

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI WEDNESDAY 3 APRIL 2024



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Parties must not claim monopoly over Ram, elections should be fought on people's issues: Pilot



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I don't get knocked down by negativity: Sunny gives insight into her entrepreneurial side



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Beyonce during the iHeartRadio Music Awards at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles on Monday. — AP

DGCA seeks daily report on Vistara flight cancellations

New Delhi: Aviation watchdog DGCA has asked Vistara to submit a daily report on flight cancellations and delays as the Tata group airline cancelled more than 50 flights for the second straight day on Tuesday amid non-availability of pilots. The civil aviation ministry is also monitoring the situation of flight cancellations at Vistara, which saw resignations of at least 15 senior first officers in the recent past. As per the summer schedule, which started from March 31, the airline is to operate a little over 300 flights daily. It has around 800 pilots. Full report on Page 2

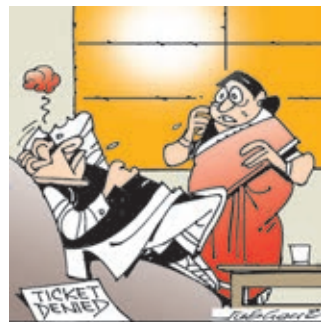
PMLA case against Mahua, bizman by ED

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate has filed a money laundering case against TMC leader Mahua Moitra and businessman Darshan Hiranandani in connection with an alleged cash-for-queries scam case, sources said on Tuesday. The ED case was registered two-three days ago. Full report on Page 3

29 killed in fire at Istanbul nightclub

Istanbul: A fire at an Istanbul nightclub during renovations on Tuesday killed at least 29 people, officials and reports said. Many people were detained for questioning. At least one person was being treated at a hospital, the governor's office said in a statement. — AP Full report on Page 6

COUNTERPOINT



You are so lucky... no need to campaign in this scorching heat!

WEATHER

Max: 36°C
Min: 21°C
RH: 25%
Rain: Nil

Forecast: Mostly cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Shobhkrut: Uttarayana
Tithi: Phalguna Bahula Navami till 6.23 pm
Star: Uttarashada till 9.42 pm
Varjyam: 6.23 am to 7.55 am
Durmuhurtam: 11:55 pm to 12.44 pm
Rahukalam: Noon to 1.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.40 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 6.07 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 3.09 AM
MOONSET TODAY 12.40 PM

Hits back at Rahul remark on 'country will be on fire' if Modi gets 3rd term; says 'Congress behind all problems, wipe it out'

Corrupt joining forces to halt action against graft, says PM

AGE CORRESPONDENTS with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/JAIPUR/RUDRAPUR, APRIL 2

Hitting out at the INDIA bloc in public rally Kotputli, Rajasthan, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said this is the first Lok Sabha election in which all the corrupt are rallying together to stop action on corruption. Earlier in a rally in Uttarakhand's Rudrapur, Mr Modi made a blistering attack on Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his remark suggesting that there will be "conflagration" in the country if he gets a third term and asked the people to wipe out the Congress from everywhere. Addressing a public rally in Rajasthan's Kotputli, Mr Modi also said, "The Congress leaders are threatening that if the BJP wins, the country will be on fire... Modi has been extinguishing such fires for the last 10 years."



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a public rally in support of Jaipur Rural candidate Rao Rajendra Singh at Kotputli in Jaipur on Tuesday, ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. — PTI

This election is to uproot corruption and to fulfil the dream of a self-reliant India
— Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

Speaking about the country's progress, the Prime Minister said that a

lot has happened in the last 10 years, but whatever happened was just a "trailer", a lot still has to be done. Asserted that the third term of the BJP-led government will be about taking historic decisions. "This election is to uproot corruption, to fulfil the dream of a self-reliant India, to resolve for the prosperity of the

EC transfers DMs & top cops in 5 states as part of 'review'

New Delhi, April 2: The Election Commission on Tuesday issued transfer orders for two inspectors general of police, eight district magistrates and 12 superintendents of police in five states as part of its "regular review" for the Lok Sabha elections. The decision was taken by the commission during a meeting chaired by Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar along with election commissioners, the poll panel said. The EC said that all the transferred officials have been asked to hand over their charge to their immediate junior officers. Those shunted out will not be assigned any election duty till the completion of the Lok Sabha polls, it said. More on Page 3

10 Naxals killed in Bastar area encounter, arms seized by forces

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
RAIPUR, APRIL 2

In a major counterinsurgency operation, 10 suspected Maoists, including a woman cadre, were gunned down on Tuesday in an encounter with security forces in the jungle of Bijapur district under Bastar in Chhattisgarh.

Acting on specific intelligence inputs on the presence of a large number of Maoists in the Lendra-Korcholi jungles under the Ganganloor police station in Bijapur district, a joint team comprising the district reserve guard (DRG), special task force (STF), CRPF and CoBRA personnel launched a search operation late on Monday night.

The search party came under attack by Maoists near Lendra village at around 6 am on Tuesday, leading to a fierce encounter, a senior police officer posted in Bastar said.

The encounter lasted for around 9 hours, during which Maoists suffered heavy casualties, the police said.

"The bodies of 10 Maoists have so far been recovered at the encounter site. A huge cache of arms and ammunition were also recovered." Bastar range IG P. Sunderraj told this newspaper. More on Page 3

Congress releases list of 17 for LS polls; fields Tariq, Sharmila

Candidates for AP, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar named

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

The Congress on Tuesday declared the list of 17 candidates for the ensuing Lok Sabha polls, fielding Mohammad Jawed and Tariq Anwar from Bihar's Kishanganj and Katihar, respectively and its Andhra Pradesh unit chief Y.S. Sharmila, who is the daughter of the former CM of united Andhra Pradesh Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, from Kadapa. Among other candidates from Andhra Pradesh, the Congress has fielded J.D.

EC appoints special observers in states

New Delhi: The EC has deployed special observers in six states and special expenditure observers in five states ahead of the Lok Sabha polls for better administrative, security and expenditure monitoring purposes. PAGE 3

Seelam from Bapatla, Gidugu Rudra Raju from Rajahmundry and M.M. Pallam Raju from Kakinada. In Odisha, Sanjau Bhoi has been fielded from Bargarh Lok Sabha seat, Janardan Dehury from Sundargarh. Manoj Mishra from Bolangir, Draupadi Majhi from Kalahandi, Bhujabal Majhi from Nabarangpur, Amir Chand Nayak from Kandhamal, Rashmi Ranjan Patnaik from Berhampur and Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka from Koraput. The Congress named former Bharatiya Gorkha Parisangh head Munish Tamang as the party's

Govt: China's renaming of Arunachal sites 'senseless'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

In another indication of the strained ties between the two Asian giants, India on Tuesday "firmly rejected China's persistent senseless attempts to rename places in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh", and said that "assigning invented names will not alter the reality that Arunachal Pradesh is, has been, and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India".

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India should rename 60 places in Tibet: Sarma proposes 'tit for tat' to counter China

Media reports cited reports in the South China Morning Post newspaper that China has renamed 30 places along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Arunachal Pradesh. The Chinese ministry of civil affairs, responsible for the establishment and naming of administrative divisions, released the fourth list of "standardised" geographical names in Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing calls "Zangnam", the reports said, adding that the list of places renamed by China includes 11 residential areas, 12 mountains, four rivers, one lake, one mountain pass and a piece of land. The names have Chinese characters, Tibetan and pinyin, the Roman alphabet version of Mandarin Chinese, the

Turn to Page 2

report said the meeting was chaired by President Ebrahim Raisi, but provided no further details. "We will make them regretful about the crime and similar acts," said Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

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Anita Singh, wife of AAP MP Sanjay Singh, meets party workers at her residence in New Delhi on Tuesday after her husband was granted bail in a money laundering case related to the Delhi excise policy case. — PTI

Govt wants to arrest me, 3 others in AAP: Atishi

'Asked to join BJP' CM shouldn't quit: AAP

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA and SANJAY KAW
NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

With pressure to resign mounting on the Delhi chief minister, the AAP MLAs, councillors and ministers on Tuesday met his wife, asserting that Arvind Kejriwal should continue to run the government from jail. Calling it the BJP's conspiracy to crush the AAP, city minister Atishi alleged that after the arrest of the party's top leadership, the ED is now planning to arrest her. Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha and party MLA Durgesh Pathak. "The BJP has approached me through someone very close. They have asked me to join the BJP and said this will save my political career. They have threatened that if I don't switch over, the ED will arrest me within a month," Ms Atishi said at a press conference in the national capital. The Delhi minister said the person who approached her on behalf of the BJP had said that the ruling party had "made up its mind on crushing everyone in the AAP."



AAP leaders Saurabh Bharadwaj and Atishi address a press conference in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

Ms Atishi said: "First, they put the AAP's leadership in jail. Satyendra Jain, Manish Sisodia, Sanjay Singh and now Mr Kejriwal have been arrested. The BJP's plan is to arrest four more AAP leaders in the next two months."

The BJP, Ms Atishi said, had thought that the party will break away after Mr Kejriwal's arrest. "But after the rally at Ramlila Maidan on Sunday, the BJP thinks the arrest of four leaders was not enough," she said.

The Delhi minister claimed that she had received information that the ED may raid her and her relatives' homes in

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PAGE 2

Kejriwal spends time in Tihar by doing yoga, meditating and reading

Sanjay Singh gets bail after 6-month jail in excise case

Big day for democracy: AAP Can't cry vendetta now: BJP

RAKESH K. SINGH
NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

In a significant development, the Supreme Court on Tuesday granted bail to AAP leader and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case linked to the Delhi excise policy scam. The jubilant AAP described this as a "big day for democracy in the country, a moment of happiness and hope". Mocking the AAP for "celebrating" a regular bail to Mr Singh, the BJP claimed that the party can no longer claim "vendetta politics". A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna, Dipankar Datta and P.B. Varale ordered Mr Singh to be released after the ED said it had no objections. The AAP leader was in jail for six months. The bench said the AAP leader can continue with his political activities but cannot make any statements with regard to the case. His release comes at



Sanjay Singh

MOCKING THE AAP for 'celebrating' a regular bail to Sanjay Singh, the BJP claimed that the party can no longer claim 'vendetta politics'

a time when the AAP is struggling with a leadership crisis in the run-up to the parliamentary polls commencing on April 19. Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and his former deputy Manish Sisodia are lodged in Tihar Jail in connection with the case.

Mr Singh will remain out on bail during the course of the entire trial of the case and the terms and conditions for the

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Defence minister Rajnath Singh is greeted by Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Anil Chauhan during the Army Commanders' Conference in New Delhi on Tuesday as Chief of Army Staff Gen. Manoj Pande looks on. Report on Page 4 — PTI

Iran vows revenge as Israel kills 2 IRGC generals in Syria strike

Tehran, April 2: Iran and one of its key proxies vowed Tuesday to respond to a strike widely attributed to Israel that demolished Iran's consulate in the Syrian capital of Damascus and killed eight people, including two Iranian generals. Iran's state TV reported on Tuesday that the country's Supreme National Security Council, a key decision-making body, met late Monday and decided on a "required" response to the strike. The

ISRAEL HAS repeatedly targeted military officials from Iran, which supports militant groups fighting Israel in Gaza, and along its border with Lebanon

Israel has repeatedly targeted military officials from Iran, which supports militant groups fighting Israel in Gaza, and along its border with Lebanon. Monday's strike in Damascus signalled an escalation because it struck an Iranian diplomatic mission. It was not clear if Iran would respond itself, risking a dangerous confrontation with Israel and its ally the US, or if it would continue to rely on proxies, including Hezbollah. — AP

Charity halts ops in Gaza as Israeli strike kills 7 staff

Deir Al-Balah (Gaza Strip), April 2: An apparent Israeli airstrike killed six international aid workers with the World Central Kitchen and their Palestinian driver, the charity said Tuesday, in a potentially major setback to efforts to deliver aid by sea to Gaza. The charity said it was immediately suspending operations in the region. — AP More on Page 6

SHORT TAKES

Arun Govil files LS paper from Meerut

Meerut: Veteran actor Arun Govil of TV serial *Ramayan* fame on Tuesday filed his nomination as the BJP candidate from Meerut Lok Sabha seat, saying it is the beginning of a new innings for him. Mr Govil filed his nomination papers in the Collectorate here. State BJP leaders, including deputy chief minister Keshav Prasad Maurya, party regional president Satendra Sisodia and outgoing MP Rajendra Aggarwal, were present on this occasion. Polling in Meerut is scheduled in the second phase on April 26. The SP has changed its candidate for Meerut and announced the name of Atul Pradhan, the sitting MLA from Sardhana. The SP had earlier fielded Bhanu Pratap Singh from Meerut against Mr Govil. After filing his nomination, Mr Govil said that he wanted to thank the BJP leadership for trusting him and making him a candidate from Meerut. — PTI

Bhupesh Baghel files LS poll nomination

Rajpur: Former chief minister and senior Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel on Tuesday filed nomination for Rajnandgaon Lok Sabha for the ensuing polls. Mr Baghel, a sitting Congress MLA, is pitted against BJP's Santosh Pandey who is seeking re-election in the constituency. Congress has fielded Mr Baghel in Rajnandgaon to wrest the seat from BJP in the upcoming LS polls. Mr Baghel later addressed a public meeting at Rajnandgaon and warned people that re-election of BJP to power at the Centre would endanger democracy and Constitution of India. Mr Baghel who was reluctant to contest in the LS polls was fielded by Congress in the seat in the polls. Former deputy chief minister leader Tamradhwaj Sahu has been fielded in Mahasamund seat by Congress.

SP replaces pick in MP's Khajuraho

Bhopal: Samajwadi Party (SP) on Tuesday replaced its candidate in Khajuraho Lok Sabha seat in Madhya Pradesh by fielding former MLA Meera Deepak Yadav. The party on Saturday had declared to field Manoj Yadav in Khajuraho. "The candidate was changed in Khajuraho by the party following public demand to field a local candidate", SP spokesman Yash Bharti said. Mr Yadav was born in Firozabad in Uttar Pradesh and settled down in Bhopal. However, Ms Yadav, although born in Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh, is married to a local SP leader in Khajuraho and started her political career in Madhya Pradesh in SP. She was elected to the state Assembly as a SP candidate in 2008. She is all set to lock horns with state BJP president Vishnu Dutt Sharma in the polls.

