



OPINION 6
AGENDA FOR THE MODI
GOVERNMENT 3.0

WORLD 9
'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

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CHHETRI'S LAST
DANCE AGAINST
KUWAIT
11 SPORTS

NDA on June 8: Third time is the charm



Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP president JP Nadda 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.

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 Nadda, 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.

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'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 as 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.

Continued on Page 2

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 Raghubar 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 Raghubar 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.

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A novel #Plant4Mother green drive

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As rising temperatures underscore the threat to Mother Earth, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on World Environment Day on Wednesday unveiled a novel campaign named 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' (a tree in the name of mother) aiming to plant millions of saplings across the country. The initiative, highlighting the nurturing and life-sustaining role of saplings in our ecosystem and drawing a parallel to the care provided by mothers, aims to plant millions of saplings

across the country in the coming months. The Government has also plans to target planting 80 crore saplings by September 2024 and 140 crore saplings by March 2025, following a "whole of Government" and "whole of society" approach. The move aligns with the D day's theme "land restoration, resilience, and drought resilience", underscoring the importance of combating land degradation and promoting sustainable land management practices. Planting a sapling at Buddha Jayanti Park in Delhi, Modi urged citizens to share

pictures of saplings planted in their mothers' names using the hashtag #Plant4Mother. Union Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav and Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena were also present at the event. Central and State Government Departments and Local Bodies have been asked to identify public spaces to support the campaign. Earlier, President Droupadi Murmu addressed the nation, emphasising the urgent need to combat climate change and calling for collective efforts to build a sustainable and greener world. She noted that protecting Mother Earth is a fundamental responsibility.

Continued on Page 2

Modi lifts b'day boy Yogi's spirits with pep talk

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Setting aside BJP's disappointing performance in the Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended heartfelt birthday greetings to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, aiming to uplift his spirits amidst rising speculations about his leadership. On his social media platform X, Modi highlighted Yogi's significant contributions to the development of Uttar Pradesh and his efforts toward empowering the underprivileged, wishing him a long and healthy life. Post-election, Yogi cancelled



official engagements on Tuesday but convened a crucial meeting with party leaders to dissect the electoral outcomes. Despite the setback, support from Modi and other senior leaders is seen as an effort to solidify

Yogi's position within the party. Yogi expressed his gratitude for the birthday wishes, particularly appreciating the Prime Minister's encouragement, which he described as inspirational in

working towards a self-reliant and prosperous Uttar Pradesh. The BJP insiders attributed the electoral failure to the inability of alliance partners to secure the Other Backward Classes (OBC) votes, despite alliances with various caste-based parties like the Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP), NISHAD Party, Apna Dal (S), and Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD). Aiming ambitiously to win all 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh to meet its national target of 400 seats, the BJP fell short. "Our allies failed to mobilise the voters. The caste-based leaders did not galvanise their support base to vote for the BJP," lamented a senior BJP leader. Facing competition from the Samajwadi Party's (SP) PDA

formula, the BJP re-inducted SBSP president Om Prakash Rajbhar into the NDA, hoping to secure Rajbhar votes. Rajbhar had previously left the BJP for SP before the 2022 Assembly elections. Additionally, the BJP enticed OBC leader Dara Singh Chauhan and successfully split RLD from the INDIA alliance in February. Despite allotting seats to all NDA allies-with SBSP contesting one seat, and Apna Dal (S) and RLD contesting two seats each-the anticipated support failed to materialise. Praveen Nishad, Sanjay Nishad's son, was allocated the Sant Kabir Nagar seat for a second time.

Continued on Page 2

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

Informed all, In my army EME records office, Secunderabad my daughter name & date of birth is Akta Divedi, DOB 17/12/2001 is by mistake wrong, correct name is Ekta dwivedi D/O Chandra Kant divedi DOB 17/12/2002. R/o mohalla khushwat Rai Nagar fatehpur U.P. 212601

सूचना

सूचित किया जाता है कि मेरी पुत्री रजिस्ट्री जो कि जिलेदर कुमार शुक्ला के नाम की थी जिसकी वही संख्या- 1, जिल्द संख्या 4105 के पृष्ठ 1 से 20 तक क्रमांक - 957 1 जो 4/10/2011 को रजिस्ट्री किया गया था वास्तव में खो गई इसका उपयोग अवैध माना जाएगा पुनः पाल पत्नी मुन्नालाल सिथौरा बिठौरा सीतापुर मोबाइल नं -6389012586

OBITUARY

OBITUARY



NAIB SUBEDAR TAYARESH VISHAL GULABRAO

11 JUL 1991-19 MAY 2024 ALL RANKS OF ARMY MEDICAL CORPS SOLEMNLY PRAY TO THE ALMIGHTY TO BESTOW PEACE TO THE DEPARTED SOUL AND GRANT STRENGTH TO THE BEREAVED FAMILY TO BEAR THE GREAT LOSS OF NAIB SUBEDAR TAYARESH VISHAL GULABRAO WHO DIED WHILE SERVING WITH 306 FIELD HOSPITAL. FROM: LT GEN KAVITA SAHAI AND ALL RANKS OF ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

NOTICE

I, Pankaj Vedi S/O Sh. Mohal Lal Vedi R/O MIG 60, Indira Nagar, Banda (UP) declare that my Pass Certificate and Marksheet of MBA having Roll No. 0409970045 is lost while travelling. Call 9911996299.

NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that my son Kushagra Bajpai's earlier name was Mohan Prakash, which was corrected in the high school mark sheet as Kushagra Bajpai and Kushagra Bajpai is the correct name. Krishna Kumar Son of Late Shiv Ram Bajpai Resident 99 Raebareilly Road, Opposite Residential Public Inter College, Amrapali, Lucknow

NOTICE

I, Hanish Pahusa R/O 289/140 Moti nay ar Naka Hindola zucknow. Notified That I Have changed my Daughter's name From Khanak To Khanak Pahuja. In Future she should Be known Khanak Pahuja For All Purposes.

NOTICE

Notified That I Have changed my name FROM SAHAB TO SAHAB Bind. In Future known me SAHAB Bind to All Purposes. R/o smeThakalan Po-Soit Hakalan Distt Jaunpur Pin-223105

सूचना

मैंने अपना नाम NIKITA KHARBANDA से बदल कर NIKITA PUNEET KOTWANI रख लिया है। इसी नाम से जानी जाती हूँ। NIKITA PUNEET KOTWANI W/o-PUNEET KOTWANI Add- 112/368 G2, SWAROOP NAGAR, KANPUR NAGAR

NOTICE

I have changed the name of my daughter from Yashvi gupta to Gauravi gupta. From now she should be identified by the name Gauravi gupta D/O Awdhesh Kumar R/O 8/155, Arya nagar Kanpur.

NOTICE

I have to changed my name from NEERAJ to SUNEETA DEVI W/O DURGESH KUMAR for future purpose. Add- VILLAGE CHAT NIWADA POST ORIYA KANPUR DEHAT.

NOTICE

I HAVE CHANGED MY NAME FROM PRIYANKA PARWEY TO PRIYANKA RAMAKANT PARWAR PRIYANKA RAMAKANT PARWAR W/O RAMAKANT PARWAR R/O H.N. 7/162, SWAROOP NAGAR, KANPUR.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from ALI HUSSAIN AHMED TO ALI HUSSAIN AHAMAD. In future I Shall be known as ALI HUSSAIN AHAMAD. ALI HUSSAIN AHAMAD S/o Jalaluddin Ahamad 84A/11B/1A Madhuvan Vihar Colony, Umapur New Prayagraj

OBITUARY

OBITUARY



HAVILDAR MANOJ KUMAR

05 APR 1982 - 26 APR 2024 ALL RANKS OF ARMY MEDICAL CORPS SOLEMNLY PRAY TO THE ALMIGHTY TO BESTOW PEACE TO THE DEPARTED SOUL AND GRANT STRENGTH TO THE BEREAVED FAMILY TO BEAR THE GREAT LOSS OF HAVILDAR MANOJ KUMAR WHILE SERVING WITH MILITARY HOSPITAL BHUJ. FROM: LT GEN KAVITA SAHAI AND ALL RANKS OF ARMY MEDICAL CORPS

World hails Modi on historic third term...

