourg. "I'm very, very happy (and) relieved, very proud to be joining a club where I've always dreamed of being." Madrid hadn't been involved in a blockbuster deal since it signed Eden Hazard from Chelsea in 2019, but the Belgian playmaker never fully lived up to expectations. The last time Madrid had gone into the market to bring a top star before that was in 2014-15, when it signed Colombia playmaker James Rodríguez and Toni Kroos, who retired at the end of this season. In

2013, Madrid had signed Gareth Bale, and Luka Modric in 2012. Karim Benzema, who eventually took over Cristiano Ronaldo's reign up front in 2018, left last year to accept a lucrative deal in Saudi Arabia. He was replaced by Joselu, an unflashy striker whose goals played a key role in Madrid reaching the Champions League final this season. Mbappé, who posed for a photo with Ronaldo when he visited Madrid as a 14-year-old, said he received welcome messages from current and former Madrid players, including Ronaldo. After Ronaldo left and the club took a chance with Hazard, club president Florentino Pérez mostly stuck with players already in the squad and bet on untested youngsters such as Vinicius and Rodrygo. They were signed at early ages and slowly got incorporated into the main squad. Endrick, the latest Brazilian sensation, is arriving from Palmeiras for the new season and is expected to travel the same path. Madrid's "galacticos" had been assembled by Pérez in the early 2000s with the signings of Luis Figo, Zinedine Zidane, Brazil great Ronaldo and David Beckham, who all helped the club win one Champions League and two Spanish league titles. By not overspending in recent transfer windows - and by signing Mbappé only after he became a free agent - Madrid saved money and moved into position to add even more top players if needed.

I am god gifted, channelled anger of previous loss to win Olympic quota: Boxer Nishant Dev

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

He claims to have the perfect blend of speed, timing, and power that define a world-beating boxer and that's why the Olympic-bound Nishant Dev (71kg) says he has no qualms in calling himself "god-gifted". His assertion might sound conceited to some but perhaps, this confidence is what earned him a place at the Paris Olympics. The 23-year-old prodigal talent burst into the scene in 2021 when he reached the light middleweight (71kg) quarterfinal in his maiden world championship appearance. Two years later, he had a world championship bronze medal around his neck and now he is one of two Indian male boxers who will fly to Paris for the Olympics. "I am god-gifted, I have everything in me," Dev replied when asked to elaborate on his strengths. "I have power, speed and timing. But the main (thing) is skills. If you have that you can win against any kind of boxer," Dev said in an interaction with select media on Wednesday. Dev, who struggled with a shoulder niggle for years, booked his place in the Paris Games with a dominant show at the final qualifying event in Bangkok last week. He had narrowly missed out at the previous qualifiers after a heartbreaking loss to Omari Jones of USA. Confident in his abilities, Dev



had then promised to make the Paris cut no matter what it took. "(There were) shortcomings that I had, like low stamina in third round, my body balance and also the fact that my body function had become a little weak. I didn't have the body language that one should have in round three. I worked on all of this," he revealed. The southpaw lost out in the closing seconds of the bout against Jones after both boxers went toe-to-toe in the first two rounds. Dev said the defeat left him with a lot of pent up anger. "I have done a lot of work for the competition, I have changed my strategy a bit, like in the first round, I (usually) start calmly. (But) this time I put in the effort from the very

first second of the very first round and continued till the last second of the bout. "I took out my anger from America (the bout against Jones). I had a lot of confidence, that I will win this time." Gifted he might consider himself but Dev acknowledged that talent alone is not enough and one has to work hard as well like he did for his triumph in Bangkok. "I used my skills, I hit more body shots to completely exhaust my opponent, drain him of his energy. I have a lot of power inside me, but you cannot win a boxing match on the basis of just power. "You will have to add small things in it, like speed, timing, power, boxing mind as well. So I mixed up all these things."