MAHAYUTI SORTS OUT DISPUTE ON 6 MAHA SEATS

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, APRIL 2

The alliance of BJP, Shiv Sena and NCP — Mahayuti — has managed to sort out its internal differences over the Lok Sabha seats of Nashik, Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar (Aurangabad), Thane, Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg, Palghar and Osmanabad (Dharashiv). According to an insider, the BJP would contest Satara, Thane and Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg, while Shiv Sena is likely to contest from Aurangabad and Palghar and the NCP will contest fight Nashik and Dharashiv. Union minister Narayan Rane is likely to contest from the Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg seat. The Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena has reportedly withdrawn claim over Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg. No candidate has been declared for the seat so far because of the differences between the two parties. A BJP insider said that the party has so far conducted three surveys in the Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg seat. In every survey, Mr Rane has emerged as the front-runner. "Accordingly, Rane has been asked to contest the Lok Sabha election," the source said. A senior BJP leader said that the announcement of the candidates for the disputed seats will be made in the next two to three days.

EC's spl observers in states to ensure level playing field

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

The Election Commission (EC) has deployed "special observers" in six states and "special expenditure observers" in five states ahead of Lok Sabha elections. This is for better administrative, security and expenditure monitoring purposes in these states, to ensure a level playing field during the upcoming polls. The EC said the "special observers" appointed are former civil servants with a brilliant track record of domain expertise and past experience with election processes. Special observers (general and police) have been deployed in West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bihar, where the population is more than seven crores, along with Andhra Pradesh and Odisha where simultaneous elections to the respective Assemblies are to be held. Besides, special expenditure

observers have been sent to Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha. "The special observers have been entrusted with the crucial task of supervising the randomisation of personnel, security forces and voting machines, thereby thwarting any attempts to subvert the democratic process and a level playing field, with an unwavering resolve to clamp down on money power in elections and to strengthen the existing election expenditure monitoring. The menace of money power and distribution of illicit liquor and freebies is also a concern for the commission," the EC said. General special observers are Manjit Singh, IAS (Retd) and police special observer Vivek Dube, IPS (Retd) in Bihar. General special observer for Maharashtra is Dharmendra S. Gangwar, IAS (Retd) along with police special observ-

er N.K. Mishra, IPS (Retd). For Uttar Pradesh, general special observer is Ajay V. Nayak, IAS, (Retd) and police special observer is Manmohan Singh, IPS (Retd). General special observer Ram Mohan Mishra, IAS (Retd) and police special observer Deepak Mishra, IPS (Retd) will handle Andhra Pradesh. General special observer Yogendra Tripathi, IAS (Retd) and police special observer Rajnikant Mishra, IPS (Retd) will handle Odisha. General special observer Alok Sinha, IAS (Retd) and police special observer Anil Kumar Sharma, IPS (Retd) have been placed in West Bengal. Special expenditure observers in five states are Rajesh Tuteja, ex-IRS (IT) in Uttar Pradesh; Himalini Kashyap, ex-IRS(IT) in Odisha; B. Murali Kumar, IRS (Retd) in Karnataka; Neena Nigam, IRS (Retd) in Andhra Pradesh; and B.R. Balakrishnan, ex-IRS(IT) in Tamil Nadu.

LS polls: EC shifts 2 IGs, 8 DMs and 12 SPs in 5 states

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

The Election Commission on Tuesday issued transfer orders for two inspectors general of police, eight district magistrates and 12 superintendents of police in five states as part of its "regular review" for the Lok Sabha elections. The decision was taken by the commission during a meeting chaired by Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar along with Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu, the poll panel said. The elections were announced by the commission on March 16 and will be held in seven phases between April 18 and June 1. Counting of votes is scheduled for June 4. The Election Commission (EC) said that all the transferred officials have been asked to hand over their charge to their immediate junior officers. Those shunted out will not be assigned any election duty till the completion of the Lok Sabha polls, it said. The respective state governments have been directed to send a panel of names of Indian Administrative Service and Indian Police Service

officers to the commission and those short-listed will be appointed in the place of those transferred. Among those transferred are the inspectors general of police Guntur Range, Andhra Pradesh, and Central Range, Odisha. The other officers are the district magistrate (DM) of Udalgiri in Assam; the DM and the superintendent of police (SP) of Bhojpur district, and the DM and the SP of Nawada district in Bihar. The SP of Deoghar in Jharkhand, the DMs of Cuttack and Jagatsinghpur; the SPs of Angul, Behrampur, Khurda, Rourkela and the DCP (Cuttack) in Odisha have also been transferred. In Andhra Pradesh, the DMs of Krishna, Anantapuram and Tirupati districts and the SPs of Prakasham, Palnadu, Chittoor, Anantapuram and Nellore districts have been shunted out. Separately, the EC has asked the Jharkhand chief secretary to fill up vacant posts of SP (Rural) Ranchi, deputy inspector general of police (Palamu) and IGP (Dumka) by sending a panel of names of officials to it.

ED files Fema case against Mahua Moitra & Hiranandani

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a money laundering case against Trinamul Congress leader Mahua Moitra and businessman Darshan Hiranandani in connection with an alleged cash-for-queries scam case. The agency filed the enforcement case information report (ECIR), the ED equivalent of a police FIR, against the two, taking cognisance of a CBI complaint, the sources said. The ED case was registered last week and it asked a former TMC Lok Sabha MP to appear before the agency on March 28. The Central agency has been probing them under the civil sections of the Foreign Exchange Management Act (Fema) and has called Ms Moitra and Dubai-based businessman Hiranandani in this case for questioning but they have not disposed till now, citing official engagements. The CBI had last month conducted searches, after filing its FIR, at the premises of Ms Moitra, a former TMC MP from Krishnanagar seat in West Bengal.

Huge cache of arms, ammunition seized ■ Ops lasted for 9 hrs Security forces gun down 10 Maoists in C'garh's Bijapur

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
RAIPUR, APRIL 2

In a major counter-insurgency operation, 10 suspected Maoists, including a woman cadre, were on Tuesday gunned down in an encounter with the security forces in the jungle of Bijapur district under Bastar in Chhattisgarh. Acting on specific intelligence inputs on the presence of a large number of Maoists in Lendra-Korcholi jungles under the Gagaloor police station limits in the Bijapur district, a joint security team comprising personnel of district reserve guard (DRG), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), special task force (STF) and CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action) launched a search operation in the area late

on Monday night. The joint search party came under the attack by Maoists in the jungle near Lendra village at around six am on Tuesday, leading to a fierce encounter between them, a senior police officer posted in Bastar said. The encounter lasted for around nine hours in which Maoists suffered heavy casualties, the police said. "Bodies of ten Maoists have so far been recovered at the encounter site. Huge cache of arms and ammu-

munition including an automatic weapon were also recovered at the site", Bastar range inspector general of police P Sunderraj told this newspaper. The casualty among the Maoists may rise since many ultras were reported to have been injured in the incident, the police sources said. "Majority of the slain ultras were the members of the company number two of the People's Liberation Army Guerrilla (PLGA)", a senior police officer posted in the Bijapur district said. One automatic LMG weapon, one .303 bore rifle, one 12-bore rifle and huge quantities of barrel grenade launcher (BGL) shells with BGLs and other arms and ammunition were recovered at the encounter site. The ten slain Maoists were yet to be identified. Search operation in the

area was on till the last reports came. With this, a total of 41 Maoists were killed in separate encounters in the Bastar division comprising districts of Bastar, Kanker, Narayanpur, Dantewada, Kondagaon, Bijapur and Sukma, in the last four months. Meanwhile, two hardcore Naxals carrying bounties of ₹29 lakh and ₹14 lakh, respectively, were gunned down in an encounter with the security forces in the jungle of Kerjhari in Balaghat district in Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday morning, MP police said. The two slain Maoists were identified as divisional committee member (DVCM) Sajanti alias Kranti, who carried a bounty of ₹29 lakh and Raghu alias Sher Singh who carried a reward of ₹14 lakh on his head.



Union home minister Amit Shah with Karnataka BJP president B.Y. Vijayendra during a meeting of "Shakti Kendra" (a collective of 3-5 booths) leaders and workers at Palace Grounds in Bengaluru ahead of Lok Sabha elections on Tuesday. — PTI

Shah to start UP campaign for polls from Muzaffarnagar

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

Union home minister and senior BJP leader Amit Shah will launch his Lok Sabha elections campaign in Uttar Pradesh with a rally in Muzaffarnagar on Wednesday. The BJP's district unit chief Sudhir Saini said on Tuesday that Mr Shah will reach Muzaffarnagar at 1 pm. The home minister will address a public rally at National Inter College Ground in Shahpur on Wednesday, sources had earlier said. Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) chief Jayant Chaudhary will also address the rally, Mr Saini said. The RLD recently parted ways with the Opposition INDIA bloc and joined the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). It is contesting the Lok Sabha elections from two seats in Uttar Pradesh as part of the NDA. Eight parliamentary constituencies in western Uttar Pradesh - Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur, Kairana, Bijnor, Nagina (SC), Moradabad, Rampur and Pilibhit will go to the polls in the first phase of the elections on April 19. After the rally, Mr Shah will attend a meeting of the BJP's Lok Sabha core group of Uttar Pradesh in the town, the sources had said. The BJP has renominated MP and Union minister Sanjeev Kumar Balyan from Muzaffarnagar.

Pilot says parties shouldn't claim monopoly over Ram

Elections should be fought on people's issues: Cong leader

New Delhi, April 2: Lord Ram belongs to everyone and the BJP cannot have a monopoly over him or religion no matter how hard it tries, says senior Congress leader Sachin Pilot, asserting that the INDIA bloc will fight the Lok Sabha polls on people's issues rather than emotive ones. The Congress general secretary also exuded confidence that the Opposition Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) will get a majority and form the next government.



Sachin pilot

It is very well for the BJP to talk about a blueprint of its 1st 100 days of returning to power for a 3rd term but how about giving a report card of the last 10 years? — Sachin Pilot, Cong leader

tax department notices to the Congress, facing a demand of over ₹3,500 crore, he said the "coercive action" taken by the government in actually freezing the accounts of the principal Opposition party is unprecedented. It does not augur well for a healthy democracy, he added. Despite all that is happening, Mr Pilot said, he has faith in the voters, in what the Congress stands for, and emphasised that the INDIA bloc will secure a majority when the election results are counted on June 4. "The Congress and all INDIA bloc partners have officially demanded from the EC to provide an ecosystem where political parties are not hindered in the run up to the elections and all parties are treated impartially and without biases," Mr Pilot said. On the issue of income-

Asked about claims that a Ram temple was sweeping north India and the INDIA bloc's plans to overcome it, Mr Pilot said, "I think this election will be fought on issues that are extremely relevant to our present and our future. Recent efforts to systematically undermine constitutionally institutions, will be one such issue. We want to bring to the fore the problems faced by the youth, women, farmers, we want to give legal guarantee for MSP, these are the things that matter to the average voter." Mr Pilot said he does not think the voter appreciates a poll agenda based on religion and underscored that polls should be fought on economic policy, job creation, reducing inflation and securing a better future for our farmers. — PTI



BJP candidate Rathin Chakraborty during a door-to-door campaign in Howrah on Tuesday. — PTI

In MP, BJP chief calls INDIA Bloc conglomeration of 'corrupt' Nadda: PM shook dynastic politics' foundation

AGE CORRESPONDENT
BHOPAL, APRIL 2

BJP president J.P. Nadda on Tuesday said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has shaken the foundation of dynastic politics in the country. Addressing the conclave of intellectuals in Jabalpur, Mr Nadda, who began his two-day visit to Madhya Pradesh Tuesday, said that Mr Modi has changed the political culture in the country by destroying dynastic, caste and appeasement politics. "Earlier, it was caste and dynasty-based politics in the country. People belonging to particular families



Lok Sabha candidate Ashish Dubey greets the BJP president J.P. Nadda during "Party Workers Conference" in Jabalpur Tuesday. Madhya Pradesh CM Mohan Yadav and party's state chief V.D. Sharma are also seen. — PTI

destroyed the politics of dynasty and appeasement in the country," he said. He also made a scathing

attack on the INDIA alliance, calling it a conglomeration of "corrupt" people who came together to save each other. They were trying to protect dynastic politics. "But Mr Modi never compromised and was determined to root out corruption in the country. He said that during the previous UPA regime, a scandal used to break out almost every day. He accused the Opposition of divisive politics to divide the society for its political gains. But, Mr Modi believed in development politics to ensure development of all sections of society.

In RTI reply, SBI refuses to share info on its bond rules

AGE CORRESPONDENT
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

After providing a substantial information to the Supreme Court on the "electoral bonds" (EB), the State Bank of India (SBI) refused to disclose its standard operating procedure for the sale and redemption of the EBs that were issued to its authorised branches, citing the exemption given under "commercial confidence", to a Right to Information (RTI) activist. The RTI response from the SBI was sent within weeks of the SC admon-

ishing the bank for the non-disclosure of the unique alphanumeric numbers of the bonds in compliance with its directions. The court said its order required the disclosure, specifically of all details of the bonds, including the names of the purchaser, the amounts and the dates of purchase. In an application filed under the RTI Act, transparency activist Anjali Bhardwaj had sought the details of the standard operating procedure issued to the SBI's authorised branches on the sale and redemption of the electoral bonds. The ministry move came after reviewing and assessment of the inputs provided by the intelligence agencies which cited potential threats to them following their entry into the BJP, the sources said. They also said that the CRPF security cover to them, as accorded, would be available to them within the territory of Punjab. Mr Rinku, a former AAP member of Lok Sabha, and Mr Angural, an MLA, recently joined the BJP. Mr Rinku's inclusion in the BJP's list of six LS candidates for Punjab, with a nomination from the Jalandhar reserved seat, further fortified his position within the party ranks in the state.

