

THE ASIAN AGE

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Trump gives support to embattled Speaker Mike Johnson at pivotal meet



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Italian fashion designer Roberto Cavalli dies aged 83

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WINDOWS



Shakira performs during the first weekend of the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival at Empire Polo Club in Indio, California, on Friday. — AP

Light rain brings relief from heat in parts of Delhi-NCR

New Delhi: Rains hit parts of Delhi-NCR on Saturday evening, bringing respite from the heat. The IMD attributed the rains to an active western disturbance over northwest India. It has also forecast light rain on Sunday. The maximum temperature in the national capital was recorded at 39 degrees Celsius, three notches above the season's average, the IMD said. "The temperature in the capital will drop by nearly 33 per cent, with overcast skies and winds reaching speeds of 30 to 40 kmph due to an active western disturbance that hit north-west India on April 12," said Kuldeep Srivastava, head of the Regional Weather Forecasting Centre. **Full report on Page 2**

NIA charges 2 in Manipur blast case

New Delhi: The NIA has filed a chargesheet against two accused, including the key conspirator, in last year's Manipur car bomb blast case in which three people were injured. The agency filed the chargesheet before a special NIA court in Manipur's Bishnupur on Friday. **Full report on Page 4**

RJD vows 1cr jobs, ₹1L to poor 'sisters'

Patna: The RJD, the largest constituent of Mahagathbandhan in Bihar, on Saturday released its election manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls, promising 1 crore government jobs and ₹1 lakh per year to "sisters" from poor families on Raksha Bandhan. **Full report on Page 3**

COUNTERPOINT



We were busy planning many schemes in the last term... please elect us this term to implement them!

WEATHER

Max: 34°C
Min: 24°C
RH: 38%
Rain: 20%

Forecast: Cloudy

ASTROGUIDE

Shubhkrut: Uttarayana
Tithi: Chaitra Shukla Shashti till 11.48 am
Star: Ardra till 1.37 am (Monday)
Varjyam: 9.32 am to 11.10 am
Durmuhurtam: 4.49 pm to 5.38 pm
Rahukalam: 4.30 pm to 6 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.47 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 5.55 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 11.07 AM
MOONSET TODAY 12.01 AM

No need to regulate industry, says PM in chat with gamers

■ 'Create games for change' ■ 'Political noob' jibe goes viral

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

In a free-wheeling interaction with top Indian online gamers earlier this week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that the gaming industry does not require any regulation. During the discussion on a host of issues related to the e-gaming industry, Mr Modi posed curious questions to the gamers and also tried his hands at some of the games. The video of Mr Modi's interaction with the gamers was released on Saturday. "If I say it (noob), you will assume it is for a particular person," Mr Modi said during his interaction with gamers, who explained to him certain terminologies related to the gaming industry, such



Prime Minister Narendra Modi tries his hands at a virtual reality game during a free-wheeling interaction with top Indian online gamers.

as "noob" and "grind". The Prime Minister's remark set off a meme fest on social media. The leaders of the ruling BJP seized the opportunity to taunt the Opposition, triggering a political slugfest. During the interaction, the Prime Minister said, "People have offered dif-

BJP to unveil manifesto for LS polls today

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

The BJP will unveil the "Modi ki guarantee" for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections on Sunday when the party top brass, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will release the party's "Sankalp Patra". With Mr Modi often reiterating his government's priority for "Gyan" — *garib, youth, annadata and narishakti* — the poll document is likely to have more promises for these sections. **More on Page 3**

Iran seizes ship with 17 Indians, Centre steps in

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

India is in touch with Iranian authorities to ensure the security and early release of 17 Indian nationals who are among the 25-member crew of a cargo ship seized by Iranian troops, sources said on Saturday. In the latest escalation of hostilities between Iran and Israel, a special forces unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) of Iran carried out the operation to take control of the Israeli-owned container ship *MSC Ariès* in the Gulf of Oman, close to the critical chokepoint of the Strait of Hormuz, separating the Arabian peninsula from Iran. **More on Page 3**