After no male boxer from the country made the cut in the first world qualifier, Indian boxing went through a coaching crisis with High Performance Director Bernard Dunne tendering his resignation from Italy itself. While Dunne's departure somewhat hampered their training, Indian boxers soon found a silver lining in the crisis. They were now allowed to train on their own beyond the time table set by Dunne. "Extra training helped because a boxer should be able to use his mind. Even if you are giving 30 minutes extra time, that allows the boxer to think. "Strategy and all is there but at the end of the day, a boxer has to apply his brain during a bout."

Defending Euro champ Italy draws 0-0 against Turkey, which loses Kabak to injury. Portugal wins 4-2

AP ■ MILAN

Italy stuttered to a 0-0 draw at home to Turkey in the first of two warm-up matches before it begins the defense of its European Championship title next week. Tuesday's match was overshadowed by a serious-looking injury to Turkey defender Ozan Kabak, who appears more than likely to miss Euro 2024 in Germany where he plays his club soccer. Kabak, who plays for Hoffenheim in the Bundesliga, was applauded by both teams and the whole of the stadium in Bologna when he was stretched off shortly before halftime after injuring his right knee. The 24-year-old player fell awkwardly following a challenge with Italy forward Mateo Retegui. Turkey plays its first Euro 2024 match against Georgia on June 18 before facing Portugal and the Czech Republic. There were few real goalscoring opportunities and Italy's best chance of the match came with the last piece of action of the first half as Bryan Cristante headed a corner out the near post. Retegui wasted a good opportunity in the 59th minute when he opted for an acrobatic overhead kick that went far over the bar. Juventus midfielder Nicolò Fagioli was brought on



shortly afterward for his Italy comeback after recently returning from a seven-month ban from soccer for betting violations. Bologna defender Riccardo Calafiori was warmly applauded when he came on in the 85th minute for his Italy debut at his home stadium. Italy has another friendly against Bosnia-Herzegovina on Sunday before kicking off its title defense against Albania on June 15. Spain and Croatia are also in Group B. R O N A L D O - L E S S PORTUGAL Without Cristiano Ronaldo, Portugal eased to a 4-2 win over Finland. Portugal coach Roberto Martinez had already said that Ronaldo would miss his country's first two friendlies - against Finland and Croatia - as he was being given a rest and allowed to go on a mini-break with his family as the season only recently ended in Saudi Arabia.

De Bruyne open to lucrative Saudi Arabia move when his Manchester City contract expires

AP ■ BRUSSELS.(AP)

Kevin De Bruyne is talking with his family about possibly moving to Saudi Arabia as a free agent next year, the Manchester City playmaker said Tuesday. The Belgian star will have just turned 34 and completed 10 seasons at the English Premier League champion when his contract expires next June. "You're talking about incredible sums of money during what might well be the twilight of my career," De Bruyne told Belgian daily Het Laatste Nieuws when asked if he would consider moving to a Saudi club. "We are increasingly having such

conversations as a family," he said, noting that his 8-year-old son "only knows England. He is also asking how long I will play for City." Saudi league clubs backed by the kingdom's sovereign wealth fund have spent hundreds of millions of dollars paying salaries and transfer fees to lure top players since Cristiano Ronaldo moved nearly 18 months ago. Karim Benzema and Neymar later followed, though Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappé resisted their offers last year. Saudi officials have said they want to focus on signing more young players at the peak of their careers, but an exception would surely be made for a generational talent like De Bruyne.



His visionary passing, reading of the game and shooting has helped Man City win six Premier League titles in his nine years there so far. "At my age you have to be open to everything," De Bruyne said about his future. He also could attract offers to start playing in Major League Soccer one year ahead of the United States co-hosting the 2026 World Cup with Canada and Mexico. De Bruyne never won a tournament title with Belgium despite being part of its so-called golden generation over the past decade. He spoke to the Belgian news outlet while in the Belgium camp ahead of the European Championship that starts June 14 in Germany.