SHORT TAKES

BJP MP likely to quit party in Maha

Mumbai: BJP, which has seen leaders from other parties making a beeline for joining it, is likely to receive a blow in Maharashtra as its sitting MP from Jalgaon Umesh Patil is likely to quit the party and join the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena. Mr Patil, who is disgruntled over being denied a ticket by the saffron party from Jalgaon, met Mr Thackeray at his residence in Mumbai and is all set to switch his loyalties to Shiv Sena (UBT) on Wednesday. In a surprise decision, the BJP denied a ticket to Mr Patil for the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls and replaced him with Ms Smita Wagh from the Jalgaon seat. Earlier in the day, Mr Patil met senior Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut, which sparked the speculations of him quitting the BJP. After meeting Mr Raut, he said, "All your questions will be answered in detail, but today is not the appropriate day for it."

Govt: China's renaming of AP sites 'senseless'

Continued from Page 1 reports said, adding that the ministry also included detailed latitude and longitude and a high-resolution map. "In accordance with the relevant provisions of the State Council [China's Cabinet] on the management of geographical names, we in conjunction with the relevant departments have standardised some of the geographical names in Zangnan of China," the newspaper quoted the ministry as saying. Beijing released the first list of the so-called standardised names of six places in Arunachal Pradesh in 2017, the second list of 15 places in 2021 followed by another list with names for 11 places in 2023, the reports added. Last month, the two sides had also been involved in a war of words after India lashed out at China over its "absurd" claims over Arunachal Pradesh, in another sign that ties between the two nations remain strained. Soon after, India again lashed out at China, with MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal stating that Beijing can repeat such "baseless claims" over Arunachal "as many times as it wants" but that "it will not change India's position that Arunachal was, is and will always remain an integral and inalienable part of India". Last week, the two sides held the "29th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation & Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC)" in Beijing, at which no breakthrough was reported even after several rounds of talks, both at the military and diplomatic level. This comes even as Chinese troops have yet to pull back from all of the friction points in the Ladakh sector to the north, where they had amassed four years ago in violation of border pacts with India.

Tit-for-tat! Sarma seeks renaming of 60 Tibet sites

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, APRIL 2

Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday suggested that India should rename 60 places in "China occupied Tibet" in response to Beijing's self-style map renaming 30 places in the frontier state of Arunachal Pradesh.

It is significant that India has firmly rejected "senseless attempts" by China to rename places in Arunachal.

Mr Sarma, who was in eastern Assam's Karbi Anglong for election campaign, told reporters, "My request to the government of India is that we should give 60 geographical names for the Tibetan area of China. It should be always tit for tat, but I do not want to comment because it is a policy decision of the government of India, but if they name 30, we should name 60."

Bogged down by frequent remarks, Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu has also defined it as another gimmick from China. "Being a proud citizen of Bharat and a native of Arunachal Pradesh, I strongly condemn this act of naming places within Arunachal Pradesh which has been an inalienable integral part of India. Proud citizens and patriots of



Himanta Biswa Sarma

IT IS significant that India has firmly rejected "senseless attempts" by China to rename places in Arunachal

Arunachal Pradesh are rejecting such antics, Mr Khandu said in his social media post.

Minister of earth sciences and food processing industries Kiren Rijiju, who seeks to retain the Arunachal West parliamentary constituency that goes to the polls on April 19, also condemned China's "illegally standardised geographical names" in his home state.

He said, "China has been making all baseless claims but that's not going to change the ground reality and the historical facts. Arunachal Pradesh is an inalienable part of India and people of Arunachal Pradesh are supremely patriotic Indians by all standards and definitions."

Talks to end dispute with China will go on: Rajnath

PAWAN BALI NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

With India-China stand-off in Ladakh completing four years, Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday said while troops are standing firm, "the ongoing talks for peaceful resolution will continue and disengagement and de-escalation, is the way forward."

Mr Singh on Tuesday addressed Indian Army's top leadership at the Army Commanders' Conference in the national capital.

He reaffirmed the faith of the billion-plus countrymen in the Indian Army as one of the most trusted and inspiring organisations in the country. He highlighted the stellar role played by the Army in guarding borders and fighting terrorism apart from providing assistance to the civil administration in need of help.

Mr Singh complimented the efforts of BRO, which has led to the quantum



Defence minister Rajnath Singh during the Army Commanders' Conference in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

improvement of road communication in the borders; both western and northern, while working under difficult conditions.

Referring to the situation along the Western borders with Pakistan, he complimented the Indian Army's response to cross border terrorism, however the proxy war by the adversary continues.

"I compliment the excellent synergy between the Central Armed Police Forces, police forces and

1st batch of 60 workers to leave for Israel soon

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

The first batch of over 60 Indian construction workers will be heading out to Israel under a "Government to Government" Agreement (G2G) between the two countries, Israeli Ambassador Naor Gilon said on Tuesday.

New Delhi had said last month that a G2G between the two sides "is still in the works".

Media reports indicated that Israel might be looking to hire about one lakh Indians in the construction sector to replace Palestinian workers following the outbreak of Gaza conflict six months ago. According to media reports, about 80,000 Palestinians used to work in the Israeli construction industry.

India and Israel were discussing a bilateral framework for mobility of people since last year in the "care-giver and construction" sectors but this was described by New Delhi earlier as a long-term initiative.

"Today we had a farewell event from the first batch of over 60 (in number of) Indian construction workers going to Israel under the G2G agreement," the Israeli envoy said in a post on social media platform X.

Families of Indians tricked to join Russian Army seek help

'Being a mother herself, Prez Murmu can feel pain and help me out'

YUSUF JAMEEL POSHAWAN (PULWAMA), APRIL 2

Raja Banoo continues to be in a state of despair and shock. For the past twelve weeks, she lives in constant fear that any moment someone will call the family to say that something awful has happened to her son Aazad Yusuf Kumar.

Mr Aazad (32) is among over thirty Indian nationals who have allegedly been duped to fight against Ukraine alongside the Russian army. Their families have claimed they were lured by a YouTube video posted by a Dubai-based recruiting agent Faisal Khan that charged them huge amounts on the pretext of getting them

jobs as "helpers" in the Russian army and promised them a lucrative salary ranging from ₹200,000 to ₹300,000 and permanent residency in Russia after six months.

Before any serious, bad, or life-altering news reaches the family, Ms Banoo and other members want President Droupadi Murmu to step in and help them out. "Being a mother herself, she alone can feel my pain," she said, sitting with her sister-in-law on the carpeted floor in the corner of a dark room of their picturesque village house located on a slope, about 25-km east of Pulwama town.

Ms Banoo's elder son Sajad Ahmad told this newspaper, "She (President Murmu) is our

MR AAZAD (32) is among over thirty Indian nationals who have allegedly been duped to fight against Ukraine alongside the Russian army

last hope. She can use her reach of influence to bring Aazad and others who have come under the clutches of death back unharmed."

"Instead, they were pushed in the jaws of death in the Russian-Ukraine war zone. Aazad is in a group of five Indians - four others being from Karnataka - who are currently deployed somewhere close to the Ukraine border and have been asked to be ready to fight," Mr Ahmad added.

In his last voice message to the family, Mr Aazad said three in the group received some papers last week indicating they might be sent home soon. "He said that he is not the one among them and, once again, requested us to do something to get him out of there before it is too late," Mr Ahmad said.

In an earlier message received by Mr Ahmad on his mobile phone, Mr Aazad had said, "We are stuck up here on the Ukraine border. We came to Russia to work as helpers, but we have been duped to serve in the Russian army forcibly."

Among over thirty Indians duped by the recruiting agency, two including Mr Aazad are residents of J&K.

Permanent UNSC seat for India inevitable, says EAM

Rajkot, April 2: External affairs minister S. Jaishankar on Tuesday expressed optimism about India's eventual permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), saying it is inevitable but emphasised the need for heightened efforts in this regard.

Addressing intellectuals in Gujarat's Rajkot city, the external affairs minister stressed that diligent work is essential to secure this coveted position. Acknowledging the current dominance of five nations — China, France, Russia, the UK, and the US — as the UN's original permanent members, the minister, however, said the international momentum was now favouring India's bid for a permanent seat.

The UN was formed around 80 years ago, and these five nations decided among themselves to become permanent members of its security council, Mr Jaishankar said.

He highlighted the historical context of the UNSC's formation, where five nations secured permanent membership, underscoring the evolving global landscape with 193



External affairs minister S. Jaishankar at a press conference before an interaction with intellectuals in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. — PTI

countries today. "But these five nations have kept their control, and it is strange that you have to ask them to give us their consent for a change. A few agree, a few put forward their position with honesty, while others do something from behind," he said. — PTI

Sonia to enter RS, Vaishnav, Murugan to serve another term Manmohan, 53 MPs retiring from RS

New Delhi, April 2: As many as 54 members of the Rajya Sabha including former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and nine Union ministers are set to retire on Tuesday and Wednesday respectively, with some not returning to the Upper House.

Former PM Singh ends his 33-year-long parliamentary inings in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday (April 3), just as former party chief Sonia Gandhi will enter the Rajya Sabha for the first time.

Mr Singh, who is known for ushering in several bold reforms in the economy, became a member of the House for the first time in October 1991. He was the finance minister in the Narasimha Rao government from 1991 to 1996 and the Prime Minister from 2004 to 2014.

Mrs Gandhi will enter the Upper House for the first time from Rajasthan, filling the seat that will fall vacant after 91-year-old Singh completes his tenure on April 3.

Seven Union ministers — education minister Dharmendra Pradhan, health minister Mansukh Mandaviya, animal husbandry and fisheries minister Purshottam Rupala, information technology minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar, MoS external affairs V. Muraleedharan, micro, small and medium enterprises minister Narayan Rane and MoS information and broadcasting L. Murugan end their tenure in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday.

Environment minister Bhupendra Yadav and railway minister Ashwini Vaishnav will end their tenure on Wednesday.

All these Union ministers, except Mr Vaishnav, are contesting the Lok Sabha elections and have not been given another term in the Upper House. Mr Vaishnav and Mr Murugan have been given another RS term.

As many as 49 members are retiring on Tuesday (April 2), while five are retiring on Wednesday (April 3). — PTI

Sanjay Singh gets bail in excise case

Continued from Page 1 all will be fixed by the special court, the top court said.

Additional solicitor-general S.V. Raju, appearing for the ED, said he has taken instructions from the probe agency and has no objections if Mr Singh is enlarged on bail.

"I am making the statement without going into the merits of the case and keeping all the rights and contentions open," Mr Raju said.

Taking note of Mr Raju's statement, the bench ordered, "The ASG states they have no objections if Mr Singh is released on bail in proceedings arising out of the FIR... In view of the statement made, we allow the present appeal and direct that Mr Singh be released on bail during the pendency of trial on terms and conditions set by the trial court."

The top court clarified that the concession of bail granted to Mr Singh will not be treated as "precedent". In view of the clarification by the bench, the bail order in favour of Mr Singh may not be of much consequence to other jailed AAP leaders, including Mr Kejriwal.

During the hearing Mr Singh's plea for bail and an appeal challenging his arrest and remand in the money laundering case, the bench told Mr Raju that no money has been recovered from his possession and the ₹2 crores bribe allegations can be tested in the trial.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, representing Mr Singh at the Supreme Court hearing, said the AAP leader was arrested

on the basis of approver Dinesh Arora, who named him in his tenth statement.

The ED had arrested Mr Singh on October 4 last year.

Earlier, Mr Singh had sought bail from the Delhi high court on the grounds that he has been in custody for over three months and no role has been attributed to him in the predicate offence.

The probe agency had in the high court opposed the bail plea and claimed that Mr Singh was involved in acquiring, possessing, concealing, dissipating and using proceeds of the crime generated from the Delhi liquor scam pertaining to the policy period of 2021-22.

The agency had further claimed that the AAP leader has gained illegal money or kickbacks, which are proceeds of crime generated from the 2021-22 liquor policy scam and that he has also played a role in conspiracy with others.

The ED's money laundering case stems from a CBI FIR. According to the CBI and the ED, irregularities were committed while modifying the now-scrapped Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22 and undue favours were extended to licence holders.

Celebrations erupted at Mr Singh's residence as his family members and supporters distributed sweets among people.

Reacting to the development, Mr Singh's wife Anita Singh said the happiness is incomplete with three of her "brothers" — Mr Kejriwal, Mr Sisodia and Satyendar Jain — still behind bars.

Describing her husband's bail as the "victory of truth", she said the AAP will celebrate when all its leaders are cleared in the case.

Welcoming the apex court decision to enlarge Mr Singh on bail, the AAP leaders, in a joint press conference, claimed that the court order "exposed" that the entire liquor scam case was based on statements "extorted" from witnesses and approvers.

"This is a big day for democracy in the country and a moment of happiness and hope," Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said in the press conference.

Atishi, also a Cabinet minister in the Delhi government, said that for two years the AAP leaders have been targeted in fake cases and arrested.

"In the court proceedings, two important things have come before the people — ED had no response when the Supreme Court asked where is the money trail and the entire ED case is based on approvers' statements who were pressured to give statements against Mr Kejriwal," she said.

Reacting to the AAP claiming bail for Mr Singh is a "clean chit to him", the BJP hit back by saying that by that logic, the party has accepted that Mr Kejriwal is the "kingpin of the scam".

Addressing a press conference, BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonwalla said that with the Supreme Court granting bail to Mr Singh in the case, the AAP now has no right to claim that the action of Central probe agencies against its leaders is "vendetta politics".

'Govt wants to arrest me'

Continued from Page 1 the coming days. "We are Mr Kejriwal's soldiers, we won't be cowed down by the BJP's threats."

Ms Atishi referred to the ED's submission in court that Mr Kejriwal had said AAP's former communication boss Vijay Nair reported to her and Mr Bharadwaj. "This information is already in the ED and the CBI chargesheets. It is possible that the ED took our names so that they can proceed to arrest the second line of the AAP leadership," she said.

The BJP junked the AAP leader's allegations as "baseless." Party leader R.P. Singh said: "I too can say that Saurabh Bharadwaj called me up and requested me to protect them from Mr Kejriwal, who wants to put them behind bars and make Ms Kejriwal the chief minister of Delhi."