From Page 1

From the Caribbean, leaders of Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana have congratulated Modi. From South East Asia, Prime Ministers of Singapore and Malaysia have congratulated Modi.

US President Joe Biden on Wednesday congratulated Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his National Democratic Alliance for their election victory to form a new government for a third straight term.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu congratulated his counterpart Modi on his party's victory in India's general election, expressing hopes that Indo-Israeli ties surge to "new heights," PTI reported from Jerusalem.

Modi was the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel since the two countries established diplomatic ties in 1992. He visited Israel in July 2017 in a much-publicised standalone visit, seen by many as de-hyphenating India's ties in the region till then seen in the context of the Israel-Palestinian conflict and New Delhi's efforts towards a balancing act.

He later also visited the West Bank, skipping Israel, and focusing on India's ties with Palestine. Netanyahu's friendship with Modi grabbed a lot of headlines in Israel with the "chemistry" between the two being talked about with a viral picture of the two taking a stroll barefoot at an Israeli beach.

China on Wednesday congratulated Modi. "We noted the results of India's general election and extended congratulations on the victory of BJP led by Modi and NDA," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said in Beijing according to PTI.

A sound and stable India relationship is conducive to the interests of both the countries and conducive to the peace and development in the region and beyond, she told a media briefing here answering questions on the outcome of India's general elections.

China stands ready to work with India to act in the fundamental interests of the two countries and two peoples bearing in mind the overall interests of our ties and look to the future and advance the bilateral ties on a steady track, Mao said.

Relations between the two countries hit a low except for trade ever since the eastern Ladakh border standoff erupted on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong Tso (lake) area. The two sides have so far held 21 rounds of Corps Commander-level talks to resolve the standoff.

In a social media post, Singapore's Prime Minister Lawrence Wong described the victory of the NDA alliance as "historic" and said he was looking forward to working with his Indian counterpart to celebrate the 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two nations next year.

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NDA on June 8: Third time is the charm

From Page 1

Hosting the meeting, the BJP presented a picture of collective partnership with its allies with Naidu, Kumar and Shinde seated to the left of Modi while Nadda, Singh and Shah flanked the prime minister on his right.

The current 17th Lok Sabha's term ends on June 16, making this transition a timely and crucial phase in India's democratic process. In the resolution passed at the NDA meeting, the leaders underlined the alliance Government's commitment to serving poor, women, youth, farmers and deprived sections of society.

"We are all proud that the NDA fought the 2024 Lok Sabha polls unitedly under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and won. We all NDA leaders unanimously elect Narendra Modi as our leader," it added.

The leaders said Modi has a "clear vision for Viksit Bharat" and they are "partners" in this goal. They further appreciated "PM's efforts towards poverty eradication", and agreed to work harder towards the goal. According to a press release, Modi said that the Lok Sabha election result "was a historic mandate for the 3rd consecutive government which was last received in India 60 years back".

The resolution also said that people have seen the country being developed in every sector in the last 10 years due to the pro-people policies of the NDA government under Modi.

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) president N Chandrababu Naidu, Janata Dal (United) leader and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, whom the poll pundits are calling the 'kingmakers' after the BJP's subpar performance in the Lok Sabha elections, Shiv Sena leader and Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and LJP (Ram Vilas) leader Chirag Paswan were among those who were present at the meeting.

Senior BJP leaders Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, JP Nadda were also in attendance. The TDP, JD(U), Shinde-led Shiv Sena and the LJP (Ram Vilas) have won 16, 12, seven and five seats respectively and will play a crucial role in the Government formation.

Insiders said Bihar Chief Minister wanted Narendra Modi to act fast and there should not be any delay in the process of government formation. "Jaldi kijiyee (act fast)," he told PM during the NDA meet. "There should not be any delay in forming the government. We should do it as soon as possible," sources quoted Kumar as saying in a meeting of NDA alliance partners.

JD(U) MP Sanjay Kumar Jha said the NDA meeting was chaired at the PM's residence, which was also attended by CM (Nitish Kumar).

"Everyone put forth their views and thanked the public for this mandate to the NDA for a third time. The government under the leadership of Narendra Modi will soon be formed, and very soon a meeting of all the MPs will take place," he said. Parties like the TDP and the JD(U) are expected to demand some key portfolios as their support will be crucial for government formation and survival.

Sources said TDP is reportedly asked for education, health, Lok Sabha speaker's post and MoS in finance while the BJP hinted at party's intent to retain five key ministries in the potential coalition government of NDA, including Finance, Railway, Home, IT and Law, citing plans for the Modi government 3.0 with increased focus in these sectors.

The JD(U) and Chirag Paswan's LJP both may demand the railways ministry while rural development and agriculture could also be part of the bargain. Earlier, Modi called on President Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan and tendered his resignation along with the Union Council of Ministers. The President accepted the resignation and requested the prime minister and the Union Council of Ministers to continue in office till the new Government is formed.

After that, the Rashtrapati Bhavan issued an order dissolving the 17th Lok Sabha. Before resigning as the Prime Minister, Modi addressed his Cabinet of Ministers in Modi 2.0 earlier in the day and told them that "winning and losing is just part of politics". "Winning and losing are part of politics. The number game keeps going on. We have done good work for ten years and will continue to do so in the future as well," he said.

The meeting at the Prime Minister's residence began at 11.30 am. This was the last meeting of the Modi 2.0 Cabinet and Council of Ministers. "The ruling organisation has lived up to the expectations of the people everywhere and will do so in the future too. All of you have worked well and worked very hard," he told his council of ministers.

While the NDA is comfortably above the majority mark of 272 in the 543-member Lok Sabha, the BJP, which won 240 seats, has fallen short of the magic number for the first time since 2014 and is critically dependent on its allies for Government formation.

Ahead of attending the NDA partners' meeting in Delhi, Chandrababu Naidu had said, "We are in NDA. I am going for an NDA meeting. In the course of time, if there is anything we will report to you."

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Man duped of ₹1.25 lakh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

A man was duped of Rs 1.25 lakh in the name of booking a trailer which he wanted to hire for transportation of goods, in Sushant Golf City police station area on Wednesday.

As per reports, the victim, Rahul Singh of the posh locality, contacted a mobile number which he got from a website while surfing the internet. The man who received the call introduced himself as a representative of a company providing transportation services and asked Rahul about his requirement.

Akhilesh sets eyes on 2027 Assembly poll

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

With an eye on Uttar Pradesh assembly elections in 2027, the Samajwadi Party is all set to hit the ground for consolidating its gains in the Lok Sabha elections.

The stellar performance by the Samajwadi Party in the just-concluded parliamentary elections has made the party realise that it will be "now or never" in 2027, otherwise it will miss the bus as happened in the 2022 UP assembly polls. SP leaders recall that Akhilesh Yadav ran a loud and spirited campaign in the run-up to the 2022 assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh. With large crowds thronging his roadshows and star-studded rallies, it seemed that the SP had finally gained the momentum it needed to close the gap with the Bharatiya Janata Party and may even outdo it in the elections. "When the election results came, the SP

was nowhere close to upsetting the BJP prospects, let alone form a government in the state. In 2024, however, the party has managed to damage the BJP by largely fixing what went wrong for it in 2022 and we will repeat this performance in 2027," said a senior SP leader.