AUSTRALIA CHASE HISTORY, PAKISTAN OPEN CAMPAIGN AGAINST USA

PTI ■ BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS)

With the World Test Championship mace and the 50-over World Cup trophy already in their bag, Australia will look to hit the ground running in their quest to become the first team to simultaneously hold all three world titles when they take on Oman in their T20 World Cup opener here. To accomplish the feat, the former champions will rely on their wealth of experience, with several of Australia's greatest modern-era players, preparing for their final farewell in international colours. The T20 trophy evaded Australia for the longest time but the maiden title in 2021 changed that. However, a year later, they failed to progress from the league stage on home soil. However, Australia have no dearth of match-winners in their squad, starting from newly-appointed skipper Mitchell Marsh. The all-rounder will be a key factor batting at No.3. Travis Head has been in red-hot form and

was the side's star performer in the WTC final and ODI World Cup final. Australia might experiment in the group stage to find their best XI. Leg-spinner Adam Zampa will play a crucial role while left-arm spinner Ashton Agar is also expected to be in the mix.

The ever-reliable trio of Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood will run the pace unit. Oman lost their opening game after against Namibia. While they did a commendable job with the ball by taking the match into the Super Over, the batters will have to be more responsible if they want to pull off an upset win over the mighty Australians.

SQUADS:
Australia: Mitch Marsh (c), Ashton Agar, Pat Cummins, Tim David, Nathan Ellis, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Glenn Maxwell, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, Matthew Wade, David Warner, Adam Zampa.
Oman: Aqib Ilyas (c), Zeeshan Maqsood, Ayaan Khan, Kashyap Prajapati, Shoaib

Khan, Mohammad Nadeem, Pratik Athavale, Naseem Khushi, Khalid Kail, Mehran Khan, Bilal Khan, Kaleemullah, Fayyaz Butt, Shakeel Ahmad, Rafiullah. Reserves: Jatinder Singh, Samay Shrivastava, Sufyan Mehmood, Jay Odedra. **Match starts 6am IST.**

PAKISTAN LOOK TO PUT BEHIND OFF FIELD DRAMA: Last edition's runners up Pakistan will take on co-hosts USA in the day's other match. While on paper, the Babar Azam-led side looks the outright favourite to win the clash, Pakistan's recent form suggests that it might not be a cake walk. Pakistan lost a T20 International in Ireland and then suffered a 0-2 defeat in England this week, not the ideal result before a global event. Before that, they drew 2-2 at home with a New Zealand side that was missing many of its World Cup squad members. The run-up to the marquee event has been chaotic to say the least with change in captaincy, shuffling of the top-order and players coming out



of retirement. Babar was reinstated as skipper after Shaheen Afridi was handed the T20 captaincy for a short time. The pacer was offered vice-captaincy later but he refused to take it.

Babar and Mohammad Rizwan are Pakistan's most consistent T20 performers but their strike rate has been a cause of concern as the duo has struggled to accelerate. But if Pakistan is known to

excel in something, it is their unpredictability. They can surprise their opponents and or implode any time. They will bank heavily on their fiery pace department that features Shaheen Afridi,

Naseem Shah, Haris Rauf and Mohammad Amir, who has come out of retirement. USA will be high on confidence after their seven wicket win in the tournament opener against Canada.

SQUADS:
Pakistan: Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan, Saim Ayub, Fakhar Zaman, Usman Khan, Azam Khan, Iftikhar Ahmed, Imad Wasim, Shadab Khan, Mohammad Amir, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah, Abbas Afridi, Haris Rauf, Abrar Ahmed.
USA: Monak Patel, Shayan Jahangir, Andries Gous, Nitish Kumar, Steven Taylor, Harmmeet Singh, Corey Anderson, Milind Kumar, Nisarg Patel, Shadley van Schalkwyk, Ali Khan, Jessy Singh, Saurabh Netravalkar, Nosthush Kenjige.
Match Starts 9pm IST.

PNG bowlers. Even though the Assad Valled side lost, it will fancy its chances in the clash. Meanwhile, debutants Uganda crashed to a 125-run loss to Afghanistan in their opener. While their bowlers led by skipper Brian Masaba showed stomach for fight, the batters completely surrendered and their fielding was also found lacking. The African nation would hope to improve on these aspects and register its first-ever T20 World Cup win.