The BJP leader said: "The truth is that action will be taken against all whose names are involved in the matter. It is clear that the fight for the CM post has begun in the AAP. Mr Bharadwaj and Ms Atishi are on one side and Ms Kejriwal and her jailed husband are on the other."

A day after Mr Kejriwal was remanded to judicial custody in Tihar prison, the AAP legislators told his wife that 2-crore people of Delhi stand with the chief minister and he should not resign at any cost. Of the 62 AAP MLAs in Delhi, 55 were present during the meeting at the CM's residence. Four MLAs are out of station, while three — Mr Kejriwal, Mr Sisodia and Mr Jain — are in jail.

Asserting that the MLAs wanted to meet Ms Kejriwal soon after the CM's arrest, Mr Bharadwaj said the meeting was delayed due to the party's protests against the arrest of the Delhi CM and the Opposition INDIA bloc's rally at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan.

After the AAP ministers and legislators, the party corporators also met Ms Kejriwal in the evening. The legislators and corporators urged her to communicate to Mr Kejriwal their message that he should keep running the government from behind bars without tendering his resignation.

The BJP, however, questioned Mr Kejriwal's continuation in office while being behind bars. The party said the people of the national capital deserve a better chief minister who can provide an honest and transparent government.

BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia accused Mr Kejriwal of "double standards", noting that he took resignations from Mr Sisodia and Mr Jain but has refused to resign following his arrest in the excise case. It is also a case of constitutional morality, Mr Bhatia told the media, wondering how he can discharge his constitutional responsibilities from behind bars.

Corrupt joining forces to halt action against graft, says PM

Continued from Page 1 farmers and to provide tap water to every household... But the Congress and its INDIA bloc are fighting the elections not for the country but for their own selfish motives," he said.

The Prime Minister noted that the ensuing general election is the first election in which family-based parties are holding rally after rally to save their families. "This is the first election in which all corrupt people are rallying together to stop action on corruption. I say remove corruption, they say save the corrupt," he said.

The PM's remarks came days after the INDIA bloc held a rally in New Delhi to protest against the arrest of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case.

"The Congress people have started showing their dangerous intentions. This election is important to save the country's future and to make the lives of future generations prosperous," Mr Modi said, adding that he was not born to have fun but to work hard for the welfare of the country.

The Prime Minister pointed out that this Lok Saha election is not a normal election but an election of the resolve for the development of India, making it the third largest economy in the world.

The Prime Minister highlighted his government's decisions, like the abrogation of Article 370, the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and a law on triple talaq.

"When I talk about the development of India and when I take action against corruption, people from the Congress and INDIA bloc abuse Modi," he said.

The Prime Minister said that the BJP takes the pledge of 'nation first', while the Congress party is looking for an opportunity to loot the country.

Mr Modi alleged that the Congress party is being seen as the root cause of every problem in the country.

"There was poverty in the country because of the Congress. The party did not allow the Army to be self-reliant. During the time of the Congress, India was known as the world's largest arms importer. Today, it is an arms exporter. The country has exported defence goods worth ₹21,000 crores. India sells Made in India weapons to more than 80 countries," he said.

Earlier in the day, addressing his first election rally in Uttarakhand's Rudrapur, Mr Modi said that he was being threatened and abused by the corrupt, but there will be even bigger action against corruption after his re-election.

"The Congress and INDIA have made their intentions clear. The Congress's royal family 'shehzada' (prince) has threatened there will be fire if Modi gets another term in office. Staying out of power has made them so desperate that they are now talking about setting the country on fire. Will you let them do it? Is this the kind of language used in a democracy? Will you not punish them?" Mr Modi asked.

THE ASIAN AGE

3 APRIL 2024

Probe agencies need to heed advice by CJI

The observation that Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud has made about Central investigative agencies spreading themselves too thin and his suggestion to them to choose their battles carefully, focus on cases that threaten national security, public order and the economic health of the country in preference to all others, could not have come at a more appropriate time.

This is not the first time that a member of the judiciary who has the opportunity to take a close look at the way the Central investigative agencies function has made an observation on the subject. In the last decade, the Supreme Court famously called the CBI “a caged parrot”, doing only what its master, the Union government, wants it to do.

The CBI has been acknowledged the world over as a professional criminal investigation organisation. Efforts have been made to keep it that way. The judiciary has interceded to ensure transparency in the selection of the head of the CBI and ensured that the appointee gets a minimum tenure. This is so that the leadership stays the course of a case and takes the team along. However, things have not changed much in the last one decade. The agency is still accused of doing the bidding of the party in power at the Centre.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED), the specialised professional agency mandated to chase black money and proceeds of crime, has, of late, transformed itself to an anti-corruption body. It dashes to states run by the Opposition parties and investigates cases against their leaders with a vigour not seen in officials originally looking into the principal offence. We do not hear much about the ED unearthing the money stashed away by drug mafia dons or even chasing them despite huge hauls of drugs in different parts of the country. But we do hear about its arrest of a minister or even a chief minister.

In many of these cases, investigations into allegations of corruption may have reached nowhere, but the ED is there, incarcerating people, with the Prevention of Money Laundering Act making the grant of bail next to impossible. People languish in jail while the agency with its poor record of conviction moves on to its next target.

The income tax department has temporarily stopped its action against political parties, even digging up decades-old cases, till the elections are over. A professional agency should be allowed to go ahead with its work unhindered, irrespective of the political climate, but it came to the apex court the other day with a suo motu suggestion of this “ceasefire”, knowing full well that its enthusiasm in the face of the Lok Sabha elections would not get the welcome in the court and in the minds of the people.

The Chief Justice was mindful of the difficult job the agencies do and hence his timely reminder about the need to strike a balance between administrative imperatives and the individual's right to privacy as much as that between the due process of law and effective functioning. It may be a tough call to go the path the CJI has prescribed, but it is here that the agencies can demonstrate the professional excellence that they are reported to be examples of.

Fears rise after Damascus strike

In the wake of deadly escalation of tensions over the Gaza war thanks to Israel's adventurism this week that goes beyond all the measures undertaken for its security after being struck by Hamas on October 7, 2023, the threat of a wider Middle Eastern conflict has grown manifold.

The Israeli missile strike that killed the top commander of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards, the highest-ranking soldier killed since the US assassination of Gen. Qassem Soleimani four years ago, and a couple of senior commanders inside a building owned by the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria, has elicited dire warnings of revenge from Iran.

A rise in proxy attacks is predictable, but the greater risk is of Iran deciding to take a direct hand in any of the goings-on in the region around the Gaza war and across the Israel border where the militant group Hezbollah and others have aimed missile and rocket, while the Houthis have been targeting commercial and western military vessels in the Red Sea.

Iran is being blamed by Israel and the US as the main initiator of trouble through proxies in four countries in the region, but there is no denying that Israeli actions, especially in Gaza, and which are seen as a disproportionate response to the Hamas attack, have been adding friction freely to the Middle Eastern cauldron.

The UN's call for a ceasefire in Gaza, supposedly binding legally, is not worth the paper it was typed on as Israeli airstrikes have reportedly killed foreign aid workers and their Palestinian driver after the group that they belonged to brought a shipload of food aid to the war-torn Gaza Strip where much of the population is said to be on the brink of starvation.

The senselessness of war has never been more acutely brought out than by such mishaps of indiscriminate killing as missiles fly into areas already ravaged. Add nearly 33,000 Palestinian deaths, including of children, to around 2,000 Israeli deaths and the question is well worth asking of where it is all heading.

Will Israel see reason, at least on realising that its objective of completely destroying Hamas is not achievable, or be reined in by the US and brought to the table to talk of a ceasefire in Gaza first?

THE ASIAN AGE

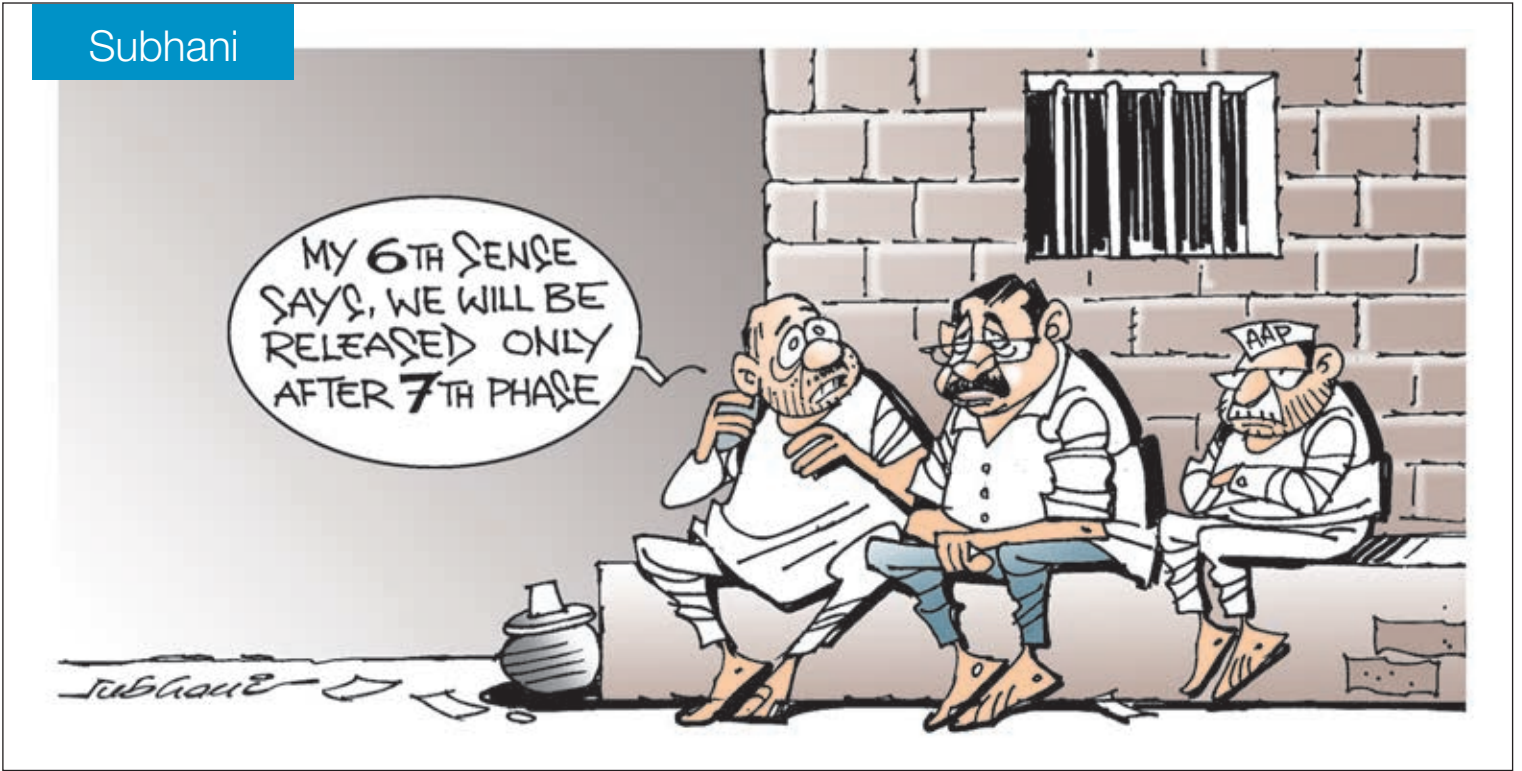
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Subhani



Unlike Gujarat, Modi isn't a 'Sardar' in Maharashtra



Sunil Gatade

The roping in of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena leader Raj Thackeray by the BJP in Maharashtra is a clear signal that Brand Modi has further diminished ahead of the Lok Sabha polls and that the strategy of Union home minister Amit Shah is floundering in the land of Chhatrapati Shivaji. No one still knows what the role of Raj might be in the BJP's scheme of things in the state.

It also shows that the Modi-Shah duo will need to have strength and stamina when confronted with pugacious regional leaders like Uddhav Thackeray and Sharad Pawar, who have the will and the determination to fight long haul despite huge setbacks.

The “scorched earth” policy followed by Modi-Shah in the premier state by engineering splits in both the Shiv Sena and the NCP was believed to be an elixir for the BJP that would make the Opposition not only inactive but dead.

The reverse has happened. Like in the 17th century after the death of Shivaji and the capture and killing of his son Sambhaji by deceit, the Mughals thought the Deccan had fallen. However, the resistance put up by the Sardars of Shivaji, like Santaji Ghorpade and Dhanaji Jadhav, forced Aurangzeb to come to the South. The rest is history.

As the BJP is making a determined push for deep inroads in Marathas, mark the pleas and propaganda of Uddhav and Pawar. “Maharashtra has never bowed before the rulers of Delhi.” The Congress has moved silently in Kolhapur with

their aid and advice and made Shahu Maharaj, one of the direct descendants of the great Maratha warrior, its candidate. Local BJP leaders perceive it as the first Opposition victory even before the general election.

Maharashtra's topography, terrain and temperament are different. The marginalisation of senior leaders like Nitin Gadkari by the Modi-Shah duo is not just an internal affair of the BJP. It is bound to have equal and opposite reactions in boosting the Opposition in Vidarbha, the home turf of Mr Gadkari as well as deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis.

Some may not know that Uddhav Thackeray is an ardent admirer of Mamata Banerjee, who had been instrumental in ousting the entrenched Left Front from power in West Bengal some 15 years back. He knows that there is no shortcut to success and the more one shows one's street fighting skills, the more one shines.

Despite the denials from the BJP high command, the consistent talk by some of its supporters and sympathisers on changing the Constitution is also likely to have an impact on the fortunes of the BJP and its allies. Dr B.R. Ambedkar is a great son of Maharashtra and any talk of tampering with the Constitution is tantamount to sacrilege for his immense army of followers.

In 2004, one of the factors that went against the Atal Behari Vajpayee government and the ruling BJP was the setting up of the Constitution Review Committee headed by former Chief Justice M.N. Venkatchaliah. It was exploited to the hilt by the Congress as well as Sharad Pawar as an attack on the

The Modi-Shah duo is not getting a hang of the political situation in the state, which has 48 Lok Sabha seats, next only to the most crucial state of Uttar Pradesh, which has 80

architect of the Indian Constitution.