"In 2022, our efforts were not up to the mark to woo non-Yadav Other Backward Classes, who constitute about 35 per cent of the population. In 2024, we have filled this gap and the SP has become the default choice for the groups voting against the BJP," the SP leader said, and added, "Given the bipolar nature of the contest, the party ended up with its best performance in an election in terms of seats and vote share. Even before the elections, it was clear that the party's social base of Yadavs and Muslims built by Mulayam Singh Yadav over decades, was consolidating behind it." The 2024 Lok Sabha polls have shown that the SP was aware that the being lim-

ited to the Yadav-Muslim base was not enough to defeat the BJP. To expand his party's limited support base, the SP forged an alliance with some non-Yadav OBC groups in the state. The SP had tried to stitch an alliance with non-Yadav OBC groups in 2022 as well, but it did not work as per the wishes of the party. First, confident in its core support from Muslim and Yadav voters and aiming to attract non-Yadav OBCs, the SP fielded only five Yadav candidates for its 62 seats, all of them from the first family of the party founded by Mulayam Singh Yadav.

This contrasts with 2019 Lok Sabha elections when the SP fielded 10 Yadav candidates out of 37 seats it contested, and 2014, when it contested 78 seats and fielded 12 Yadav candidates, four of them from Mulayam Singh Yadav's family. The SP's 2024 candidate slate also included 27 candidates from non-Yadav OBCs, 11 from upper castes (compris-

ing four Brahmins, two Thakurs, two Vaishyas and one Khatri), and four Muslims.

Additionally, the party fielded 15 Dalit candidates on seats reserved for Scheduled Castes. Second, Akhilesh Yadav introduced a new slogan to broaden his voter base from 'M-Y' (Muslim-Yadav) to 'PDA' -- (Pichhde (backward classes), Dalit and Alpsankhyak (minorities)). Moreover, Akhilesh Yadav consistently advocated for a caste census, arguing that such a survey in UP would ensure that communities receive an equitable share of reservations and access to government schemes based on their proportion in population. However, Akhilesh Yadav did not raise the issue of caste census during the campaign for Lok Sabha elections. The SP chief repeated this issue with freebies like 'free atta-data' to counter the welfare schemes of the BJP.

BJP got fewer seats across UP, categorical snub in B'khand

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

From western Uttar Pradesh to Purvanchal, the BJP suffered losses in the Lok Sabha polls securing only 33 compared to 62 seats it got in the 2019 general election.

Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh are generally divided across six regions — Western Uttar Pradesh, Purvanchal, Bundelkhand, Awadh, Braj, and Rohilkhand. While a political post mortem is still underway, the party's halving came despite a fiery campaign, which featured a communally charged rhetoric, a castigating contrast between "Ram Bhakts" and "Ram Drohis," and vote-seeking in the name of a temple.

UP's 80 seats are distributed thus: Western UP-10, Braj-8, Awadh-20, Rohilkhand-11, Bundelkhand-5, and Purvanchal-26.

In Western UP — composed of Saharanpur, Kairana, Muzaffarnagar, Bijnor, Nagina, Amroha, Meerut, Baghpat, Ghaziabad, and Gautam Buddha

Nagar — BJP won four seats, down from six in 2019. Its ally RLD won two seats.

SP won two while Congress and Azad Samaj Party won one seat respectively.

Of Awadh's 20 seats, which include such key constituencies as Amethi, Rae Bareilly, and Lucknow, BJP could win only nine, while SP and Congress won seven and four seats, respectively. The biggest blow in the region came from Faizabad, the city of the newly constructed Ram temple, which sent the BJP candidate packing despite a vociferous campaign by the party in the name of Ram.

Maneka Gandhi and Smriti Irani, both big leaders from the party, lost Sultanpur and Amethi. Irani's defeat seemed to hurt the party more, delivered as it was by a Congress debutante.

The margin of Rajnath Singh's victory in Lucknow too narrowed to about 1.5 lakh from 3.47 lakh in 2019.

The Rohilkhand region which has Badaun and Bulandshahr among its 11 seats gave no suc-

cess to the party, which won four seats from there, down from nine last time. SP won seven seats in this region.

Union Minister Ajay Mishra Teni, whose son Ashish Mishra allegedly mowed down farmers part of a protest rally in 2021, lost from the region's Kheri seat.

Bundelkhand, considered UP's most backward and driest region, threw the most telling verdict for the BJP.

Of the region's five seats — Jalaun, Jhansi, Hamirpur, Banda and Fatehpur — BJP managed to wrest only one — Jhansi. The party had swept the region winning all five seats in 2019.

From Purvanchal region, which has such constituencies as Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, and Mirzapur, BJP won 10 seats, down from 18 the last time. SP got 14 seats, while Apna Dal and Congress secured one seat each, from this region.

Braj (Mathura, Hathras etc) was less harsh on the ruling party, which won five seats from the region, down from seven in 2019. SP won three seats here.



Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav receives his victory certificate after winning the Lok Sabha election from Kannauj constituency. PTI

Priyanka celebrates Rahul's victories

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

A day after the announcement of the Lok Sabha poll results, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra penned a heartfelt note to her brother, Rahul Gandhi, celebrating his victories.

Rahul Gandhi won both the Lok Sabha seats he contested — Wayanad and family stronghold Rae Bareilly.

Praising Rahul, Priyanka highlighted his resilience in the face of intense opposition. "You kept standing, no matter what they said and did to you.... You never backed down whatever the odds, never stopped believing however much they doubted your conviction, you never stopped fighting for the truth despite the overwhelming propaganda of lies they spread, and you never allowed anger and hatred to overcome you, even when they gifted it to you every day," Priyanka wrote in a post on X.

"You fought with love, truth and kindness in your heart. Those who could not see you, see you now, but some of us have always seen and

known you to be the bravest of all," she added, expressing her pride in being his sister.

Rahul Gandhi won the Wayanad Lok Sabha seat by a margin of more than 3.6 lakh votes and the Rae Bareilly seat by over 3.9 lakh votes. The Congress party also improved its overall tally from the 2019 general election, winning over 99 seats compared to 52 in the previous election.

Five years ago, former Congress president Sonia Gandhi had won the Rae Bareilly seat by a margin of 1,67,178 votes against Dinesh Pratap Singh. Sonia Gandhi, who had been elected to the Lok Sabha from Rae Bareilly continuously since 2004, vacated the seat earlier this year after she was elected to the Rajya Sabha.

Rae Bareilly was the only Lok Sabha seat in Uttar Pradesh that the Congress had won in 2019. Rahul Gandhi represented the Amethi seat in the Lok Sabha from 2004 to 2019.

In the 2019 general election, he lost the seat to the Bharatiya Janata Party's Smriti Irani but was elected to the Lok Sabha from Wayanad in Kerala.

Maya disappointed by lack of support from Muslims

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

Following the Lok Sabha election results, Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati expressed disappointment over the lack of support from the Muslim community, saying the Muslims have not understood the mission she has taken to uplift them and the downtrodden members of society.

"The Muslim community is not able to understand BSP properly. We gave them proper representation in the Lok

Sabha. But now, the party will give them a chance in the elections only after a lot of thought, to avoid a significant loss like this time," she said here on Wednesday, a day after the results of the Lok Sabha elections were announced.

Mayawati issued a letter addressing the party's supporters and the public, acknowledging the intense focus on Uttar Pradesh during these elections.

"This time, the whole country's eyes were on UP. The result that has come out is in front of the

public. We will review the loss in the elections," she wrote.

The BSP faced a severe setback, failing to secure a single seat in this election. This is a stark contrast to the previous election in which the party had won 10 Lok Sabha seats.

As the BSP prepares for a thorough review of its performance, Mayawati's remarks highlight the party's strategy of moving forward and the need to reassess its approach to garnering support from the Muslim community and other voter bases.

UP to face assembly bypolls for 8 seats

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

With as many as nine legislators from Uttar Pradesh including eight MLAs registering a win in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, a sort of mini-assembly election is on the anvil in the state which threw surprising poll results on Tuesday.

Altogether, 13 MLAs and four MLAs contested the Lok Sabha elections from the politically crucial state of UP.

Eight legislators including three MLAs eventually ended up losing the elections. Apart from these three MLAs who lost the Lok Sabha seats, luck did not smile on five MLAs of UP also.

According to the Election Commission of India, the Samajwadi Party (SP) bagged 37 out of 80 seats, the highest number of Lok Sabha seats in the state, while its ally the Congress bagged six seats.