SQUAD:
Papua New Guinea: Assadollah Vala, CJ Amini, Alei Nao, Chad Soper, Hila Vare, Hiri Hiri, Jack Gardner, John Kariko, Kabua Vagi Morea, Kipling Doriga, Lega Siaka, Norman Vanua, Sema Kamea, Sese Bau, Tony Ura.
Uganda: Brian Masaba, Simon Ssesazi, Roger Mukasa, Cosmas Kyewuta, Dinesh Nakrani, Fred Achelam, Kenneth Waiswa, Alpesh Ramjani, Frank Nsubuga, Henry Ssenyondo, Bilal Hassun, Robinson Obuya, Riazat Ali Shah (vc), Juma Miyaji, Ronak Patel.

Scotland, England share point each as rain abandons T20 World Cup match

PTI ■ BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS)

Intermittent rain forced abandonment of the T20 World Cup clash between England and Scotland here on Tuesday with both teams sharing a point each. Rain arrived right at the innings break once again after having already truncated the game to a 10-overs-per-side affair, with Scotland reaching 90 for no loss in the first half. England's target was revised to 109 runs needed off 10 overs via the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method as Ireland kept the opposition bowlers under the pump for the majority of the contest. Michael Jones made a 30-ball 45 not out with two sixes and four fours while George Munsey hit an unbeaten 41 not out off 31 balls with as many boundaries to lead the charge for their side. Munsey was also lucky when Mark Wood, who had bounced him out on the third ball of the fifth over, was found to have overstepped the crease with skipper Jos Buttler taking a fine catch running behind. Both the Scottish batters displayed attractive array of strokes to put their team in a strong position. The contest witnessed multiple rain interruptions starting with a delay in start of the game. A passing shower right after the toss left a wet



spot on the pitch which forced a delay of 20 minutes, while the longest break came right after the powerplay. Scotland were on charge reaching 51 for no loss in 6.2 overs when a heavy shower forced players into the shed and the long interruption forced the officials to cut short the game by 10 overs each in the two innings. For the defending champions England, both Chris Jordan (0/24) and Adil Rashid (0/26) lacked control with the ball in the team's first outing in this World Cup and the bowling overall could not really trouble the Scottish opening pair. Scotland will now prepare for the next clash against Namibia to be played here at the Kensington Oval on Friday, whereas England will gear up for a contest against arch-rivals Australia at the same venue on Saturday.

Afridi looking forward to cricket's Super Bowl on June 9, says it will be battle of nerves

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Shahid Afridi sees the India-Pakistan contest as an equivalent to the hugely popular 'Super Bowl' in USA and reckons whichever team handles nerves better will come out on top in the T20 World Cup contest in New York on June 9. The last time the two teams played at the T20 World Cup, it turned out to be a game for the ages with Virat Kohli pulling off a special win for India. Cricket's biggest game will take place on American shores for the first time and former Pakistan captain Afridi too will be keenly following it from the stands. "For those Americans discovering the tournament, they should know that Pakistan's game against India is like our Super Bowl," Afridi, who is the T20 World Cup ambassador, told ICC. "I used to absolutely love

playing India and I really believe it is the biggest rivalry in sport. When I played in those games, I got a lot of love and respect from the Indian fans and it means so much to both sides. "Against India, it is about handling the pressure of the occasion. There is so much talent in both teams, they just need to put it together on the day. That will be the case in that game and in the tournament overall. The team that can hold its nerve will come out on top." The event is being co-hosted by the USA and Caribbean, where the Super 8 stage and knock-outs will be held. Afridi said it is hard to pick a favourite in the shortest format. "T20 cricket is so unpredictable, and teams can bat so deep now. You can have a batter coming in at No.8 and smashing the ball at a strike rate of 150 to win a game. I



hope that will be Pakistan this time around, but it is hard to pick a favourite," said the former all-rounder. Pakistan have not had the best of build ups for the tournament, having lost the series in England. They lost a game to Ireland in the preceding rubber. "Even though their form has been inconsistent in 2024, I