Flights skip Iran airspace amid tension in West Asia

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

In the wake of India's advisory on Friday asking its nationals to avoid travel to Iran and Israel following escalating hostility between those two nations, Air India flights bound westwards to Europe and beyond are now avoiding Iranian airspace along with several other international carriers, sources confirmed on Saturday. Online media reports too cited a flight-tracking website that showed that an Air India flight to London on Saturday morning had avoided Iranian airspace. Besides Air India, Vistara flights also avoided the Iranian airspace for their west-

bound flights on Saturday. According to industry sources, all Air India flights bound for Europe could now take up to 45 minutes longer to reach their destinations. Air India flights to the Middle East, however, will not be impacted as they fly south of Iranian airspace. This comes a day after the ministry of external affairs "advised" Indian nationals to avoid travelling to Iran and Israel. Air India operated its flight to Tel Aviv on Saturday and

is yet to announce any cancellations. No Indian carrier flies to Iran. Air India and Vistara flights from Mumbai to Europe take the Iranian route. Flights from Delhi opt for routes via Iran or one via Afghanistan and Tajikistan. On Saturday, Vistara's Mumbai-Europe flights took the northern route via Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Air India's flights to London from Ahmedabad and Kochi too skipped the Iran routes on Saturday. "Due to the current situation affecting parts of the Middle East (West Asia), we are making changes to the flight paths of some of our flights. Contingency routes, which are kept available to ensure **Turn to Page 4**

SC to hear Delhi CM's plea against ED arrest April 15

ED case is illegal: Kejriwal

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

The Supreme Court is slated to hear on Monday Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's plea against a high court order that upheld his arrest in a money-laundering case linked to the excise policy "scam". A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta will hear on April 15 Mr Kejriwal's petition challenging the Delhi high court's April 9 order, according to the cause list uploaded on the apex court's website. In a setback to the arrested chief minister, the high court had junked his plea challenging his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate and subsequent remand in the money laundering case. Dismissing his plea, the high court also upheld his arrest, saying the ED was left with "little option" after he skipped repeated summonses and refused to join the investigation. The case relates to alleged corruption and money laundering in the formulation and execu-



Arvind Kejriwal

tion of the Delhi government's excise policy for 2021-22, which was later scrapped. The ED had arrested Mr Kejriwal on March 21, hours after the high court refused to grant him protection from coercive action by the anti-money laundering probe agency. He is undergoing judicial custody until April 15 at the Tihar Jail. Mr Kejriwal has dubbed his arrest by the ED in the run-up to the parliamentary polls an "unprecedented assault on the tenets of democracy" and urged the apex court to release him by declaring the case against him "illegal". In his appeal before the top court, Mr Kejriwal has said his arrest on **Turn to Page 4**

MEIL, 11 others booked in bribery case ■ Firm donated ₹966cr via electoral bonds

Hyd firm, 2nd top poll doner, in CBI net

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

The CBI on Saturday said that it has registered an FIR against Hyderabad-based Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Ltd (MEIL), which bought electoral bonds worth ₹966 crores (the second-biggest buyer), in an alleged bribery case. In its FIR, the anti-graft agency has named eight officials of the NISP and NMDC and two MECON officials for receiving an alleged bribe of around

₹78 lakhs for clearing bills of ₹174 crores from Megha Engineering in connection with works related to the Jagdalpur integrated steel plant. According to the data on electoral bonds, which was released by the Election Commission on March 21 following a Supreme Court ruling, Megha Engineering had emerged as the second-biggest buyer of electoral bonds and donated the highest amount of about ₹586 crores to the BJP. Besides the BJP, the

company had donated ₹195 crores to the BRS, ₹85 crores to the DMK and ₹37 crores to the YSRCP. The TDP got about ₹25 crores from the company, while the Congress received ₹17 crores. The JD-S, the Jana Sena Party and the JD(U)

also got smaller sums ranging from ₹5 crores to ₹10 crores. According to the FIR made public on Saturday, the CBI had registered a preliminary inquiry on August 10, last year about the alleged bribery in the ₹315 crores project related to the works of the intake well, pump house and cross-country pipeline at the integrated steel plant in Jagdalpur, which was awarded to the company. Based on the findings of the preliminary inquiry, a recommendation was

made on March 18 to register a regular case into the alleged bribery, which was filed on March 31. The eight officials of NISP and NMDC booked by the CBI are retired executive director Prashant Dash, director (production) D.K. Mohanty, DGM P.K. Bhuyan, DM Naresh Babu, senior manager Subro Banerjee, retired CGM (finance) L. Krishna Mohan, GM (finance) K. Rajshakar and manager (finance) Somnath Ghosh. **Turn to Page 4**