The BJP won 33 seats, while its allies, the Rashtriya Lok Dal

(RLD) and the Apna Dal (Sonelal), won two seats and one seat respectively. The Aazad Samaj Party (Kanshi Ram) clinched victory in one constituency.

The number of sitting MLAs in UP who lost the election stands at five, while the lone MLC who emerged victorious in the ongoing Lok Sabha election from the state was UP's PWD minister Jitin Prasad, who registered a win from Pilibhit Lok Sabha seat, defeating his nearest rival by a margin of 1,64,935 votes.

The other minister from UP who managed to secure a win was Anoop Pradhan 'Balmiki', the minister of state for revenue from Hathras (SC) seat, by a margin of 2,47,318 votes. 'Balmiki' is an MLC from Khair assembly constituency in Aligarh district.

The other ministers of UP who lost the Lok Sabha elections are Dinesh Pratap Singh, minister of state (independent charge) for horticulture, agricultural market-

ing, agricultural foreign trade and agricultural exports, who lost to former Congress president Rahul Gandhi by a margin of 3,90,030 votes from the Rae Bareilly Lok Sabha seat.

Dinesh Pratap Singh is an MLC. The other MLCs from UP who lost the Lok Sabha elections are Saket Mishra from Shravasti, who lost to Ram Shiromani Verma of the SP by 76,673 votes; and BSP's Bhimrao Ambedkar, who lost to BJP's Jai Prakash from Hardoi (SC) seat. Ambedkar finished as the second runner up. UP Tourism and Culture minister Jaiveer Singh, who is an MLC from Mainpuri assembly constituency, lost to sitting MP from Mainpuri parliamentary constituency Dimple Yadav of the SP by a margin of 2,21,639 votes.

SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, who is the sitting MLC from Karhal assembly constituency in Mainpuri district, registered a win from Kannauj Lok Sabha seat, defeating BJP's Subrat

Pathak by a margin of 1,70,922 votes. The other SP MLAs who clinched victory from their respective seats are Ziaur Rehman from Kundarki in Moradabad, who helped the party retain the Sambhal Lok Sabha seat, as he defeated his BJP rival Parameshwar Lal Saini by 1,21,494 votes.

Similarly, senior SP leader Lalji Verma, who is the MLC from Katehari in Ambedkarnagar, won the Ambedkar Nagar Lok Sabha seat by a margin of 1,37,247 votes, defeating BJP's Ritesh Pandey, who had joined the party after leaving the BSP.

Congress MLA from Pharenda in Maharajganj district, who contested the Lok Sabha polls from Maharajganj parliamentary constituency, lost to Union minister Pankaj Chaudhary by 35,451 votes. The other BJP MLAs who won from their respective Lok Sabha seats are Praveen Patel, the BJP MLA from Phulpur assembly con-

stituency, who bagged the Phulpur Lok Sabha seat in Prayagraj district by winning with a margin of 4,332 votes.

Similarly, BJP MLA from Ghaziabad assembly seat Atul Garg won the Ghaziabad Lok Sabha seat by 3,36,965 votes.

NISHAD party MLA Vinod Kumar Bind won the Bhadohi Lok Sabha seat on a BJP ticket by a margin of 44,072 votes. Bind is the MLC from Majhawan assembly constituency in Mirzapur district. RLD MLA from Meerapur assembly constituency in Muzaffarnagar district Chandan Chauhan won the Bijnor Lok Sabha seat by 37,508 votes, BJP MLA from Nehtaur in Bijnor district Om Kumar lost to Chandrashekar of Aazad Samaj Party (Kanshi Ram) by 1,51,473 votes. Similarly, Rinki Kol, who is also the MLC of Apna Dal (Sonelal) from Chhanbey in Mirzapur district, lost to SP's Chhotelal by 1,29,234 votes from the Robertsganj (SC) seat.

RLD and Apna Dal (Sonelal) are alliance partners of the BJP.

In the assembly bypolls held alongwith the Lok Sabha polls, the BJP won the assembly constituencies of Lucknow East and Dadraul while the SP emerged victorious in Gainsari and Duddhi (ST) constituencies.

NEET: Achievers on cloud nine

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW

The National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET) 2024 results were declared on Tuesday and the young achievers who cracked it were on cloud nine. 'The Pioneer' interacted with some of these achievers who were able to fulfill their aim.

Anurag Patel, who secured a rank of 3,879, said that this was his second attempt at the entrance examination and he was happy with his performance. "I am aspiring to join King George's Medical University though I am not sure which medical college I would get with this rank," he said.



Khushdil Alam, Abdul Muqeem, Ahmad Khan

joined the BSc course even as he prepared for the NEET.

Abdul Muqeem, who secured a rank of 2,416, said that he was aspiring for admission at All-India Institute of Medical Sciences. "This was my third attempt at the examination," he said.

The young achiever said that one only needs to thoroughly revise what has been taught on an everyday basis to clear the examination.

"Self-study can also be done without going in for coaching but it all varies from person to person. Mock tests are important because from

there only a student will come to know where he is standing and how the preparation is faring," he said.

Ahmad Khan, who secured a rank of 12,767, said that he would most probably secure a medical college outside Lucknow at places like Azamgarh, Etawah, Meerut, Jhansi.

"This was my second attempt for which I dropped a year for the preparations. The success mantra is simple -- one has to be regular. For Biology one should consult NCERT books, for Chemistry and Physics follow the notes of

coaching classes," he said.

He further informed that as the examinations drew near, mock tests were a help because they gave the students an idea of what kind of examination paper was expected.

Khushdil Alam who secured 1,336 rank, said that this was his second attempt at the examination.

"I dropped a year to keep the focus on NEET. I hope to get AIIMS Rishikesh, AIIMS Bhopal or AIIMS Jodhpur with this rank," he said.

Regarding his success mantra, he said that the basics should be very strong so one should study in a good school in Class 10 and Class 12.

"Those who take these formative classes lightly will face problems during the competition. Apart from this one should keep away from social media. It is important to be self-motivated and one should remember that if one is feeling depressed then it is important to talk to the parents as it helps a great deal," he added.

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**APPENDIX IV [Rule 8(1)]
POSSESSION NOTICE
(For immovable property)**

Whereas the undersigned being the authorized officer of IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited) under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(2) of the said Act read with [rule 3] of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notices calling upon the Borrower/ Co-borrowers and Guarantors to repay the amount mentioned in the demand notice appended below within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice together with further interest and other charges from the date of demand notice till payment/realization.

The Borrower/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower/ Co-Borrowers/ Guarantors and public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under sub-section (4) of Section 13 of the Act read with rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on this notice.

LOAN ACCOUNT NUMBER	BORROWER/S CO-BORROWERS & GUARANTORS NAME	DESCRIPTION OF THE MORTGAGED PROPERTIES	DEMAND NOTICE		DATE AND TYPE OF POSSESSION TAKEN
			DATE	OUTSTANDING AMOUNT (RS.)	
15153623	1. Ashok Kumar Yadav, 2. Shripra Yadav	ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF FREE HOLD HOUSE NO. 341, LIG-3, BLOCK-SECTOR-B, SCHEME-BARRA (U.P.U.D.P.) SITUATED AT MOHALLA BARRA-8, TESHIL & DISTRICT: KANPUR NAGAR (U.P.), LAND AREA 85.09 SQ. MTRS., AND COVERED AREA 75 SQ. MTRS., AND BOUNDED AS: EAST: PLOT NO. 350 & 351, WEST: 7.50 METER WIDE ROAD, NORTH: PLOT NO. 340, SOUTH: PLOT NO. 342	24.12.2022	Rs. 16,69,727.58/-	04-06-2024 Symbolic Possession
17486959 & 33763429	1. Krishna Kumar Pandey, 2. Deepika Pandey, 3. Rajesh Kumar Pandey	ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF PLOT NO. 154, ADMEASURING 205.69 SQ. MTRS., SITUATED AT BLOCK - H-2, SCHEME-II, KIDWAI NAGAR, KANPUR, UTTAR PRADESH - 208011, AND BOUNDED AS: EAST: 30 FT. ROAD, WEST: PLOT NO. 155, NORTH: 60 FT. ROAD, SOUTH: PLOT NO. 153	20.09.2023	Rs. 59,23,621.17/-	04-06-2024 Symbolic Possession

The Borrower/ Co-borrowers/ Guarantors in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited) for an amount mentioned in the demand notice together with further interest and other charges from the date of demand notice till payment/realization.