Ambedkar's grandson Prakash Ambedkar of the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi is politically a slippery customer in these Lok Sabha polls for the Opposition. Still, he is insistent that what the BJP and RSS are up to is the dismantling and destruction of the Constitution to bring in an East India Company of a different kind where corporates would call the shots.

Undoubtedly, it is a fact that Mr Modi was instrumental in the BJP leaping from the Number 4 spot to Number 1 in Maharashtra ten years back when he brought the saffron party to the centre-stage of national politics virtually singlehandedly. By splitting the Shiv Sena and the NCP, he has made it a six-cornered race from four-cornered one.

But the tragedy is that the BJP stock has been coming down gradually and it has failed to generate the chemistry that can make it the dominant party in the state, a position held by the Congress some three decades back. After securing 122 seats in the 288-member Maharashtra Assembly in 2014, it came down to 105 in 2019 though it has maintained the dominant position in the Lok Sabha along with the allies.

One must realise that the move to rope in of Raj has gained momentum after the Opposition's mega show at Shivaji Park in Mumbai where the INDIA bloc showed that it is more than alive and kicking and also that Maharashtra could offer stiff resistance

to the BJP. The Modi-Shah duo is not getting a hang of the political situation in the state, which has 48 Lok Sabha seats, next only to the most crucial state of Uttar Pradesh, which has 80. So, they are trying various permutations and combinations to come up with the winner.

The issue is that the BJP wants to benefit from its allies, but does not want to give anything back in return. Several leaders of the allies have been “purified” by virtually exonerating them from charges of financial irregularities by bringing them to the ruling side — that is the unspoken argument of the BJP. Therefore, it feels that friendly parties should stay content with what they get and should not show unhappiness. This has created bad blood among the allies.

As a political commentator put it aptly, the allies of the BJP might have got a sizable share of power through the rebellion in their respective parties, but they are finding it difficult to sustain this at the negotiating table. The Big Brother is chewing the juice out of them.

Right or wrong, the BJP's rise in Gujarat was by painting the Congress as pro-Muslim, consistently and effectively for more than a quarter of a century. Though he projects himself as the sole representative of seven crore Gujaratis, Mr Modi has mainly been a “chowkidar” of the majority community.

The ethos of Maharashtra is different from that of Gujarat and the work of social reformers like Jyotiba Phule, Shahu Maharaj and Dr Ambedkar and the path set by Shivaji is making the BJP wonder how to dominate it. It is wooing the Marathas in a big way while not upsetting its OBC vote bank. It is a tightrope walk and only a perfect balance can make it click. It looks like a tall order at the moment.

The writer is a journalist based in New Delhi

LETTERS

NEED WILDLIFE POLICY

Human-animal conflicts have seen a steep rise in the past few months all over the nation. Earlier, wild animals were just spotted but now they have begun attacking humans as is reported in Wazirabad where the leopard entered a human dwelling and injured five people. In the South elephants have been attacking and killing humans. Loss of habitat could be the reasons for wild animals venturing into human territory. Lack of prey could be another. So far the authorities have not taken any serious steps to reduce these conflicts. A broad national policy is needed to ensure such conflicts do not spread. Relocation of animals could be one possible solution.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

UNTOUCHABILITY EXISTS

CASTE IS a reality in India. One in four Indians (27 per cent respondents across India) says that she or he follows the practice of untouchability in daily life (the 2011-12 India Human Development Survey). Given higher castes dominate powerful positions in our country, how could such a person select a candidate or a student from a backward caste for his company or college? The vulnerability of backward castes in our society demands positive discrimination like reservation in their favour in proportion to their population just like footpaths should be reserved for vulnerable pedestrians.

Sujit De
Kolkata

HOMO DIGITALIS

EVEN THOUGH there is a lot of life on Earth, only humans have made new discoveries and innovations. But if AI, machine learning and other advancements continue at their current rate, we too will perish, just like our ancestors. The likely heir, *Homo digitalis*, would be superior to *Homo sapiens* in a number of ways. Unlike humans, all robots can be taught with a single click of the update or feed button through the co-learning method. The digital entities would also not have forgetfulness, would hardly be tired and would never be held back by emotional backlog.

Arka Goswami
Durgapur

Farrukh Dhondy



Sobhraj claims he didn't kill anyone: The many ways I know it's not true

Britain's Channel Four TV recently ran a three-part documentary featuring an extensive interview with Charles Sobhraj in Paris with two former detectives and a psychoanalyst questioning him. Late last year Sobhraj had been released from Kathmandu jail after serving 19 years for two murders he committed in Nepal some 25 years before he was convicted. Throughout the three-hour documentary, Sobhraj kept protesting he never murdered a single person. The detectives weren't convinced.

I watched the series diligently as I first met Charles Sobhraj in 1997 when he was released from Delhi's Tihar Jail, where he had served 20 years, and approached me in this same Channel Four, where I worked as a commissioning editor at the time. He struck up an association with me and attempted to involve me in all manner of schemes. My acquaintance with him resulted in my writing two books — one a fictionalised novel *The Bikini Murders* and recently a factual memoir of my interaction with Sobhraj. This involved my roundabout introduction of him to the CIA, to (former UK Prime Minister) Boris Johnson, to an Indian minister when Sobhraj called me to claim he could intervene in the 1999 Indian Airlines hostage saga. The memoir titled *Hawk and Hyena* includes incidents such as his attempting to involve me in arms deals that he was doing with terrorist groups.

Sobhraj's claims of innocence rely on the fact that, though he was imprisoned pending trial for perhaps eleven of these murders in Thailand, he

was never tried in a court of law or convicted as he bribed his way out of detention and escaped before the trials which would have inevitably resulted in his execution. Innocent until proved guilty? Or guilty, and so on the run?

And the Nepal “life” convictions? Why did he venture to Kathmandu when he knew he was wanted for two murders there? In *Hawk and Hyena*, I feel sure I have explained his confident and yet culpable venture. I even admit to being peripherally involved in his nonchalance. He felt he could venture there with impunity, was “betrayed” and convicted of both murders on flimsy evidence — the memories of policemen 25 years earlier — which in my non-legal, humble opinion would not stand up in, say, a UK court.

So, no convictions in Thailand as he was ever tried and unconvincing convictions in the Nepalese courts.

Is Sobhraj entitled to claim he never killed anyone? Innocent until proved guilty by an acceptably reliable process of law?

No, he isn't. Let me count the ways? From 1977 Sobhraj was in Tihar Jail for poisoning a group of French tourists, intending to rob them.

The journalists Richard Neville and Julie Clarke interviewed him and recorded in *Shadow of the Cobra* his confessions to eleven murders in Thailand which, he much later, retracted.

Escaping through bribery from a Thai jail, he arrived in India with his girlfriend and was subsequently arrested for poisoning a group of

French tourists. He discovered that if he spent 20 years in jail in India, the statute of limitations in Thai law would erase his murder conviction. He convinced to do exactly that.

In Delhi, he was to serve 12 years on the poisoning charge. He needed eight more. He contrived to get these by staging an escape, staging a re-capture and being sentenced for jailbreak. At the time the Indian press — and even a stupid Bollywood film — bought his story of drugging the jail warders with sleeping pills concealed in Indian sweets and escaping while they all dozed off. The story was bovine excreta as he confessed to me. The truth was he heavily bribed the gatekeeper warders of Tihar, who used the sleeping pill device to escape being disciplined for letting him out.

After a two-week holiday in Goa, he summoned a police accomplice to Goa to fortuitously “recognise” and arrest him. I recall his boasts about fooling the Indian media in *Hawk and Hyena*.

Sobhraj never confessed to a single murder during our acquaintance. Once he remarked when we discussed a corpse found in a hotel room: “That fellow deserved to die! He was a drug addict.”

I think I asked: “So that entitled you to kill him with an overdose?”

The most revealing slip of the tongue occurred when Sobhraj wanted a film written about his exploits. “Faa-ook, I give you carte blanche, write what you like...”

I asked my friend Shekhar Kapur if he was

interested. He was. He asked if he could meet Sobhraj and proposed inviting him to his house in London. I said that was not a good idea and we called him instead to a picnic in summery Holland Park.

The film synopsis I wrote, to attract financial sponsors, began with: “There is a serial killer on the loose. Charles Sobhraj has murdered perhaps 52 victims...”

Charles came with his then girlfriend to Holland Park. Shekhar brought my two-page synopsis with him and Sobhraj asked if he could see it.

I said he must remember that he gave me “carte blanche” to write what would sell. Sobhraj agreed that was the deal and he wouldn't say anything. But when he was handed the proposal and read it, he said: “Faa-ook, where you get this 52? That's an exaggeration, isn't it?”

Was that an admission? Should it have been 51? 37? Just 13? Was “exaggeration” the unwitting word that gave the game away?

Sobhraj now threatens to sue every documentary, TV serial, drama series and book that portrays him as a serial killer. He has threatened to sue Netflix, the BBC, Channel Four and others, including myself. I think Netflix and the others have said: “Bring it on... see you in court”.

Yes, we are all Spartacus.

Writer-playwright Farrukh Dhondy is a former commissioning editor of Britain's Channel Four TV and the author, most recently, of *Hawk and Hyena*



SHORT TAKES

TURKEY BUILDING BLAZE DEATH TOLL RISES TO 29

Istanbul, April 2: A fire killed at least 29 people in a 16-storey residential building in Istanbul on Tuesday, the governor of Turkey's capital said. "The number of people who lost their lives in the fire... in Gayrettepe of Besiktas district has increased to 29," governor Davut Gul's office said. "One person hurt in the fire was still being treated in hospital," it added. The blaze had broken out during construction work in the first and second floors below ground, which housed a nightclub, Gul told reporters.

EGYPTIAN PREZ SISI SWORN IN FOR THIRD TERM

Cairo, April 2: Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi was sworn in Tuesday for his third term as leader of the Arab world's most populous nation. In power for the past decade, the 69-year-old former Army chief is set to remain President until 2030. Speaking before Parliament, Sisi vowed to "remain faithful to my work, my eyes seeing only your interests and this country's". As Egypt has battled a deep economic crisis with the help of billions in overseas loans and investments, he pledged "to realise the aspirations of the Egyptian nation."

SENEGAL SWEARS IN FORMER OPPN FIGURE AS PREZ

Dakar, April 2: Senegal inaugurated Bassirou Diomaye Faye as its new President on Tuesday, completing the previously little-known opposition figure's dramatic ascent from prison to the palace in recent weeks. Faye was released from prison less than two weeks before the March 24 election, along with popular opposition figure and mentor Ousmane Sonko, following a political amnesty announced by outgoing President Macky Sall. It is the former tax inspector's first time in elected office. "It's the culmination of a long struggle for democracy."

12 KILLED, 15 MISSING IN SOUTH SUDAN ATTACK

Juba, April 2: Youths attacked a village in eastern South Sudan and shot dead at least 12 people while 15 children are missing, officials said on Tuesday, as local conflicts continued to increase ahead of elections late this year. A civil war from 2013-18 caused hundreds of thousands of deaths and although the main belligerents have since been at peace, clashes continue among armed groups. Activists believe the recent rise in violence is at least partly connected to the elections to choose leaders to succeed the present transitional government.

CONGO APPOINTS ITS FIRST FEMALE PRIME MINISTER

Kinshasa, April 2: Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi on Monday appointed the country's first female Prime Minister, fulfilling a campaign promise and taking an important step toward the formation of a new government after his reelection last year. Former planning minister Judith Suminwa Tuluka will step into the role at a time of worsening violence in the country's mineral-rich east, which borders Rwanda. The long-running conflict has displaced more than 7 million people according to the United Nations.

INTERMEDIATE MISSILE FIRED BY NORTH: SEOUL

Seoul, April 2: North Korea on Tuesday test-fired a suspected intermediate-range ballistic missile toward waters off its eastern coast, South Korea said, adding to a series of weapons demonstrations that have raised tensions in the region. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the missile was launched from an area near the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, but it did not immediately confirm how far the weapon flew. The North had said last month that it tested a solid-fuel engine for its new-type intermediate-range hypersonic missile.

1 child killed, 2 hurt in Finland school shooting

Helsinki, April 2: One child was killed and two seriously wounded in a shooting at a school outside the Finnish capital on Tuesday, police said, with a 12-year-old fellow pupil suspected of the attack taken into custody. The arrest of the boy was made without further violence in the Helsinki suburb of Siltamaki, 4 km (2.5 miles) south of the Viertola school in Vantaa district, police said. Education minister Anna-Maja Henriksson broke into tears when speaking to reporters hours after the attack in a country where gun violence among youths is rare. "One 12-year-old child will never again return home from school," she said. The suspect and the three victims were all sixth-graders, the police said in a statement. "The injuries of both victims who were taken to the hospital are very serious," said criminal commissioner Marko Sarkka. A national day of mourning will be observed on Wednesday, with government buildings flying the flag at half-mast, the interior ministry said. There were no other suspects, police said. They provided no details on the identity of the suspect or victims, apart from saying they were all 12-year-old Finns and pupils at the school and the suspect was a boy.