Devotees outside the historical Goddess Kali temple during Baisakhi and Navratri festival in Jammu on Saturday. — PTI

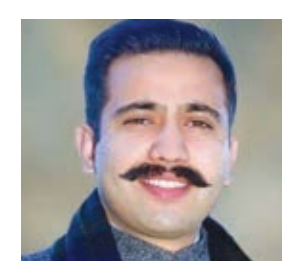


A senior citizen casts her vote through a postal ballot for the Lok Sabha elections at her residence in Bengaluru on Saturday. In a pathbreaking initiative, the Election Commission, for the first time, has provided the facility of home voting for the elderly and persons with disabilities in a general election. — PTI

Cong names 16 picks ■ Pits Tewari from Chd Vikramaditya will take on Kangana in Mandi LS seat

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

The contest for the Mandi Lok Sabha seat in Himachal Pradesh promises to be more intense, with the Congress pitting state minister Vikramaditya Singh to take on BJP's Kangana Ranaut. Besides Mr Singh, the Congress on Saturday also announced a list of 15 more candidates for the ensuing Lok Sabha polls. The Mandi seat is a matter of prestige, as Mr Singh is a sitting MLA and the son of the late Himachal Pradesh chief minister Virbhadra Singh and state unit chief Pratibha Singh. "We discussed the names that we had short-listed. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former Congress chief Sonia Gandhi were also present at the meeting. Some names are final and some names will be discussed again. From Mandi, Vikramaditya Singh's name has been made final as everyone



Vikramaditya Singh



Kangana Ranaut

was in favour of a young face from Mandi," the Congress Himachal Pradesh unit chief said. Mr Singh became the titular kind of the erstwhile princely state of Bushahr (a town in Shimla) after his father's death. He holds a master's degree in history from Delhi's St Stephen's College. He was the only Congress MLA who attended the Ram temple inauguration ceremony in Ayodhya, defying the party line. In February, Mr Singh had announced his resignation. Speculation was rife that he was going to join the BJP along with a few rebel MLAs, a move that could have brought down the Congress gov-

ernment in the hill state. The infighting ensued soon after the Congress lost the Rajya Sabha elections owing to cross-voting. The crisis was managed with the intervention of the top leadership. Mr Singh withdrew his resignation and stayed with the party. The Congress' on Saturday nominated former Union minister and Lok Sabha MP Manish Tewari from Chandigarh. The seat was earlier held for two terms by BJP MP and actor Kirron Kher. Senior Congress leader and former Union minister Pawan Bansal, the unsuccessful Congress candidate from **Turn to Page 4**

6 dead in stabbings at Sydney shopping mall

Sydney, April 13: A man stabbed six people to death at a busy Sydney shopping centre on Saturday before he was fatally shot, police said, with hundreds fleeing the chaotic scene, many weeping as they carried their children. Eight people, including a 9-month-old, were injured. The 40-year-old was stopped in the knifing attack at the Westfield Shopping Centre in Bondi Junction when a police inspector shot him after he turned and raised a knife, New South Wales assistant police

commissioner Anthony Cooke told reporters. "They just said run, run, run — someone's been stabbed," one witness told ABC TV in Australia. "The attacker was walking really calmly like he was having an ice cream in a park. And then he went up the escalators... And probably within about a minute we heard three gunshots." Six of the victims — five women and a man — and the suspect died. Commissioner Karen Webb said the injured people were being treated at hospitals. — AP **More on Page 6**