Date: 04-06-2024
Place: KANPUR

(erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited)

बैंक ऑफ इंडिया
Bank of India

Zonal Office: "Star House"
Vibhuti Khand, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow-226010,
Ph.: 0522-2721512

POSSESSION NOTICE

Whereas, The undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the Bank of India under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest, Act 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13 (2) read the Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, had issued a Demand Notice, calling borrower to repay the amount within 60 days from the date of receipt of same. The borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property/ies described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub-section 13(4) of the Act read with rule 8 of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002 on the dates mentioned hereunder. The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property/ies and any dealings with the property/ies will be subject to the charge of the Bank of India for mentioned amount and interest thereon. **The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.**

S. No.	Name & Address of the Borrower & Guarantor	Description of Immovable property mortgaged / Owner of the property	Amount o/s as mentioned in the Notice u/s 13(2) Date of Demand & Possession Notice
Eranch: Sitapur Road			
1	Borrower: Sri Vivek Shukla, S/o Late Ved Prakash Shukla & Mrs Ruchi Shukla W/o Late Ved Prakash Shukla Add- (1) House No. 538 Ka/91 Triveni Nagar 1st, (Near Madhu Girls Hostel) Lucknow-226020 (2)- Add of Immoveable Property- Flat No. ST/104 ELDECO Utopia Sec 93-A, Expressway, Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar, UP- 201304.	All that part and parcel of the property consisting of Flat no. ST/104 Eldeco Utopia Sec 93A, Expressway, Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar, UP- 201304. Area – admeasuring 850 Sq. ft. jointly in the name of Mr. Vivek Shukla and Mrs. Ruchi Shukla vide sale deed registration no. 4466 dated. 09.05.2014. Boundaries: North East : Open at Ground Floor, North West : - Flat no. ST/103, South East : - Flat no. ST/105, South West : - Common Passage then open at Ground Floor.	₹ 50,64,311.93 + interest & other charges Demand Notice dt. 19.10.2023 Possession Notice dt. 01.06.2024

Date : 06.06.2024, Place : Lucknow

Authorised Officer, Bank of India

Mankind's welfare not possible sans environmental protection: Dr Singh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A seminar on 'circular economy and clean air' was organised at Institute of Environment and Sustainable Development (IESD) in Banaras Hindu University (BHU) on the occasion of World Environment Day here on Wednesday under the aegis of Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board, Varanasi. The chief guest of the seminar was Conservator of Forests (Varanasi) Dr RK Singh and was presided over by IESD Director Prof AS Raghuvanshi. Addressing the seminar as the chief guest, the conservator of forests said the welfare of mankind is not possible without environmental protection. He said that people have to be made aware about environmental conservation and have to take active participation in it. "Only when the environment remains balanced, we will get pure air, pure water, lush green forests and the number of animals will remain balanced", Dr Singh said, adding that the simple and easy way to conserve the environment is tree plantation. "We need to use natural resources in such a way that the balance of the environment is not disturbed and they can be used for a long period", he said. In the beginning, the guests were welcomed by presenting angavastram and plants. While throwing light on the theme of the seminar, Regional Officer



Conservator of Forests RK Singh planting a sapling at IESD BHU in Varanasi on Wednesday.

of Pollution Control Board Dr SC Shukla said that the environment can be protected by adopting a circular economy under which a systemic approach has to be adopted to benefit business, society and environment in relation to economic development. Dr Shukla said that the main objective of the circular economy is to achieve the goal of sustainable development by using limited resources. "Under the circular economy, the economy can be strengthened along with environmental protection by adopting the five 'R's' such as Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Remanufacture and Refurbishment process", he added. President of Srijan Sanstha Dr Anil Singh said the simple and easy way to reduce environmental pollution is plantation and protection of forests. "For this, we have to create attachment towards trees in the minds of people, only

then we can save biological existence", he said, and added that due to increasing population, urbanisation, industrialisation and forest destruction, the temperature is increasing due to increase in greenhouse gases and to stop the increasing temperature, we have to adopt an environmentally friendly lifestyle. As a special guest, Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Swati said that only by conserving the environment, we can give a happy, prosperous and healthy life to our present and future generations. "Environment is a common heritage of all of us and it is our collective responsibility to protect it", she said, emphasising on working by accepting the mantra of 'Vriksh se Vayu, Vayu se Aayu'. She laid special emphasis on planting of plants like peepal, gular, pakkaad, bel and neem. Assistant Commandant of CRPF Sujay Yadav said the flow of development on earth has to be

made environment friendly and special attention has to be paid to all aspects of environment in all development plans. Deputy General Manager of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) Subra Jyoti Radharoy said instead of plastic products, eco-friendly jute, paper and cloth bags, clay made kulhars, leaves and steel utensils should be used. Prof Virendra Mishra of IESD BHU said that carbon emissions can be reduced to a great extent by promoting the use of alternative sources of energy such as solar energy, wind energy, geothermal energy and bio-energy. The seminar was conducted by Dr Anil Singh and Dr SC Shukla proposed the vote of thanks. It was also attended by Dr Kripa Ram (DDM of NABARD), Prof Kavita Shah, Madan Ram Chaurasia, Tushar Rai, CP Verma, RN Chaudhary, Ranjit Kumar, Paras Nath, DS Rai, Subedar Pandey, Sarita Kumari, along with the IESD faculty members and research students, CRPF personnel, including inspector Ramkumar and PRO Praveen Singh, forest department employees etc. Before organising the seminar, an environmental rally was taken out from the IESD. After the rally, a tree plantation programme was organised in the institute campus. The plants were irrigated using drones. On the occasion 200 jute bags and caps were distributed among the people by the Pollution Control Board.

Functions galore on Environment Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Various programmes of plantation, cleanliness and others were organised on the occasion of World Environment Day here on Wednesday. Many programmes including plantation were organised on a large scale by the Safety department under the leadership of General Manager (GM) Sushil Kumar Srivastava in Banaras Locomotive Works (BLW) to give the message of keeping the environment green by planting trees. After plantation, the GM and other key department heads observed the pictures related to environmental protection prepared by the children on the occasion. In this sequence, a seminar was also organised at the Technical Training Centre. The GM gave the message of environmental awareness to everyone, calling tree plantation and water conservation the need of the hour. "The water level of the land has gone very low and the air has also become very polluted", he said, adding that air and water are the basis of life, which we all have to protect for the coming generation. Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer Subrata Nath, Principal Chief Engineer Vinod Kumar Shukla, Principal Chief Personnel Officer Janardan Singh, Principal Financial Advisor Neeraj Verma, Principal Chief Safety Commissioner Ranveer Singh Chauhan, Principal Chief Medical Officer Dr Devesh Kumar, Chief Safety Officer SB Patel and others were also present. The Postal department organised plantation drive in Post Offices and Postal colonies of Varanasi Region. On the occasion, while planting tree in the Postal Colony situated on Maqbool Alam Road, Postmaster General of Varanasi Region Krishna Kumar Yadav said environmental protection is the biggest need of today. He said to ensure that the coming generation gets pure oxygen for survival, plant as many trees as possible and take care of them like family member. "We can also control the ever-increasing temperature at the global level through regular plantations", he said. On the occasion, postal officials were made aware about environmental protection by taking a pledge to keep the environment clean. Senior Superintendent of Post Offices Rajiv Kumar said that planting trees for environmental protection is the responsibility of all of us. Assistant Director Brijesh



GM SK Srivastava seeing the posters prepared by children at BLW in Varanasi on Wednesday.