They were reunited outside the police barricade. Children had to leave their coats behind. Prime Minister Petteri Orpo said the shooting was deeply shocking. He encouraged parents to comfort their children and help alleviate any fears about further such attacks. "I want to tell children and young people all over Finland that the Finnish authorities and school staff are doing everything they can every day to prevent something like this from happening," Orpo said in a statement. The suspect had admitted the attack in a preliminary interview, police said, and the offences would be investigated as murder and attempted murder. No one has yet spoken on the suspect's behalf. He will be put in the care of social services because a child cannot be remanded in custody, police said. Police said the motive was not clear. The handgun's permit belonged to a relative of the suspect, they said. Video circulating on social media showed two police kneeling at the side of the suspected shooter who was lying face down on a sidewalk. — Reuters

Parents had to wait for three hours before they were able to collect their children, with lots of tears and hugs when they

Channel opens at site of US bridge collapse

Baltimore, New York, April 1: The US Coast Guard has opened a temporary, alternate channel for vessels involved in the clearing of debris at the site of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, part of a phased approach to opening the main channel leading to the vital port. The crew of 20 Indians and a Sri Lankan of the crippled container vessel that collided with a key Baltimore bridge last week is busy with their normal duties and will remain on board until the investigation into the accident is completed, the company that owns the vessel has said. The container vessel *Dali* collided with the 2.6-km-long four-lane Francis Scott Key Bridge over the Patapsco River in Baltimore in the early hours of March 26. The 984-foot cargo ship was bound for Colombo, Sri Lanka. Crews are undertaking the complicated work of removing steel and concrete at the site of the bridge's deadly collapse into the Patapsco River after a container ship lost power and crashed into a supporting column. On Sunday, dive teams surveyed parts of the bridge and checked the ship, and workers in lifts used torches to cut above-water portions of the twisted steel superstructure. Officials said the temporary channel is open only

to vessels that are helping with the cleanup effort. Authorities believe four workers plunged to their deaths in the collapse. Recovery of their bodies is a key part of the salvage operation. — Agencies

other areas of the country, the state weather forecasters said. The actual highest recorded temperature for the metropolis on Tuesday was 35.7°C, below the record of 38.6°C reached on May 17, 1915. Local officials across the main island of Luzon, the central islands, and the southern island of Mindanao suspended in-person classes or shortened school hours to avoid the hottest part of the day, education ministry officials said.

MERCURY RISING March, April, May driest months for swathes of the tropical country

Philippine schools suspend classes over heat

Manila, April 2: Hundreds of schools in the Philippines, including dozens in the capital Manila, suspended in-person classes on Tuesday due to dangerous levels of heat, education officials said. The country's heat index measures what a temperature feels like, taking into account humidity. The index was expected to reach the "danger" level of 42 degrees Celsius in Manila on Tuesday and 43°C on Wednesday, with similar levels in a dozen

7 workers killed, World Central Kitchen charity suspends ops

Cyprus: Ships with 240 tonnes of undelivered aid turn back from Gaza

Deir Al-Balah, Jerusalem, April 2: An apparent Israeli airstrike killed six international aid workers with the World Central Kitchen and their Palestinian driver, the charity said on Tuesday, in a potentially major setback to efforts to deliver aid by sea to Gaza, where Israel's offensive against Hamas has pushed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to the brink of starvation. The US, France and Britain led international criticism of the strike. US secretary of State Antony Blinken urged a "swift, impartial investigation" into the airstrike as Israel's PM Benjamin Netanyahu said the strike was "unintentional". French foreign minister Stephane Sejourne said "protecting humanitarian workers is a moral and legal imperative that everyone must adhere to. Nothing justifies such a tragedy." British foreign secretary David Cameron said the country had "called on Israel to immediately investigate and provide a full, transparent explanation of what happened". UK PM Rishi Sunak said he was "shocked and saddened" after learning that

AL JAZEERA 'TERROR CHANNEL', SAYS NETANYAHU

ISRAEL CLEARS WAY TO EXPEL AL JAZEERA
PM Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to shut down Al Jazeera's operations in Israel, calling it a "terror channel" that spreads incitement, after Parliament passed a law clearing the way for the closure

W.H.O.: SHARP RISE IN NEWBORN DEATHS

Newborn mortality is rising sharply in the Gaza Strip. "Doctors are reporting that they're seeing a big rise in children born with low birth weight, and just not surviving the neonatal period because they're born too small," WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris said at a briefing in Geneva.



United Nations staff members inspect the carcass of a car used by US-based aid group World Central Kitchen, that was hit by an Israeli strike the previous day in Deir al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip, on Tuesday. — AFP

DESTRUCTION OF GAZA'S SHIFA HOSPITAL RIPS HEART OUT OF HEALTH SYSTEM, SAYS W.H.O.

Israel's destruction of Gaza's biggest hospital in a raid over the past two weeks has ripped the heart out of the enclave's healthcare system. "We've had contact with the staff. The directors told us that Al Shifa Hospital is gone. It's no longer able to function in any shape or form as a hospital," said WHO spokesperson Margaret Harris.

WASHINGTON FOR ALTERNATIVES TO RAFAH INVASION IN HAMAS WAR TALKS

Top American and Israeli officials held virtual talks on Monday as the US pushed alternatives to the ground assault against Hamas under consideration by Israel in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, a move the Biden administration opposes on humanitarian grounds and that has frayed relations between the two allies.

a Briton was among those killed. Cyprus foreign ministry spokesman Theodoros Goisis said on Tuesday that around 100 tonnes of aid had been unloaded before

World Central Kitchen, an international charity, suspended operations after its workers were killed by an apparent Israeli strike. The source of fire late on Monday could not be inde-

pendently confirmed. The Israeli military expressed sorrow over the deaths while stopping short of accepting responsibility. Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the top military spokes-

man, said that officials are reviewing the incident. He says an independent probe will be launched that will help us reduce the risk of such an event from occurring again. — Agencies



A woman reacts standing by the rubble in her damaged apartment hit by local officials called a Ukrainian military strike, in Donetsk, on Tuesday. — AFP

Drone attacks over 1K km from Ukraine, says Russia

Moscow, April 2: A Ukrainian drone strike on Russia's Tatarstan region — hundreds of miles from the countries' shared border — wounded over a dozen people, health officials said on Tuesday. Kyiv has regularly hit Russian territory during Moscow's Ukraine offensive but strikes this deep into the country are rare even as Russia said its forces had captured 400 square kilometres (150 square miles) of Ukrainian territory this year. Moscow secured its first territorial gains in almost a year in recent months, as Kyiv struggles with manpower and ammunition shortages amid delays to vital Western aid. The attack hit a building in a business park in the town of Yelabuga and targeted an oil refinery in Nizhnekamsk, both some 1,100 kilometres (690 miles) from the border. "The Kyiv regime continues its terrorist activity," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday. "Our military is working to minimise this threat and then completely eliminate it." Two defence sources in Kyiv told AFP that Ukraine was behind the strikes. — AFP

RUSSIA TO HOLD TALKS WITH TALIBAN

RUSSIA SAYS IT IS WORKING ON REMOVING TALIBAN FROM ITS TERRORIST LIST
Russia said on Tuesday it had important matters to discuss with Afghanistan's Taliban leaders and was working to remove the Taliban from its list of banned terrorist organisations. "This is a country that is next to us, and one way or another we communicate with them," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Tuesday.

ICC PROSECUTOR, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ARE TALKING JUSTICE, COMPENSATION FOR UKRAINE

Ministers and officials from dozens of countries are gathering in the Netherlands on Tuesday for a conference on restoring justice in Ukraine, as the war sparked by Russia's invasion drags on in its third devastating year.

RUSSIAN CREWS END RESCUE EFFORT TO REACH 13 MINERS IN A COLLAPSED MINE
Authorities in Russia's Far East called off a two-week rescue effort to reach 13 workers trapped deep underground in a collapsed gold mine and declared them dead.

EIGHT YEARS' SENTENCE TO PUSSY RIOT ACTIVIST OVER 'WAR FAKES'

London, April 2: A Moscow court sentenced in absentia Pyotr Verzilov, a Russian-Canadian activist and independent news site founder, to eight years and four months for social media posts criticising the war in Ukraine. Verzilov, 36, rose to prominence as the unofficial spokesperson of the feminist opposition group Pussy Riot. — Reuters

Nawaz co-chairs govt meet again

Lahore, April 2: Unfazed by criticism, Pakistan's former prime minister Nawaz Sharif has chaired yet another administrative meeting with his daughter and Punjab province Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. Sharif, who is also the supremo of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, on Monday, co-chaired a meeting to review issues faced by the province's agriculture sector, a report in Dawn newspaper said on Tuesday. The veteran leader chairing the administrative meetings raised many questions as he does not hold any official posts in the provincial or federal government and is only a National Assembly member. Since the February 8 general elections marred by allegations of vote rigging, the 74-year-old PML-N supreme leader has generally kept a low profile. However, in the few public appearances since, he has been seen chairing or co-chairing with his 50-year-old daughter administrative meetings of the Punjab government. This has led to questions, as Sharif holds no official position in either the provincial or federal government and is officially only a member of the National Assembly. — PTI

WIFE POISONED IN SUB-JAIL, CLAIMS IMRAN

Islamabad, April 2: Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan on Tuesday said his wife and former first lady Bushra Bibi was poisoned while incarcerated at his private residence here which was turned into a sub-jail, emphasising that the Army chief should be held responsible if she is harmed. — PTI

PAK'S RULING COALITION WINS SENATE POLLS

Islamabad, April 2: Pakistan's ruling coalition swept the Senate elections as the results of 19 seats were announced after the election process to fill 48 vacant seats of the upper house. The alliance bagged 18 seats out of 19 while an independent also was elected with their support. Polling was held on 12 seats from Sindh, five from Punjab and two seats from the Islamabad capital territory. — PTI

TRUMP POSTS \$175-MN BOND TO AVERT SEIZURE OF ASSETS

New York, April 2: Donald Trump has posted a \$175 million bond in his New York civil fraud case, thereby halting collection of the more than \$454 million he owes and preventing the state from seizing his assets to satisfy the debt while he appeals the ruling, according to a court filing. A New York appellate

court had given the former president 10 days to put up the money after a panel of judges agreed last month to slash the amount needed to stop the clock on enforcement. The bond Trump is posting with the court now is essentially a placeholder, meant to guarantee payment if the judgment is upheld. — AP

GERMAN COUP PLOTTERS FACE TRIAL IN MAY

Berlin, April 2: The alleged ringleaders of a suspected far-right plot to attack the German parliament and overthrow the government will go on trial in Frankfurt from May, a court said on Tuesday. Nine suspected members of the "terror group" behind the planned coup will stand trial from May 21, a court in the city said. Among the defendants will be the two men alleged to have led the plot. — AFP

Dutch climate case: Shell back in court

The Hague, April 2: Shell squared off against seven environmental groups in a Dutch appeals court on Tuesday, with climate activists accusing the multinational oil giant of failing to implement a landmark 2021 judgment. Judges at The Hague District Court ruled three

years ago that Shell must reduce its carbon emissions by 45 per cent by 2030, as it was contributing to the "dire" effects of climate change. Shell is appealing the 2021 ruling, while environmental groups accuse the oil giant of failing to take action. — AFP



A teacher inside an elementary school's empty classroom in Iloilo City, Philippines, on Tuesday. — AFP

The department of education was unable to provide an exact number of schools affected. March, April and May

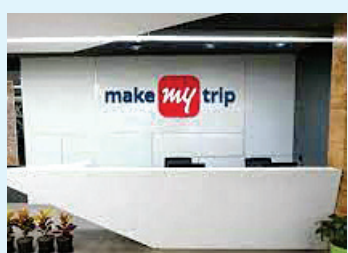
quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	73,903.91 -0.15
Nifty 50	22,453.30 -0.04
S&P 500*	5,193.77 0.95
Dollar (₹)	83.38 0.03
Pound Sterling (₹)	104.80 0.42
Euro (₹)	89.56 0.34
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	68,810.521 0.76
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	88.40 1.12
IN 10-Yr bond yield	7.108 0.056
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.349 0.02

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Sanjay Nayar is Assocham new president

Sorin Investment Fund chairman Sanjay Nayar has taken over as Assocham president for 2024-25, the industry body said on Tuesday. He replaced SpiceJet chairman and managing director Ajay Singh, who completed his tenure as the chamber's president. "Nayar brings experience of four decades in global financial and capital markets, including 25 years at Citigroup and nearly 14 at KKR," Assocham stated.



MakeMyTrip in pact to promote Singapore

MakeMyTrip has entered into a partnership with Singapore Tourism Board (STB) for promoting Singapore as a key destination to Indian travellers. The two have signed a memorandum of understanding for a year-long strategic partnership to boost travel to Singapore, MakeMyTrip said. "Through this partnership, we want to deepen Indian consumers' brand affinity for Singapore," STB CEO Melissa Ow said.

Fintech PeepalCo launches stock investing app

PeepalCo, a fintech, has launched a stock investing app, Lemonn, that aims to simplify discovery and decision-making for new investors. Lemonn mark's PeepalCo's expansion into stock broking, and will be housed as a separate business division. "We aim to make stock investing engaging, informative, and effortless with the Lemonn," Ashish Singhal, co-founder and Group's CEO, PeepalCo group, said.

Zomato platform gets tax demand for ₹184 crore

Zomato said it has received a service tax demand and penalty order aggregating over ₹184 crore, and will file an appeal against it before an appropriate authority. The demand order has been received for non-payment of service tax for the period Oct. 2014 to June 2017 determined on the basis of certain sales made by the foreign subsidiaries and branches to its customers located outside India, it said.

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Quick clearances, EoDB, compliance top focus for Sebi

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, APRIL 2

Securities and exchange board of India (Sebi) chairman Madhabi Puri Buch assured capital market participants of faster decisions from Sebi in clearing offer documents and other pending matters as well as ease of doing business as far as compliance with Sebi regulations are concerned.

Sebi chief also emphasised on building trust and transparency between the regulator and the industry at a time when India's economy and markets were showing wonderful momentum, while speaking at 17th CII Corporate Governance Summit here.

"We are streamlining our use of technology ensuring there is never a delay from Sebi," the Sebi chief said, adding earlier mutual funds had to wait for approvals of their new schemes from Sebi but now they were expecting approvals to come in just a few days' time.

Sebi is also now closely monitoring pendency of matters it is handling and vigilant to clear all matters with longer pendency beyond a fixed time span, Buch said.

She added that the sole reason for Sebi's existence is capital formation and wherever there is an opportunity to raise capital from the market, the regulator tries to ensure that there is no delay in the process.

The regulator also complimented Indian capital market's technological



● **SEBI IS** giving a lot of time to ease out compliance. To make compliance so easy that it's like breathing and for that now Sebi has an ease of doing business team.

advancement by moving to T+1 and then T+0 or same day settlement cycle in the equity market.

"Today we are being appreciated world over for cutting edge technology," She said.

"Sebi is giving a lot of time to ease out compliance. To make compliance so easy that it's like breathing and for that now Sebi has an ease of doing business team," the regulator said.