IN BRIEF

Gurgaon man drags cop on car's bonnet

Gurgaon: A constable of Gurugram traffic police was injured on being allegedly hit by a car and dragged on its bonnet for about 100 metres after he asked the driver to pull over, officials said on Saturday. However, the car could not flee due to congestion on the road and the driver was arrested, they said. The incident took place around 6 pm on Friday at the Sector 4/7 Chowk where Ajay Pal was posted on traffic duty. Meanwhile, a white car with tinted windows was seen going from the Chowk towards Sector 9, he said. Pal said in his complaint. When he asked the driver to stop the car, the driver allegedly hit Pal and dragged him on the bonnet. "I yelled at the driver to stop the car, but he kept driving with me on the car's bonnet for around 100 metres," the constable said. After the car got stuck in a jam, the driver finally stopped his car and other cops caught hold of him, he added. According to the police, the constable got injured in the incident and was admitted to a private hospital for treatment. — PTI

Man shot dead by minor in Seelampur

New Delhi: A 35-year-old man, who was shot in the head from a close range here, succumbed to his injuries on Saturday and a minor was arrested in connection to the case, police said. The incident occurred on Friday when Shahnawaz, a labourer, was shot in the head from a close range allegedly over the refusal of protection money, the police said. He was rushed to the Jag Pravech Chandra Hospital and later referred to Lok Nayak Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries, the police said. The police examined the CCTV footage and identified the accused, deputy commissioner of police (northeast) Joy Tirkey said. "We have apprehended one of the accused persons, who is a juvenile. Other accused persons have been identified as Rehan, Faizan and Shoab," the DCP said, adding efforts are being made to nab them.

Ganga Ram Hospital expands cancer care

New Delhi: Sir Ganga Ram Hospital announced on Saturday that a comprehensive and holistic cancer care center, along with 200 additional beds, will be commissioned shortly. Speaking on the 69th Founder's Day of the hospital, Dr. Ajay Swarup, Chairman of the Board of Management, stated that the hospital provided free surgeries for 2,647 patients, 20,078 free X-rays, 2,238 free MRIs, and 2,661 free CT scans during the year 2023 to 2024. "We take pride in our strong emphasis on research and academics, which keeps us at the forefront and sets us apart," said Dr. D.S. Rana, Chairman of the Sir Ganga Ram Trust Society, on the occasion.

'SANGH VALUES' RUN THROUGH MY VEINS: BANSURI

New Delhi: Bansuri Swaraj, the BJP candidate for the New Delhi Lok Sabha seat and daughter of late Union minister Sushma Swaraj, said the values of Sangh run through her veins and that she cannot even think of filling her mother's shoes owing to her stature and legacy. Bansuri Swaraj reminisced the deep connection she had with her mother since childhood and revealed that she has continued the late minister's tradition of sending BJP veteran L.K. Advani his favourite cake on his birthday every year. Bansuri Swaraj, the only child of Sushma Swaraj and Swaraj Kaushal, said while growing up, there was a strict rule in the house — she had to converse with her mother in Hindi, and father in English — which made her proficient in both the languages. Forty-year-old Bansuri Swaraj, the youngest Bharatiya Janata Party candidate in Delhi, said she had a normal upbringing which has kept her grounded while her family consisting of her parents and grandparents had a nationalistic outlook. — PTI



Bansuri Swaraj

4,000 flats, multi-specialty hospital and 2 colleges in East Delhi will be my priority, says BJP candidate Delhiites have seen real face of AAP: Malhotra

The upcoming Lok Sabha polls have raised the political temperature in Delhi, where consecutive victories by the BJP have prompted the AAP and Congress to forge an alliance for the 2024 parliamentary polls.

Contesting from the East Delhi constituency, Harsh Malhotra, a former mayor of East Delhi Municipal Corporation, in a free-wheeling interview with SHASHI BHUSHAN and BHASKAR HARI SHARMA exuded full confidence in sailing through the electoral challenge given Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charismatic appeal and his bonding with the people and all-round development of the country during his leadership over the past decade besides his organisational acumen.