Sharma and RK Chauhan explained the importance of plantation with the slogan of 'one person, one tree'. Senior Postmaster PC Tiwari said that trees give us life, therefore, along with planting trees, their conservation is also very important. In Mahila Mahavidyalaya (MMV) located in Banaras Hindu University, under the leadership of Principal Prof Rita Singh, a tree plantation programme was organised. She called nature conservation a useful and necessary resolution for human life. On the occasion, Prof Seema Tiwari, Prof Rita Jaiswal, Dr Sabina Bano, Dr Dharendra Nath Choubey etc along with all the non-teaching staff were present. The activists of Namami Gange, by cleaning the Ganga river, gave a call for a pollution free world at Dashashwamedh and Prayag ghats. Regional coordinator Rajesh Shukla gave the message that this

earth is prosperous only because of trees and water, this is the true basis of life. By removing the materials polluting the Ganga water, a wish was made for a pollution free world. A pledge was taken to conserve water during Ganga cleaning and Aarti amid the sound of conch shells. Tulsi plants were given to the people at Ahilyabai Ghat. Sohan Singh, Rajendra Singh, Ramesh Chauhan, Ratanlal, Nagendra Sharma etc were present. The day was also observed jointly by VESS India, Varuna Seva Trust and Plan India. A total of 15 plants were planted at three places in the event and a pledge was taken to protect it. A total of five plants were planted in the hospitality of District Inspector of Schools Dr Awadh Kishore Singh in the DIOS Office premises. The second event was organised in the hospitality of BSA Dr Arvind Pathak, five plants were planted in his office premises. Then five plants were planted in the park located near the WTC College campus. On this occasion, volunteers from various organisations and offices took an oath that we will keep our earth pollution free, will conserve water, will do the real beautification of the earth by planting trees. Among those present were CA Jamuna Shukla, Income Tax Officer Sameer Srivastava, former Principal Prof Sharad Srivastava, Reeti Srivastava, Sanjay Singh, Priyanka Sinha, Anurag, Dr Rajesh Srivastava, Shubham Dwivedi and Disha Singh.

Environment Day celebrated with enthusiasm

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

World Environment Day was celebrated with enthusiasm in North Central Railway (NCR) here on Wednesday. Various programmes were organised in all three divisions, including NCR headquarters under the theme "Land restoration, desertification and drought resistance". On the occasion General Manager (GM) Ravindra Goyal along with other important department heads planted saplings in the NCR headquarters office premises. The GM administered the oath of environmental protection to the officers and employees present. A street play was also presented by the Scouts and Guides team of NCR for envi-



ronmental awareness. IIT-A ADDS ANOTHER FEATHER TO ITS CAP: The Indian Institute of Information Technology, Allahabad (IIT-A) has added another feather to its cap by securing position in the QS World University

Ranking 2025 in overall category. The institute has secured 1401 position in the world while 46th position in the country. Giving this information Dr Shiv Ram Dubey, Faculty In-Charge Institute Ranking on Wednesday said

IIT-A was the only IIT ranked in QS Worldwide Ranking 2025 in the country while Global Rank Worldwide was 1401. Owing the IT institute only, IIT-A has secured the ranking in overall category. Director Prof Mukul Sharad Sutaone has hailed the achievement of the institute of securing QS World Ranking and congratulated the entire IIT-A fraternity to achieve such milestone. The institute is now well recognized on international map benefitting the students to get more research exposure. Dr Satish Kumar Singh, acting registrar has congratulated the teaching fraternity for bagging the world ranking through their academic and research laurels.

Importance of collective responsibility in safeguarding planet emphasised

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

In celebration of World Environment Day, NTPC Auraiya organised a rally in the Aloknagar township, marking a significant commitment to environmental sustainability and community engagement. Several esteemed dignitaries, including Jayadev Parida, Chief General Manager (CGM), NTPC Auraiya, Sanghmitra Parida, President Jagriti Mahila Mandal, PR Rai, DC CISE, SK Balyan, AGM O&M, Tanmoy Dutta, AGM HR, and Bijay Nayak, CMO, were present. The event saw



Tree plantation was organised by NTPC Auraiya on World Environment Day

enthusiastic participation from all heads of departments, employees and members of the Jagriti Mahila Mandal Committee. The theme of World Environment Day-2024 is "Land restoration, desertification and drought resilience, Our land - our future." A highlight of the day was the active involvement of GEM 2024 children and their faculties, who joined the rally with great enthusiasm, showcasing their commitment to environmental protection and sustainability. The programme commenced with a rally aimed at

raising awareness about environmental issues, followed by a pledge on environmental protection led by Chief General Manager Jayadev Parida. In his address, Parida emphasised the importance of collective responsibility in safeguarding our planet for future generations. Following the pledge, a tree plantation drive was conducted reinforcing NTPC Auraiya's dedication to enhancing green cover and promoting ecological balance. The participants planted saplings symbolising their commitment to creating a greener and healthier environment.

'Zero doser' programme to strengthen vaccination soon

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Under the National Routine Immunisation Programme, the 'zero doser' programme will soon start in the urban area of the district and its objective is to administer the first dose of Penta to 100 per cent of the newborn babies at one and a half months. Along with this, special emphasis will also be given on the second dose on the 10th week and the third dose on the 14th week. To reduce infant mortality, the emphasis of the Health department is not only on children up to one year but on 100 per cent vaccination of all children from birth to five years. Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary said many families in the society do not have access to vaccination services. "Zero doser campaign is an effort to make the children of all those families an integral part of important primary health care by vaccinating them, so that they can also get health benefits. For this purpose, special emphasis is being laid on regular vaccination in the district", he said,

adding that by vaccinating children at the right time, many serious diseases like TB, polio, diarrhoea, jaundice, pneumonia, measles, whooping cough, diphtheria, tetanus, hemophilia influenza and night blindness can be prevented. The CMO said to further strengthen the regular vaccination programme, 'zero doser' programme will soon be started in the areas under the Municipal Corporation in which children who have not taken even a single dose of Penta due to some reasons will be covered with that vaccine. "Children who have not received a single dose of Penta within a year or have received only one or two doses, such children will be given all three doses within a year", he said, adding that by changing the behaviour of families who are indifferent and refuse vaccination, the left out children are being vaccinated. He appealed to the family members to get their children vaccinated on time under the regular vaccination programme. District Immunisation Officer (DIO) Dr AK Maurya said that

'zero doser' programme is being started in 68 districts of the state including Varanasi. Under the regular vaccination programme, this programme will be conducted every Wednesday and Saturday. Within a year, if a child could not get the second (10th week) and third (14th week) dose of Penta apart from the first dose (one and a half months), those children will be vaccinated 100 per cent. Five vaccines (DPT, Pertussis, Tetanus, PCV and Hepatitis B) have been included in Penta. This is a very special and effective vaccine for the child, which protects against many serious diseases simultaneously, he added. He further said that this programme will be conducted in the areas under the Municipal Corporation. Currently, the survey work is going on in these areas by health workers. After its completion, the verification work will be done by departmental officials and partner organisations WHO, UNICEF and UNDP. Then the validation work will be completed. After this, the programme will be started.