Buch stated that the regulator is a proxy for the entire investor base of approximately 56 per cent while promoters/industry accounted for 44 per cent.

Among market instruments while equity is most popular, she highlighted the importance of the bond market as together the equity and bond market raised over ₹10 lakh crore in the last 12 months. She also opined that REITs and InvITs are going to be the vehicles of growth in the future.

CENTRE GARNERS ₹34.3 LAKH CRORE IN TAXES, MEETS COLLECTION TARGET

New Delhi, April 2: The government has broadly met the tax collection target of over ₹34.37 lakh crore for 2023-24 on the back of robust economic activity and improved compliance, an official said.

"Overall targets for tax revenue have been met," the official said. The government had raised the target for direct tax collection in FY24 to ₹19.45 lakh cr, while for indirect taxes (GST + customs + excise) the target was lowered to ₹14.84 lakh crore in the revised estimates (RE) presented on Feb. 1, 2024.

The net direct tax collections (corporate tax and personal income tax) reached over ₹18.9 lakh cr as of March 17.

GST remained a high point during the last fiscal with collections reaching a record high of ₹1.87 lakh crore in April 2023 and the second highest collection coming in at ₹1.78 lakh crore in March 2024. The gross tax collection target as per RE stood at ₹34 lakh cr for FY24.

India is recording a growth rate and is projected to grow at 7.6 per cent in 2023-24, as per NSO estimates.

Domestic consumption and government capex are the main drivers of the country's economic momentum.

India grew above 8 per cent for three consecutive quarters (April-Dec.) and various agencies revised growth estimates for FY24 closer to 8 per cent. —PTI

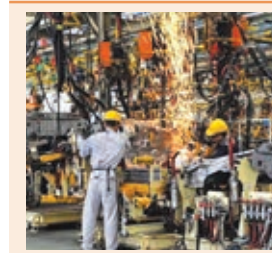
Firms stepped up hiring in response to strong output and new orders

India's manufacturing hits 16-yr high in March

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, APRIL 2

With the stellar performance in production as well as new orders since October 2020, India's manufacturing activity continued to expand in March 2024 as the HSBC purchasing managers' index (PMI) climbed to a 16-year high of 59.1 in the same month from 56.9 in the month of Feb. this year, reflecting stronger growth of renewed job creation in the country, a private monthly survey showed on Tuesday.

In the PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction. The survey also showed that it is the 33rd consecutive month in the final month of the financial year 2023-24 as the growth quickened across



● **THE PACE** of job creation was mild, but the best since September 2023. However, customer retention remained a priority for goods producers who raised their charges to the least extent in over a year.

consumer, intermediate and investment goods sectors. Besides, companies also stepped up hiring in response to strong output and new orders.

Ines Lam, economist at HSBC, said that India's March manufacturing PMI rose to its highest level since 2008. "Manufacturing companies expanded hiring in response to strong production and new orders. On the back of strong demand and a slight tightening in capacity, input cost inflation picked

up in March," Lam said. The survey further showed that inflows of new work strengthened from both domestic and export markets. New export orders increased at the fastest pace since May 2022. "Quantities of purchase increased at quickest rate since mid-2023, and one that was strongest in nearly 13 years, as companies sought to build up stocks in advance of expected improvements in sales," the survey said.

On the job front, it further said that after leaving payroll numbers broadly unchanged in last two months, manufacturers in India took on additional workers in March. "The pace of job creation was mild, but the best since September 2023. However, customer retention remained a priority for goods producers who raised their charges to the least extent in over a year, the survey said.

On the price front, it said that despite remaining modest by historical standards, cost pressures were at their highest in five months. "Companies reported having paid more for cotton, iron, machinery tools, plastics and steel. They remained confident on an average, with 28 per cent forecasting output growth in the year ahead and 1 per cent expecting a contraction," it added.

76 firms raise ₹62,000 cr from IPOs in FY24

New Delhi, April 2: Buoyant secondary markets, strong participation of retail investors, and the spirit of Indian entrepreneurship, and favourable government policies bolstered by FDI support, Pantomath Financial Services Group, said in its report.

"With a diverse array of offerings and a fervent appetite for growth capital, the IPO landscape in FY2025 promises to be dynamic and vibrant, offering exciting opportunities for investors and companies alike. We anticipate that equity-raise through IPOs in FY25 could exceed ₹1 lakh crore," Mahavir Lunawat, managing director, at Pantomath Capital Advisors, said.

According to the report, a total of 76 companies garnered close to ₹62,000 crore through main-board IPOs in 2023-24, which was higher than ₹52,115 crore mopped up by 37 companies in preceding fiscal.

Meanwhile, data compiled by prime database, showed that small and medium enterprises (SME) IPOs saw a huge increase in 2023-24 with 200 SME IPOs mobilising ₹5,838 crore, as the compared 125 initial public offerings raising ₹2,235 crore in the preceding fiscal. —PTI

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Ireda sanctions loans of ₹37,354 cr

New Delhi, April 2: State-owned Indian renewable energy development agency (Ireda) on Tuesday said that it has sanctioned loans amounting to ₹37,354 crore and disbursed loans worth ₹25,089 crore during the fiscal year 2023-24.

According to the Ireda statement, this has led to a significant growth of 26.71 per cent in the loan book, which now stands at

● **DURING THE** January-March 2024 quarter, loan sanctions more than doubled to ₹23,796 crore from ₹11,797 cr in the same quarter a year ago.

₹59,650 crore compared to ₹47,076 crore a year ago.

The annual loan sanctions of Ireda's grew by 14.63 per cent to ₹37,354

crore in 2023-24 from ₹32,587 cr in 2022-23.

Similarly, the annual loan disbursements rose by 15.94 per cent to ₹25,089 crore in 2023-24 from ₹21,639 crore in 2022-23.

During the January-March 2024 quarter, loan sanctions more than doubled to ₹23,796 crore from ₹11,797 crore in the same quarter a year ago, according to the statement. Similarly, the loan dis-

bursements have gone up by 13.98 per cent to ₹12,869 crore in the fourth quarter of 2023-24 from ₹11,291 crore a year ago.

Pradip Kumar Das, chairman and MD of Ireda, said, "Ireda's record loan sanctions and disbursements for financial year 2023-24 underscore our untiring commitment to driving the renewable energy revolution in the country." —PTI

ASSET MONETISATION GETS ₹40,314 CR TO HIGHWAYS MINISTRY

New Delhi, April 2: The ministry of road transport and highways (MoRTH) has raised ₹40,314 crore through various modes of asset monetisation in financial year 2023-24, against the target of ₹28,968 crore, a senior government official said on Tuesday.

The ministry had raised ₹15,968 crore through monetisation of 4 toll-operate-transfer (TOT) bundles, ₹15,700 crore through infrastructure investment trust (InvIT) and ₹8,646 cr through securitisation, the official said.

The ministry had raised ₹32,855 crore in 2022-23 through various modes of asset monetisation.

Currently, ministry of road transport and highways monetises its assets under three different modes - toll-operate-transfer (TOT) model, infrastructure investment trust (InvIT) and project-based financing, in order to provide all categories of investors an opportunity to invest in assets pertaining to the highways and associated infrastructure. —PTI

OpenAI allows users access sans signing up for service

San Francisco, April 2: OpenAI has started allowing users to access its free-to-use ChatGPT generative AI chatbot without needing to sign up for the service, the Microsoft-backed start-up said.

ChatGPT, which kicked-started the GenAI boom in late 2022, can mimic human conversation and perform tasks such as creating summaries of long text, writing poems and even generating ideas for a theme party.

The San Francisco-based company said that it will gradually roll out the feature to "make AI accessible to anyone curious about its capabilities."

The popular service, which set a record for the fastest-growing user base, has seen its growth slow down since May 2023, when its traffic peaked at 1.8 billion web visits, according to data analytics firm Similarweb.

OpenAI said it has introduced additional content safeguards for users accessing ChatGPT without signing up, such as blocking prompts and generations in a wider range



of categories. It did not specify these categories. Apart from the free version of ChatGPT, which does not have direct access to the internet, OpenAI also offers paid versions for individuals, team users and the enterprises.

The company also said that it may use content provided by users to help improve its large-language models but said users can turn off the feature.

The move comes about a month after billionaire Elon Musk sued OpenAI and its chief executive officer, Sam Altman, saying they abandoned the start-up's original mission to develop artificial intelligence for the benefit of humanity and not for profit. —Reuters

Kia adds 7 variants to Carens

MICHAEL GONSALVES
PUNE, APRIL 2

Kia, South Korean car-maker, on Tuesday expanded the Carens trim line-up from 23 variants to 30 variants, with the addition of a new diesel-manual powertrain priced between ₹10.52 lakh and ₹19.67 lakh.

The company has also updated the existing variants with a range of new features. The 1.5-litre diesel engine is now available with a 6-speed manual gearbox. The Carens Diesel MT is available in both 6 and 7-seat configurations with prices starting at ₹12.67 lakh.

The Prestige+ (O) variant in 7DCT and 6AT now gets an electric sunroof. Additionally, the Prestige (O) variant offers the choice of 6 or 7 seating capacity. The Carens X-Line gets additional features like a dashcam, auto up/down for all windows with voice commands.

"We are happy to introduce the new trims of the Carens. The Carens has become a preferred personal mobility choice for over 1.5 lakh families, embodying the comfort, reliability, and luxury," said Myung-sik Sohn, chief sales and business officer at Kia India.

He said a huge potential for a 6-seating option backed the move to refresh Carens to reshape mobility preferences for families seeking comfortable rides.

"This is another gift that we're making back to the start-up ecosystem, in exchange for what we hope is start-ups continue to choose AWS as their first stop," said Howard Wright, vice president and global head of start-ups at



progress in enhancing the socio-economic landscape of the region," PepsiCo India and South Asia chief executive officer Jagrut Kotecha said.

The company said in line with its global sustainability goals, the new facility will operate entirely on renewable energy sources leading to a reduction in carbon footprint by 1.9 metric tonne per day. —PTI

PepsiCo plans flavour mfg. unit with ₹1,266 cr

New Delhi, April 2: PepsiCo India on Tuesday said it will invest ₹1,266 crore to set up a flavour manufacturing facility at Ujjain in Madhya Pradesh as part of its expansion plans in the country.

The plant will play a significant role in scaling up PepsiCo's beverage production in India, generating employment and growth of the local economy, the company said.

The construction of the upcoming plant is slated to start in 2024 and is expected to be operational in the first quarter of 2026, it added.



"Our collaboration with BMW Group demonstrates our commitment to providing top-tier solutions in automotive software and digital engineering to customers across the world," said Warren Harris, CEO and MD, Tata Technologies. —PTI

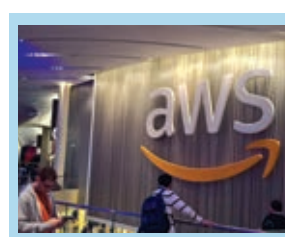
BIG | GIVEAWAY Major cloud providers luring artificial intelligence start-ups

AWS gives free credits to start-ups

New York, April 2: Amazon Web Service (AWS) has expanded its free credits programme for start-ups to cover the costs of using major AI models, the company said, as it looks to boost the market share of its AI platform Bedrock.

In a move to attract start-up customers, Amazon now allows its cloud credits to cover the use of models from other providers including Anthropic, Meta, Mistral AI, and Cohere.

"This is another gift that we're making back to the start-up ecosystem, in exchange for what we hope is start-ups continue to choose AWS as their first stop," said Howard Wright, vice president and global head of start-ups at



● **IN A PARTNERSHIP** with Y Combinator, it's offering \$500,000 in credits for the latest cohort launched in January, which can be used on AI models and Amazon's chips.

AWS. The move followed Amazon's now-completed \$4 billion investment in Anthropic in convertible notes.

As part of the deal, Anthropic will use AWS as its primary cloud provider, and Trainium and Inferentia chips to build and train its models. Wright said Amazon's free credit will contribute to revenue of Anthropic, one of the most popular

models on Bedrock. "That's part of the ecosystem building. We are unapologetic about that," he said, adding that AWS offers a wide range of choices and security to start-ups.

Amazon said it has offered over \$6 billion in credits to start-ups in the past decade. In a partnership with Y Combinator, it's offering \$500,000 in credits for the latest cohort launched in

January, which can be used on AI models and Amazon's chips. The cost of using AI, based on usage, could pile up for start-ups.

Amazon is not alone among major cloud providers in providing free credits to lure AI start-ups. Microsoft Azure gives out credits that can be used for OpenAI's models, while Google's cloud credit can be applied for over 130 models on Vertex AI.

Big tech's investments in AI start-ups have drawn scrutiny from regulators, as the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) opened an inquiry on Microsoft's backing of OpenAI, as well as Google and Amazon's investment in Anthropic. —Reuters

BLITZCRICK



- Chennai Super Kings
- Delhi Capitals
- Gujarat Titans
- Kolkata Knight Riders
- Lucknow Super Giants
- Mumbai Indians
- Punjab Kings
- Rajasthan Royals
- Royal Challengers Bengaluru
- Sunrisers Hyderabad

ORANGE	
Virat Kohli, RCB	203
Riyank Parag, RR	181
Heinrich Klaasen, SRH	167
PURPLE	
Mustafizur Rahman, CSK	7
Mayank Yadav, LSG	6
Yuzvendra Chahal, RR	6

QUICKTON!

De Kock's whirlwind knock leads Lucknow to win

Bengaluru, April 2: Lucknow Super Giants defeated Royal Challengers Bengaluru by 28 runs in their IPL match here on Tuesday. Opener Quinton de Kock hit 8 fours and 5 sixes in his entertaining 56-ball 81 before Nicholas Pooran smashed five sixes en route a 21-ball 40 not out to power LSG to 181 for five.

In reply, RCB were all out for 153 in 19.4 overs. Mayank Yadav (3/14) once again produced a sensational spell of fast bowling, claiming three wickets.

De Kock (81 off 55) selected the bowlers and positions around the ground to play his shots with precision but the RCB bowlers did not allow other batsmen, except Nicholas Pooran (40 off 21), a free run on a pitch that sported a generous tinge of green.