The Delhi BJP general secretary set the tone of the conversation saying, "This time in the national capital the party has put confidence in the ground workers and we will strive for another clean sweep." Excerpts:

How was your transition from a hardcore organisational person to the BJP's candidate for Lok Sabha polls?

It's an overwhelming feeling that the party has entrusted organisational workers with this opportunity. As a mayor in the past, we touched upon the basic necessities of the people, be it the issue of salaries of safai karmchris or healthcare problems. Now, the people themselves are coming forward and supporting me.

The Opposition is accus-

ing the BJP of stepmotherly treatment to the East Delhi constituency as the saffron party fields fresh faces in every Lok Sabha polls.

This time the party has fielded those candidates who are natives of the area. I was born and raised in east Delhi and also previously served as a mayor of the EDMC. This area has always been my "janmbhoomi" as well as "karmbhoomi." In the last two times also, the people of this seat have given immense affection to the candidates and they will continue to do so this time also.

How will you try to fill the "star" gap of Gautam Gambhir?

Mr Gambhir is an incumbent MP. Despite his star aura, he did work for the people — whether through initiatives like



Harsh Malhotra

"Jan Rasoi" or addressing issues like the Ghazipur landfill problem by installing 20 Trommel machines. People recognise his efforts, and they don't have any complaints about him as his office was open round the clock for the common people.

What are your priorities or agenda for the constituency?

There are four JJ clusters in my constituency. The moment my candidature

was announced and before the MCC was imposed, we announced that around 4,000 clusters of flats will be constructed under PM Modi's Jahan Jhuggi Wahan Makaan scheme in two years. Apart from that, one multi-specialty hospital and two colleges in the area will be on top of my agenda.

What will be your take on the rejuvenation of the Yamuna river which flows through your constituency?

It is an emotional as well as religious matter for us. We always talk about "Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb", which is an integral part of our culture, but the AAP-ruled Delhi government has turned the river into a drain. It is and will be my priority to get it cleaned by installing sewage treatment plants

at the exit of the 18 drains that fall into the river. Arvind Kejriwal has only given false promises about cleaning the river. We will develop a riverfront to the level of Sabarmati front at the banks of Yamuna to boost tourism.

Will the arrest of AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal affect BJP in Delhi?

Yes, people will give "jail ka jawab vote se" since not just the Delhiites everyone in the country now understands the extent of corruption that the AAP has engaged in. There is no sympathy with them. People have seen their corrupt and original faces. AAP should be ashamed of themselves for comparing and putting a jailed photo of Mr Kejriwal between Shaheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh and Baba Saheb

Ambedkar. So yes, people will give "jawab" to the corrupt AAP not only in 2024 but also in next year's Assembly elections.

Is Opposition INDIA bloc a threat to the BJP?

The so-called alliance is only for electoral gain. There are two types of alliances — one is natural and respectful where people adhere to a common minimal agenda. But this alliance is for personal gains. AAP joined hands with those whom they once used to call corrupt. Why didn't they join hands with Congress in Punjab? For an alliance, one has to sacrifice, which AAP cannot. This is why Mr Kejriwal is not resigning as chief minister despite being in jail. On June 4, the BJP will sweep all seven seats in Delhi and NDA will be over 400 seats.

Rains cool down Delhi-NCR

IMD forecasts more showers today, warns of lightning & storm

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

Rains hit parts of Delhi-NCR on Saturday evening, bringing respite from the heat.

The India meteorological department (IMD) attributed the rains to an active western disturbance over Northwest India. It has also forecast light rain accompanied by gusty winds on Sunday.

The maximum temperature in the national capital was recorded at 39° C, three notches above the season's average, the IMD said.

"The temperature in the capital will drop by nearly 33 per cent, with overcast skies and winds reaching speeds of 30 to 40 kmph due to an active western disturbance that hit Northwest India on April 12," said Kunaldeep Srivastava, a scientist and head of the Regional Weather Forecasting Centre.

The effects of the western disturbance will be felt until April 18-19. The temperature will not reach 40° C until then.

After April 18, the temperature will begin to increase day by day, he said.

The IMD also issued an advisory for thunderstorms and lightning over Delhi-NCR, urging people to stay indoors. It also advised people to close windows and doors and avoid travelling.