believe they have all the ingredients to put it all together in the West Indies and USA. "The conditions in the Caribbean will definitely suit them. There is so much talent in the side, particularly when you look at the bowling attack which should thrive over there. "The fast bowlers are as good as any team in the world and

there is so much depth as well. That class is much more important than recent form," he said referring to the 2022 T20 World Cup finalists. He is also confident the American public will warm up to the sport. "This is also a huge tournament for American cricket. I have always had a great time when playing in the USA and for those who have not experienced it, the conditions are similar to playing in the West Indies. "People are going to love the support in the States. There is a great expat community over there which absolutely loves cricket. And the Americans absolutely love their sport, whether it is American football, basketball or baseball. "I really believe that cricket will hit the mainstream over there in the next few years, which is very exciting for up-and-coming cricketers," Afridi added.



Ashwin returns to CSK family, will take charge of their High Performance Centre and academies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's premier off-spinner R Ashwin is set to take charge of the Chennai Super Kings High Performance Centre, potentially paving the way for his return to the franchise that propelled him into national reckoning. CSK CEO Kasi Viswanathan told PTI that Ashwin will oversee the centre as well as the team's various academies in India and abroad. "Ashwin is one of the greats of India and Tamil Nadu and his presence will be a big boost to the high performance centre and our academies," he said. The centre is located on the outskirts of Chennai. The 37-year-old, who recently became the second Indian bowler to take 500 Test wickets after Anil Kumble, got to play for India following his exploits at CSK. He was part of the storied franchise from 2008 to 2015. With the mega auction lined up, Ashwin could be back in

the market and CSK would be more than happy to bring him into the fold. He played for Rajasthan Royals in the recently-concluded IPL season. When asked if CSK would look to buy him at the auction, Viswanathan said: "We can't control what happens at the auctions. We will see what happens." Back in the India Cements family, Ashwin will also be eligible to play for its team in the TNCA first division. The great Mahendra Singh Dhoni looked at his dangerous best in the season that went by. He is 42 and his future at CSK remains a subject of constant speculation. "Only MS can decide for himself. We and his fans would wish for him play but it will ultimately it will be his call and we will respect that," Viswanathan added. Dhoni stepped down from the team's captaincy at the beginning of this season, handing over the leadership role to Ruturaj Gaikwad.

Netherlands open Twenty20 World Cup campaign with six wicket win over Nepal

AP ■ TEXAS

Netherlands beat Nepal by six wickets with eight balls remaining in a tight contest that was delayed by rain at the Grand Prairie here. The Dutch opted to bowl first and dismissed Nepal for 106 in 19.2 overs, led by captain Rohit Paudel's 37-ball 35. Tim Pringle (3-20 in four overs) and Logan van Beek (3-18 in 3.2 overs) did the damage as Nepal lost wickets at regular intervals on a surface suited for fast bowlers. Dutch opener Max O'Dowd led the successful chase, hitting 54 not out in 48 balls as his team finished on 109-4 in 18.4 overs. Sompal Kami, Dipendra Singh Airee and Abinash Bohara took a wicket apiece. Nepal's hopes were briefly raised when



Netherlands dropped to 80-4 in the 16th over after Bohara bowled Netherlands captain Scott Edwards (5). But O'Dowd and Bas de Leede (11 not out) shared an undefeated 29-run partnership for victory.

India and Ireland meet in New York in the first of Wednesday's three games. Australia takes on Oman at Bridgetown, Barbados and Papua New Guinea is against Uganda in Providence, Guyana.