Various programmes held at Banaras station



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Various programmes, including tree plantation, eco-friendly exhibition, drawing competition and many others were organised at Banaras railway station on the occasion of World Environment Day on Wednesday under the chairmanship of Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Vineet Kumar Srivastava and leadership of Senior Divisional Engineer (EnHM) Apoorv Swarnkar. These programmes were organised to make the environment friendly under Mission LiFE. On the theme of 'land restoration, desertification and drought tolerance', street plays were staged by Scout/Guide members and tree plantation was done by officers and employees. The DRM, while wishing all the officers/ employees of the railway family and railway passengers present in an awareness programme organised in the general passenger hall of Banaras station, said that to increase awareness for environmental protection, the United Nations General Assembly has designated June 5 to be celebrated as World Environment Day in 1972 and after which the day was observed for the first time in 1974. He said the whole creation is dependent on nature and environment. "The air, water, food needed to live is a gift of the environment", he said, adding that the environment is getting polluted due to the exploitation of natural resources and their misuse for

human lifestyle. He said the main objective of the day is to focus on environmental issues and to create awareness to stop the damage that is happening to the environment day by day. Under the chairmanship of the DRM, all the branch officers and station employees working on the division, including about 200 railway passengers were sworn in to adopt an environmentally friendly lifestyle. Apart from this, under the campaign to make the environment green, the team of Bharat Scout and Guide North Eastern Railway, Varanasi Division, through a street play, created awareness about plantation and water conservation. Besides, with the objective of making the environment green and clean, senior officials under the leadership of DRM took out a cleanliness rally in the Banaras station premises till Nandi Udyan and did a massive tree plantation on the land of the garden. On the occasion ADRM (Operations) Rajesh Kumar Singh, ADRM (Infrastructure) Roshan Lal Yadav, Chief Project Manager (Gati Shakti) Kausalesh Singh, Senior Divisional Engineer (EnHM) Apoorv Swarnkar, Senior Divisional Engineer (C&W) Abhinav Pathak, Senior Divisional Commercial Manager Sheikh Rehman, Senior Divisional Finance Manager Rajesh Srivastava, Senior Divisional Personnel Officer Sameer Paul and many others were also present.

CORE GM administers oath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

World Environment Day is an occasion that unites all the people for environmental awareness and activism. This year the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, has envisaged celebrating World Environment Day 2024 with "Mission LiFE" (Lifestyle for Environment) at the centre. In line with its commitment towards environmental protection, General Manager Central Organisation for Railway Electrification (CORE) Ashok Kumar Verma on



Wednesday administered the oath to all officers and employees of CORE on the occasion of World Environment Day for the protection of the environment and expressed concern over the rising temperature

and requested for more and more tree plantation to protect the environment. The GM participated in the tree plantation programme along with the CORE officers and employees. Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Yatendra Kumar, Principal Chief Engineer Anil Kumar Singh Shaival, Principal Chief Signal and Telecommunication Engineer and Principal Chief Personnel Officer (PCPO) RN Singh, Chief Electrical Engineer SS Negi and Upendra Kumar and other officers and employees of the CORE office were present and made the programme successful.

'New laws will usher in significant legal reforms'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT-K) hosted an awareness campaign about India's three new criminal codes. This campaign was organised by the Institute's Legal Cell under the direction of the Ministry of Education, Government of India. The campaign aimed to inform the campus community about the new criminal laws. It was led by Deputy Registrar (Legal), IIT-K, Prakalpa Sharma, and inaugurated by Deputy Director IIT-K, Prof Brj Bhushan, along with Registrar of

IIT-K Vishwa Ranjan. The new laws, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, will replace the Indian Penal Code, 1860, while the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, will supersede the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023, will take the place of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872. These new laws are designed to be more relevant to modern India, incorporating aspects like cybercrime, social justice and modern evidence procedures. They aim to simplify legal language, streamline processes and strengthen victim rights while decolonising the

legal framework. These changes will take effect on July 1, 2024. Senior Public Prosecutor, Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Chandan Kumar Singh, during his address as guest speaker said, "The new laws will usher in significant legal reforms and establish a new social order in India. I am confident that this campaign will successfully raise awareness about the details of these new criminal codes." IIT Kanpur's awareness campaign has equipped the campus community with the knowledge necessary to understand and adapt to this important legal evolution.

SPSEC organises mega plantation drive

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

In a significant move to promote environmental sustainability and awareness, Sir Padampat Singhania Education Centre (SPSEC) organised a mega plantation drive and mural painting event on World Environment Day on Wednesday. This initiative reflects the institution's ongoing commitment to fostering environmental stewardship among students and the broader community. Held near the school premises, the event saw enthusiastic participation from the district administration, political representatives, teachers, students, parents and residents. Saplings of diverse types were planted to enhance biodiversity and contribute to ecological balance. The chief guest, Surendra Maitihani, Member of the UP State Legislative Assembly, lauded the school's efforts in contributing to the development of green zones in the city and emphasised the importance of community participation in environmental initiatives. The special guest, Shashank Shukla, District Project Officer, Ministry of Jal Shakti, Namami Gange Programme, praised the school

for leading a green crusade, noting that the saplings will stand as a testament to collective efforts in making this initiative a success. Participants took a 'Green Pledge' to make sustainable choices, reduce single-use plastics, conserve water and ener-



MLA Surendra Maitihani planting a sapling at SPSEC on Wednesday.

gy and support eco-friendly products. Both guests showcased their mural painting skills, delivering messages of environmental protection through their artwork. Principal Bhawna Gupta remarked, "This plantation drive is more than just an event; it's a movement towards creating a greener, healthier planet. We are proud of our students and staff for their dedication to this cause and we hope to inspire others in the community to take similar actions." The event aligns with SPSEC's theme for the year, "Sustainability: Clean and Green Kanpur", with initiatives including saving water and electricity; developing water stations for birds; mural paintings on sustainability; plantation drive; educational visits to solid waste management and sewage and water treatment plants; rainwater harvesting projects; ghat cleaning and plogging activities and safe garbage disposal system. As a gesture of gratitude, parents were gifted jute bags for their participation. School Chairperson Manorama Govind Hari Singhania, Vice-Chairman, Abhishek Singhania, Vice Chairperson, Varsha Singhania, and Vice-Chairman and Director, Partho P Kar praised the efforts of students, teachers, and the entire school family. The principal thanked the management for their guidance and stewardship.

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 Khadour 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 Bihar 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.

Recognising the unique stressors faced by the Indian military, the need for telemental health services in the armed forces has become evident, the health ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The operational environment, cultural challenges, and specific stressors related to regional conflicts necessitate a specialised approach to mental health care in armed forces.



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

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

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.



Army Chief visits Thal Sena Bhawan construction site

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Army Chief General Manoj Pande visited the site of construction of the upcoming Thal Sena Bhawan — the new building of the Army headquarters — at Delhi cantonment on Wednesday to oversee the progress of the complex scheduled to be completed by June 2025. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh laid the foundation stone of the complex in February 2020.

Thal Sena Bhawan, a cornerstone project aimed at modernising infrastructure for the Indian Army, has been under construction since March 2023, officials said.

The Army chief was updated on the state of the construction which is "progressing as per schedule and in adherence to the highest engineering standards", a senior official said.

Various green initiatives and the best engineering practices which have been adopted in the project were highlighted during the visit. These include transplantation of 476 fully grown trees, compensatory plantation of 5,790 trees to increase green cover, and use of environment-friendly construction material such as fly ash bricks, ashcrete cement, recycled wood, and perl formwork, the officials said. The Thal Sena Bhawan aims to be a net-zero building as it will have its own compost plant, sewage treatment plant, solar panels and electric vehicle charging facilities to promote clean energy, they said.

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 Pande 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



DG NCC Lt Gen Gurbirpal Singh attends two-day 'Varshik Niti Samvad Shivir' of NCC in New Delhi

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 Kanngam 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 Akojiam 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 force 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.



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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 paar.'



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.

Agenda for the Modi Government 3.0

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



KALYANI SHANKAR

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 Ram Nath 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 BJP, 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)

PICTALK



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

PTI

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

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 — I wrote 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)



SANJAY CHANDRA

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



Apropos 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



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 (retd), 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) made 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)

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.

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 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

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 H D 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. BJP 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 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."

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

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 belonged 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 ECI data showed. Congress had fielded three women candidates, two of whom — Prabhaben Taviyad and Sonal Patel — were defeated in Dahod and Gandhinagar seats respectively. Apart from Thakor, BJP's Nimuben Bambhaniya defeated Aam Aadmi Party's Umesh Makwana to win the Bhavnagar seat by a margin of 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 'Banas 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), Poonamben Maadam (Jamnagar), Bharti Shiyal (Bhavnagar), Ranjanben Bhatt (Vadodara), Gitaben Rathva (Chhota Udepur) and Darshana Jadosh (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 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 Ghosiram Majhi came second, securing 50,941 votes.