Additionally, the advisory recommended seeking safe shelters and avoiding taking shelter under trees.

The IMD has forecast generally cloudy skies for Sunday with light showers accompanied by winds with speeds reaching 35 to 40 kmph.



Visitors enjoy on Kartavya Path after rain in New Delhi on Saturday.

— PTI

Shah skips Noida visit due to bad weather, gives telephonic speech

Noida, April 13: Union home minister Amit Shah on Saturday sought electoral support for the BJP's Gautam Buddh Nagar candidate Mahesh Sharma through a telephonic speech that was played out on loudspeakers after he skipped an in-person visit here due to inclement weather.

Mr Shah made in-person appearances for poll campaigns in Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan earlier in the day and was scheduled to reach Noida in the evening.

However, since he could not visit Noida due to bad weather in Delhi-NCR, the Union home minister addressed the gathering here through a brief telephonic call and solicited voters' support to ensure that Narendra Modi



Amit Shah

becomes Prime Minister for a third term.

"During the last 10 years, Mr Modi has worked on a range of issues from the welfare of the poor to urban and infrastructure development in the country. The team of Mahesh Sharma and Narendra Modi got an airport in Noida and connected the area with several high-ways. Mr Sharma has made a huge contribution to the comprehensive development of Noida," Mr Shah said.

Remove Bournvita as health drink: Centre directs e-commerce firms

New Delhi, April 13: The government has asked all the e-commerce companies to remove drinks and beverages, including Bournvita, from the health drinks category from their portals.

"National commission for protection of child rights (NCPDR), a statutory body constituted under section (3) of the Commission of Protection of Child Rights (CPCR) Act 2005 after its inquiry under Section 14 of CRPC Act 2005 concluded that there is no 'health drink'

defined under FSS Act 2006, rules and regulations submitted by FSSAI and Mondelez India Food Pvt Ltd," the commerce and industry ministry said in an advisory to all e-commerce companies.

The order is dated April 10, 2024.

It said that all e-commerce companies/portals are advised to remove drinks and beverages, including Bournvita, from the category of health drinks from their platforms/sites. — PTI

'45% doctors in India giving incomplete prescriptions'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

Around 45% of doctors are writing incomplete prescriptions to their patients, found a study report of 13 big government hospitals by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR).

The study has shared the findings recently in the Indian Journal of Medical Research (IJMR) which states that around 10% of prescriptions from tertiary care and teaching hospitals analysed as part of a

year-long government study had "unacceptable deviations" such as inappropriate prescription of medications or more than one diagnosis.

The overall prevalence of deviations found was 45 per cent, of which unacceptable deviations were estimated to be 9.8 per cent, as per a study.

The study titled — "Evaluation of prescriptions from tertiary care hospitals across India for deviations from treatment guidelines & their potential consequences" —



Devotees take a dip in the sacred pond of Gurdwara Bangla Sahib on the occasion of Baisakhi in New Delhi on Saturday.

— G.N. JHA

THE STUDY underlined that the most common drug prescribed inappropriately in the prescriptions with unacceptable deviations was pantoprazole

analysed 4,838 prescriptions.

A total of 7,800 prescriptions were collected and 4,838 prescriptions were analysed from 13 RUMCs as per the protocol.

It has said this cross-sectional observational study was conducted between

2019 and 2020 in the out-patient departments of tertiary care hospitals in India

wherein the 13 ICMR Rational Use of Medicines Centres are located. The survey was undertaken at renowned government hospitals across the country, including Delhi AIIMS and Safdarjung Hospital.

The prescriptions collected were from all the zones: North (2,879), South (778), West (881), and East (300). All the prescribers were postgraduates in their respective disciplines and on average were in prac-

tice for 4-18 years.

Of the 4,838 prescriptions assessed, about one-tenth of them (475) had unacceptable deviations, as per the study.

The study underlined that the most common drug prescribed inappropriately in the prescriptions with unacceptable deviations was pantoprazole.

The potential consequence of the unacceptable deviations reported by the clinician was increased cost of treatment, it said.