The Super Giants went off the block quite quickly, reaching 32 for no loss in three overs and then making it 54 in the Power Play. Most of the runs came from the blade of De Kock, who took a particular liking for pacer Mohammed Siraj.

The South African left-hander slammed him for three sixes — two in succession — spread across two overs — two powerful pulls and a handsome loft over mid-wicket.

K. L. Rahul, who captained the side after coming in as an impact sub against Punjab Kings in

SCOREBOARD

Lucknow Super Giants: Quinton de Kock c Dagar b Topley 81, KL Rahul c Dagar b Maxwell 20, Devdutt Padikkal c Anuj Rawat b Mohammed Siraj 6, Marcus Stoinis c Dagar b Maxwell 24, Nicholas Pooran not out 40, Ayush Badoni c du Plessis b Yash Dayal 0, Krunal Pandya not out 0. Extras (w-10) 10. Total (for 5 wickets in 20 overs) 181.

Fall of wickets: 1-53, 2-73, 3-129, 4-143, 5-148.

Bowling: Reece Topley 4-0-39-1, Yash Dayal 4-0-24-1, Mohammed Siraj 4-0-47-1, Glenn Maxwell 4-0-23-2, Mayank Dagar 2-0-23-0, Cameron Green 2-0-25-0.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru: Virat Kohli c Padikkal b Siddharth 22, Faf du Plessis run out (Padikkal) 19, Rajat Patidar c Padikkal b Yadav 29, Glenn Maxwell c Pooran b Yadav 0, Cameron Green b Yadav 9, Anuj Rawat c Padikkal b Stoinis 11, Mahipal Lomror c Pooran b Yash Thakur 33, Dinesh Karthik c Rahul b Naveen-ul-Haq 4, Mayank Dagar run out (Pooran) 0, Reece Topley not out 3, Mohammed Siraj c Pooran b Naveen-ul-Haq 12. Extras (lb-3, w-8) 11. Total (all out in 19.4 over) 153.

Fall of wickets: 1-40, 2-42, 3-43, 4-58, 5-94, 6-103, 7-136, 8-137, 9-138.

Bowling: Mani Mani Sidharth 3-0-21-1, Krunal Pandya 1-0-10-0, Naveen-ul-Haq 3-4-0-25-2, Mayank Yadav 4-0-14-3, Ravi Bishnoi 3-0-33-0, Yash Thakur 4-0-38-1, Marcus Stoinis 1-0-9-1.

the previous game, started slowly making six runs off his first 10 balls. But a six off left-arm pacer Yash Dayal gave his innings some momentum and later he swept spinner Glenn Maxwell for a six. —PTI



Lucknow Super Giants batter Quinton de Kock plays a shot en route to his 81 against Royal Challengers Bengaluru at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru on Tuesday. Lucknow Super Giants won by 28 runs. —PTI

POINTS TABLE						
Teams	P	W	L	N/R	Points	Net RR
RR	3	3	0	0	6	+1.249
KKR	2	2	0	0	4	+1.047
CSK	3	2	1	0	4	+0.976
LSG	3	2	1	0	4	+0.483
GT	3	2	1	0	4	-0.738
SRH	3	1	2	0	2	+0.204
DC	3	1	2	0	2	-0.016
PBKS	3	1	2	0	2	-0.337
RCB	4	1	3	0	2	-0.876
MI	3	0	3	0	0	-1.423

Delhi ready for KKR challenge

Visakhapatnam, April 2: Delhi Capitals would be keen to prove that their comfortable win against Chennai Super Kings was not a flash in the pan while Kolkata Knight Riders would be eyeing a hat-trick of victories when the two sides face off in the IPL here on Wednesday.

The Capitals would be buoyed by the 20-run victory here on Sunday, their first of the season, against defending champions CSK who were outsmarted by Rishabh Pant and Co. in all departments of the game.

And come Wednesday, the Capitals will have to put another such performance against KKR, whose batters pummeled Royal Challengers Bengaluru bowlers to notch their second win of the season on March 29.

For DC, the onus will be on Prithvi Shaw and veteran Australian David Warner to provide a solid start.

Meanwhile, Pant continues his inspirational journey. After two scratchy innings, the skipper gave a glimpse of his devastating best as he scored his maiden fifty (51 off 32 balls) of the season and seems to be slowly finding his groove.

ACTION TODAY

DC VS KKR

FROM 7.30 PM, LIVE ON STAR SPORTS

The likes of South African Tristan Stubbs and Australian Mitchell Marsh, both capable of launching an assault on the opposition, need to be better towards the end as DC lack domestic power hitters.

While Stubbs showcased his prowess with the bat against Rajasthan Royals, a consistent show from him will do a world of good for DC.

On the other hand, Marsh is yet to produce a glimpse of his brute power with the willow which could prove to be DC's lethal weapon.

KKR, on the other hand, have looked good this season, registering two wins from as many games. Opener Phil Salt, all-rounder Andre Russell and Venkatesh Iyer have been in good nick in the first two games and would look to pose a challenge for the Delhi pacers. —PTI

Short takes

India, Oz, England in talks to revive CLT20

About 10 years after its last edition was played, "active conversations" are taking place between cricket boards of India, Australia and England to revive the Champions League, a club-based international T20 competition. The last edition of the CLT20 was held in India in 2014 with Chennai Super Kings winning the title after defeating Kolkata Knight Riders in the final at Bengaluru, with the edition involving three teams from India, two each from Australia and South Africa and one team side from Pakistan, the West Indies and New Zealand.

While the cricket calendar remains jam-packed, the biggest challenge would be to find a window for reviving such an event, said Cricket Victoria CEO Nick Cummins, who is aware of the conversations taking place between the three biggest boards in cricket.

KKR-RR, Gujarat-DC matches rescheduled

Kolkata Knight Riders' home KIPL game against Rajasthan Royals was on Tuesday advanced by a day to April 16, while Gujarat Titans-Delhi Capitals fixture in Ahmedabad was also rescheduled by the BCCI which did not give any reason for the move. "The fixture between Kolkata Knight Riders & Rajasthan Royals, which was earlier scheduled to take place on April 17, 2024 at Eden Gardens, Kolkata, will now be played a day prior on April 16, 2024," BCCI said.

"The Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad was earlier scheduled to host the match between Gujarat Titans & Delhi Capitals on April 16, 2024. The fixture will now be played on April 17."

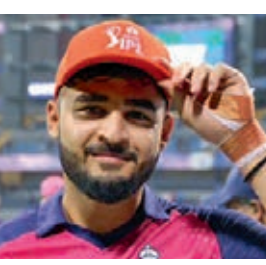
Parag reminds me of young SKY at MI: Bond

Mumbai, April 2: Rajasthan Royals assistant coach Shane Bond has described in-form Riyan Parag as a player of "extreme talent" and likened him to a young Suryakumar Yadav who joined Mumbai Indians more than a decade ago and went on to become one of the most explosive T20 batters in the world.

The 22-year-old Parag has brought his rich form from domestic cricket into the IPL, striking two high

quality fifties to help Rajasthan notch up wins in all three games so far. Parag's latest effort came against Mumbai Indians in his side's six-wicket win on Monday. He dropped anchor to spearhead Royals' chase of 126, scoring 54 not out off 39 balls with the help of five fours and three sixes.

"He (Parag) sort of reminds me a little bit of Surya (Suryakumar Yadav), who came to Mumbai a few years ago,



Riyan Parag. He looks like that — he has got extreme talent. He has just matured as a cricketer, even though he is

only 22." Bond, who is also the RR bowling coach, said at the post-match press conference.

Bond played a crucial role in developing bowling talents at MI in his nine-year stint with the Mumbai-based franchise from 2015 onwards, before shifting base to Jaipur this year.

"He (Parag) has had an outstanding domestic season, obviously, batting up the order. The trade we made with Devdutt

(Padikkal), bringing Avesh (Khan) in, that was to put Riyan up into a position which was probably better suited," the former New Zealand fast bowler added.

Suryakumar, the world's number one T20 batter, joined MI in 2011 and spent four years at Kolkata Knight Riders from 2014-17 before he was brought back to the Mumbai side in 2018. He is recovering from a recent surgery

HEAD TO HEAD

Matches	16	14	Tied	1
KKR	16	14	Tied	1

FOR THE RECORD

- David Warner, with 1,075 runs at an average of 44.79 and a strike rate of 145.27 in 27 innings of as many matches with two hundreds and six fifties, is the highest run-getter against Kolkata Knight Riders in IPL.
- Andre Russell, who took 99 wickets at an average of 21.97 and a strike rate of 14.33 in 33 innings of 107 matches, needs just one wicket to become the second bowler after Sunil Narine (165 wickets in 164 matches) to complete the century of wickets for Kolkata Knight Riders in IPL.

LAST YEAR'S MATCH

- Delhi Capitals defeated Kolkata Knight Riders by 4 wickets in Delhi.

STATS: S. PERVEZ QAISER

Sharma suspended in physical assault case

New Delhi, April 2: The All India Football Federation on Tuesday suspended its executive committee member Deepak Sharma until further notice for his alleged physical assault of two women players in Goa.

Two footballers of Himachal Pradesh-based Khad FC, taking part in the Indian Women's Football (IWL) League second division, had alleged that Sharma, the owner of the club, had barged into their room and physically assaulted them on the night of March 28.

On Saturday, the AIFF asked Sharma to refrain from football-related activities till the conclusion of a probe by a panel into his alleged incident. Sharma was arrested by Goa police after the host state association lodged a complaint and later released on bail.

"The AIFF Executive Committee has decided to suspend Mr. Deepak Sharma from participating in any football-related activities until further notice," the national federation said in a release.

Before that, the Emergency Committee of the AIFF comprising president Kalyan Chaubey, vice-president N A Haris and treasurer Kipa Ajay, on Monday took stock of the

complaints received from the players against Sharma. Thereafter, a meeting of AIFF member associations was held on Monday night and "Sharma was called and heard for a few minutes before he was advised to leave the meeting". In the complaint sent to the AIFF, the two players said, according to sources, that Sharma was mostly in an inebriated state and they were "scared for their lives".

Sports Minister Anurag Thakur had also asked the AIFF to take "quick" and "strong legal action" against the official.

On Tuesday, the AIFF also dissolved the three-member committee formed on March 30 to probe the incident, and instead referred the matter to its Disciplinary Committee.

"The AIFF is determined to promote women's football in a safe and enabling environment and will take all necessary steps to ensure this. The case has now been referred to the Disciplinary Committee and will be taken up emergently," Chaubey said.

"The AIFF has taken all steps necessary to ensure the safe passage of the complainants to their hometowns." —PTI

Praggnanandhaa enters as India's best bet at Candidates

Toronto, April 2: Teen sensation R. Praggnanandhaa will enter as the favourite among the three Indian participants in the Candidates chess tournament that will get underway here from Wednesday to decide the challenger for the next world championship match. After nearly 35 years as many as three Indians — Praggnanandhaa, D Gukesh and Vidit Gujrathi — have qualified for the most prestigious event of the year that has just eight participants.

According to an expert, India is the new Russia of the chess world, as in the past such dominance was only shown by Russian players.

Praggnanandhaa, 18, starts as the rating favourite among Indians and also as the favourite of the chess buffs even though the top bracket of the world feels that all the three Indian youngsters still need time to settle among the world elite.

Fearless and psychologically sound, Praggnanandhaa will likely have the assistance of eight-time Russian champion Peter Svidler for the event. One cannot help but recall that during one of the world champi-



onships Indian grandmaster P Harikrishna had assisted Svidler in his quest to be the world champion.

While Svidler could be a game-changer, it will largely depend on Praggnanandhaa's form and how he adapts in this

UMPIRE ERASMUS ADMITS TO MAKING MASSIVE ERROR IN FINAL OF 2019 WC

London, April 2: Recently retired elite panel umpire Marais Erasmus has admitted to making a 'massive' mistake in the 2019 ODI World Cup final that England won in a rather controversial fashion at the Lord's.

England won their maiden ODI World Cup title by edging New Zealand on the now-scrapped boundary countback rule after both teams were tied following a Super Over. However, the game could have ended in regulation time if on-field umpire Erasmus and Kumar Dharamsena did not award England six runs for an overthrow in the 50th over with the hosts

needing nine runs from three balls. It was later realised that England should have been awarded only five runs as the batters had not crossed for the second run.

"The next morning (after the final) I opened my hotel room door on my way to breakfast and Kumar opened his door at the same time and he said, 'did you see we made a massive error?' That's when I got to know about it," Erasmus told The Telegraph.

"But in the moment on the field, we just said six, you know, communicated to each other, 'six, six, it's six' not realising that they haven't crossed, it wasn't picked up. That's

it." Erasmus was an on-field umpire in 127 Tests, 192 ODIs and 61 T20s. The 60-year-old admitted to another mistake in the final played five years ago when he adjudged Ross Taylor lbw off Mark Wood.

"It was just too high but they had burnt their review. That was my only error in the whole seven weeks and afterwards I was so disappointed because it would have been an absolute flip had I got through the whole World Cup not making an error and that obviously impacted the game a bit because he was one of their top players." —PTI

Stokes pulls out of T20 Cup

London, April 2: England's star player Ben Stokes on Tuesday pulled out of the upcoming T20 World Cup, saying the "sacrifice" will help him focus on regaining his fitness to bowl full throttle and be the "all-rounder I want to be for the foreseeable future".

The country's Test captain has informed the England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB) about his decision, two months

ahead of the showcase that will be held in the USA and West Indies.

"I'm working hard and focusing on building my bowling fitness back up to fulfil a full role as an all-rounder in all formats of cricket."

"Opting out of the IPL and the World Cup will hopefully be a sacrifice that allows me to be the all-rounder I want to be for the foreseeable future," Stokes said.

Stokes, 32, was in-charge of the team that suffered a 1-4 Test series loss to India earlier this year and said the tour made him realise that he isn't quite up for it when it comes to bowling.

"The recent Test tour of India highlighted how far behind I was from a bowling point of view after my knee surgery and nine months without bowling," Stokes said in the release. —PTI