Cummins joins MLC, signs four year contract with San Francisco Unicorns

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Pacer Pat Cummins has signed a four-year contract with San Francisco Unicorns, becoming the latest Australian to join USA's Major League Cricket. The second season of the USA franchise T20 league, which has acquired List A status from the global governing body ICC, is slated from to be played from July 6 to 29. "MLC is developing at a rapid rate, and the US market potential is huge for cricket," Cummins said in a video post on the franchise's X handle. The Australian Test and ODI skipper has so far played only in one overseas league -- the IPL. He has also not play Australia's Big Bash League since the 2018-19 season. "While cricket is integral to my involvement, the global network and long-term possibilities offered by the owners specifically, and Silicon



Valley more broadly, presented a unique opportunity for me and my life beyond cricket." With Australia scheduled to tour the West Indies for a full series in June-July next year, it remains to be seen if the frontline pacer is available for the T20 league. Cummins will have explosive Aussie batter Jake Fraser-McGurk as his teammate at the franchise. Glenn Maxwell, Travis Head and Steve Smith have inked deals with Washington Freedom, who have also signed New Zealand all-rounder Rachin Ravindra. Shakib Al Hasan and David Miller (Los Angeles Knight Riders), Anrich Nortje and Romario Shephard (MI New York), Aiden Markram and Daryl Mitchell (Texas Super Kings), and Nandre Burger and West Indies' Obed McCoy (Seattle Orcas) have also signed up for the MLC.

Praggnanandhaa loses to Carlsen; Vaishali beats Muzychuk

PTI ■ STAVANGER (NORWAY)

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa went down fighting against top seed Magnus Carlsen of Norway while his elder sister defeated overnight sole leader Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine in the eighth round of Norway chess tournament here. With the win, Carlsen stretched his lead to a full point over Hikaru Nakamura of United States, who lost to Firouzja Alireza of France. Meanwhile, World champion Ding Liren of China's dismal run continued as he lost to Fabiano Caruana of United States. With just two rounds to go in the six-player double round-robin tournament, Carlsen has 14.5 points ahead of Nakamura on 13.5. Praggnanandhaa on 12 is in third spot, a full point clear of Alireza. Caruana is on nine occupying the fifth spot while Liren seemed to have resigned to his fate in this event being distant last on 4.5 points. In the women's section, world champion Wenjun Ju of China scored

over Pia Cramling of Sweden to surge ahead of the field on 14.5 points benefiting from Muzychuk's loss against Vaishali. The Ukrainian remained in the second spot on 13 points, 1.5 points ahead of Vaishali and Tingjie Lei of China who accounted for Koneru Humpy in the other game of the day. Humpy on eight points remained fifth in the standings, 3.5 points more than Cramling in the USD 161000 prize money tournament in both the sections. All the three games in the men's category ended in draws in the Classical and with a laboured effort the world number one won a pawn but only ended up reaching a theoretically drawn rooks and pawns endgame. However, in the return game, Praggnanandhaa could not match the guile of Carlsen and lost a handful of pawns while reaching the endgame wherein the Indian had two minor



pieces against a rook. Eventually white's extra material had the final say. In the Armageddon, the white player has ten minutes compared to black's seven but white needs to win the game. For each win under Classical time control the players are awarded three

points while in the Armageddon the winner gets 1.5 points compared to losers' one. Nakamura remained within striking distance of Carlsen despite losing to Firouzja Alireza in an exciting contest. For Alireza, it was a good comeback

and the Frenchman might fancy his chances in the last two rounds now. Vaishali defeated Muzychuk for the second time in the event in the Armageddon. It was a finely played Classical game wherein neither players could reach an advantage but in the Armageddon Vaishali took advantage of her better placed rooks to call the shots. Both players ran very short of time and Muzychuk was the one to falter. Humpy's aspirations to make a comeback suffered a setback as she lost to Tingjie Lei. Humpy, known for bouncing back from difficult situations, now needs two wins to have a good finish in the event. **Results round 8 men:** Magnus Carlsen (Nor, 14.5) beat R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 12) 1.5-1; Firouzja Alireza (Fra, 11) beat Hikaru Nakamura (Usa, 13.5) 1.5-1; Ding Liren (Chn, 4.5) lost to Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 9) 1-1.5. **Women:** R Vaishali (Ind, 11.5) beat Anna Muzychuk (Ukr, 13) 1.5-1; Wenjun Ju (Chn, 14.5) beat Pia Cramling (Swe, 5.5); Tingjie Lei (Chn, 11.5) beat Koneru Humpy (Ind, 8).