'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 the children suffer from acute

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.

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 hostages. 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 nationalists march through Palestinian area Some chant 'Death to Arabs'

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Thousands of mostly ultranationalist Israelis were taking part in an annual march through a sensitive Palestinian area of Jerusalem on Wednesday, with some stoking already surging wartime tensions by chanting "Death to Arabs". Jerusalem, the emotional heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has been mostly calm throughout the Israel-Hamas war. But the annual march, seen as provocative by Palestinians, could ignite broader unrest, as it did three years ago, when it helped set off an 11-day war in Gaza. Marchers convening outside the Damascus Gate, a central gathering place for Palestinians in east Jerusalem, chanted anti-Arab and anti-Islamic slogans, danced and waved Israeli flags as the procession kicked off. Just before the march began, crowds scuffled with police and threw plastic bottles at a journalist wearing a vest with the word PRESS emblazoned on it. Police said they arrested five marchers for throwing objects at journalists. The march was taking place as tensions over the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza are high. The war began with Hamas' Oct 7 attack into southern Israel, in which militants killed some 1,200 peo-

ple, 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. Police said they were deploying 3,000 security personnel to ensure calm and were seen arresting several Palestinian men before the march got underway, leading them away with their hands bound behind their backs.



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 expected to take stand in his gun trial

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 has quickly 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 federally 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."

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.

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 econo-

my, 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." A note of the personal crept in when Starmer took a dig at ex-banker Sunak's wealth, saying his own father had been a factory worker and claiming Sunak did not understand the financial worries facing working-class people.

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 Mahlengi 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.

Russian gang suspected in London hospital cyberattack

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 ransomware where the system just doesn't work," Martin told BBC Radio 4.

Italian premier 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.

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.

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 Vumlungmang 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 NCLT 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.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said the rupee appreciated as domestic markets recovered some losses of the previous day and reports of intervention by the RBI. "...A recovery in the US dollar and disappointing macroeconomic data capped sharp gains," he said, adding that the rupee is expected to trade with a slight negative bias on recovery in the US dollar and selling pressure from foreign investors. 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. According to analysts, a weak tone in global crude oil prices and further intervention by the RBI may support the rupee. Also, investors are likely to move cautiously ahead of the RBI's monetary policy later this week. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.23 per cent higher at 104.29. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, inched up 0.06 per cent to USD 77.57 per barrel. "...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. FIIs bought shares worth Rs 26,776.17 crore and sold equities worth Rs 39,212.39 crore in the cash segment.

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



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 Arahass 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 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

Gold slips ₹80; silver plunges ₹1,200

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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," Saunil 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.

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 will receive proceeds of USD 810-945 million. If the green shoe 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.

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

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Motions 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 Subhashish 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 defence.

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, Subhashish Bose, Anwar Ali, Jay Gupta; Jeakson Singh, Anirudh Thapa; Naorem Mahesh Singh, Brandon Fernandes, Lallianzuala Chhangte; Sunil Chhetri.

KUWAIT: Sulaiman Abdulghafour (GK); Rashed Al-Dosary, Khalid El Ebrahim, Hassan Al-Enezi, Salman Bormeya; Eid Al-Rasheed; Hamad Al-Harbi, Faisal Zayed, Azbi Shehab, Mohammad Daham; Yousef Nasser.

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 heart-breaking 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 warmup 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 stretchered off shortly before halftime after injuring his right knee. The 24-year-old player fell awkwardly following a challenge with Italy forward Matteo Retegui. Turkey plays its first Euro 2024 match against Georgia on June 18 before facing Portugal and the Czech Republic.

There were few real goal-scoring 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 onto 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 Belgium 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.



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 Rodriguez 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.

ROHIT'S INJURY ONLY WORRY IN INDIA'S CAKEWALK WIN OVER IRELAND

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Skipper Rohit Sharma's freak upper arm injury came as a dampener but India's four-pronged pace attack was too deadly for an out-of-depth Ireland during a walk-in-the-park eight-wicket victory in their opening game of the T20 World Cup here on Wednesday. The 'Men in Blue' will indeed have some sleepless nights going into the Pakistan game on June 9 after Rohit's injury. The Mumbai man had to leave the field after a well-compiled half-century (52 off 37 balls) as he missed a pull shot off a short-pitched delivery from Gujarat Titans pacer Josh Little. The ball hit him on the upper part of his right-arm left Rohit in considerable pain. On a drop-in track that offered variable bounce and extra seam movement, Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj didn't even need to bring in their 'A' game. Arshdeep Singh and a rejuvenated Hardik Pandya were good enough to dismantle the Irish for 96 in just 16 overs. Arshdeep (2/35 in 4 overs), Pandya (3/27 in 4 overs), Siraj (1/13 in 3 overs) and Bumrah (2/6 in 3 overs) didn't give any breathing space to Irish batters who were

made to look like novices in front of swing, seam and extra bounce produced during the 14 out of 16 overs that they bowled.

Such was their plight as none of the Irish batters save Gareth Delany (26 n.o., 14 balls) could even cross the 20-run mark. Delany's innings took them close to the 100-run mark.

Later, Rohit entertained the crowd with his customary pull-shots which found their appointed place in the semi-empty make-shift stands to complete the chase in 12.2 overs. Virat Kohli (1) and Suryakumar Yadav (2) missed out on some batting practice while Rishabh Pant (36 not out) was generally good in his first outing as No. 3.

The partisan Indian spectators, many of whom having taken a mid-week leave went home happy. But the playing conditions and the variable bounce on offer from the drop-in track certainly will leave a lot of questions about the preparedness of the Nassau County ground ahead of the most high-profile match of the tournament in three days' time here - India vs Pakistan.

There were deliveries that were flying off from length and a few that didn't rise above knee roll and in these conditions,



each and every batter could feel that they could get injured - whether its arm like Rohit or on the forearm and knuckle like Pant. Rohit was lucky with the coin and the overcast conditions was just the kind of

help Arshdeep needed first up as he bowled an ideal Test match length with the white Kookaburra. Most of his deliveries were pitched up and reared up from length making life miserable for the seasoned duo of Paul

Stirling and Andrew Balbirnie. It only helped that Mohammed Siraj also kept up the relentless pressure from the other end as the two openers found it difficult to even put bat on balls that were juggling around allowing Rishabh Pant to

dive full stretch on both sides of the track. Stirling tried to pull one which climbed up on him from good length and Pant ran backwards to pounce the skier. For Balbirnie, his 'one-leg' stance turned out to be a wrong strategy to counter Arshdeep as he bowled one that was pitched on middle and moved a shade towards off with the batter with no footwork unable to cover the line of the swing.

The Powerplay gone horribly wrong at 26 for 2 for Ireland, and there was no coming back for them. Pandya as the second change pacer bowled a perfect nip-backer with a wobbly seam to breach through Lorcan Tucker's defence.

Bumrah then scarred an already rattled Harry Tector with a nasty bouncer that took his gloves and almost blew away his head lobbing off the helmet.

At the halfway stage, Ireland, who recently beat Pakistan in a T20I at home, were 49 for 6 and the match already became lopsided.

The biggest gain from the game was Pandya bowling his full quota of overs and the lengths that he hit during his spell which will give his skipper a chance to play an extra batter or bowler as per the demands of the conditions in coming games.

His three dismissals were different deliveries - first one was swing, the second seam and the third extra bounce.

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, Shoib Khan, Mohammad Nadeem, Pratik Athavale, Naseem Khushi, Khalid Kail, Mehran Khan, Bilal Khan,

Kaleemullah, Fayyaz Butt, Shakeel Ahmad, Rafullah. 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 TAKE ON UGANDA: The third match of the day features Papua New Guinea and Uganda.

PNG put up a strong show against the West Indies. The two-time champions were put under extreme pressure by 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 to 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, Alpheg 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

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."

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 benefitting 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 leading to Armageddon game as per tournament rules. Carlsen could not really dent Praggnanandhaa's solid play 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.

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