L-G: Subsidies on power, water, bus fare to stay

'Don't pay attention to rumours'

AVINASH PRABHAKAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

Delhi lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena on Saturday said the ongoing electricity, water, and bus fare subsidies will continue in the city and people need not pay attention to "rumours" spread by "vested political interests."

Appealing to the people to reject the attempts made to mislead them, Mr Saxena said, "Schemes are part of the budget approved by govt of India and lieutenant-governor; these do not belong to an individual or a political party."

As per a statement from Raj Niwas, the L-G has emphasised that the subsidy schemes are those of the government and not driven by or dependent on any individual holding any position and therefore, because of any individual being in jail, the question of a scheme getting affected does not arise.

These schemes have budgetary allocation in the budget document that is in turn approved by the government of India, as per constitutional and statutory provisions, it added.

Meanwhile, Delhi minister Saurabh Bharadwaj in a post on X said, "Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal had promised the public of Delhi that he will not let the works of people in Delhi stop—regardless of



V.K. Saxena

being inside or outside the jail. Today, Delhi's son and brother Arvind Kejriwal got a big victory. The people of Delhi have achieved a big victory. Those who used to say that they would not let the government run from jail, have conceded defeat. They have accepted that the work in Delhi won't stop, and the Kejriwal government will run from jail..."

However, the statement said that Mr Saxena has assured the people of Delhi that none of the subsidy schemes benefiting the poor would be discontinued and appealed to them to not pay heed to statements and rumours being spread by "vested political interests."

Mr Saxena also underlined that these schemes are paid for by the consolidated fund of the NCT of Delhi and not from the account of any individual or political party.

These schemes are funded by the people of Delhi themselves who contribute to the NCTD's consolidated fund by way of taxes, it added.

CBI: Kavitha threatened Aurobindo firm promoter

New Delhi, April 13: The CBI has told a special court here that BRS leader K. Kavitha had allegedly "threatened" Aurobindo Pharma promoter Sharath Chandra Reddy to pay an amount of ₹25 crore to the AAP for the five retail zones allotted to his firm under the Delhi government's excise policy. According to the CBI, Ms Kavitha had told Mr Reddy that in case he does not pay the amount to the AAP in the national capital, his business will be harmed in Telangana and Delhi.

Mr Reddy, who was an accused in a money-laundering case linked to the alleged liquor scam in Delhi, had turned an approver in the case that is being probed by the ED. The CBI is yet to file a chargesheet against him.

Seeking the BRS leader's custodial interrogation, the CBI told special judge Kaveri Baweja that it was at the "insistence and assurance" of Ms Kavitha, the daughter of former Telangana CM K. Chandrababu Naidu, that Mr Reddy got involved in the liquor business in Delhi. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Teacher takes part in rally, suspended

Bhubaneswar: A woman teacher on Saturday was suspended for allegedly taking part in a rally carried out by a political party for an election campaign in Odisha's Boudh district. The suspended teacher was identified as Sanghamitra Mallick. Boudh district election officer (DEC) and the district collector took disciplinary action against the erring teacher. The suspended teacher is posted at Dahya Government Nodal High School. Ms Mallick was placed under suspension with immediate effect for violating the model code of conduct, the DEC office said in a notification. As per reports, she took part in a political rally that was carried out from Palaspat to Ambagaon under Kantamal assembly constituency in Boudh district, a couple of days ago. As per the election code of conduct, Ms Mallick's act was a gross violation of guidelines set by the EC.

Raj reiterates his support to PM Modi

Mumbai: Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray on Saturday reiterated his support to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Praising the work done by the NDA government, he said Mr Modi should continue to lead the country. "Narendra Modi should be the PM again. His government has taken many important steps in the interest of India's development," Mr Thackeray said. Praising Mr Modi for the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya, Mr Thackeray said, "The work of Ram Mandir was stalled for many decades. No one could complete that task. But the Modi government did it. Had PM Modi not been there, Ram temple would not have been built. It would have remained a pending issue."

Didi: BJP won't even win 200 LS seats

Jalpaiguri, WB: Alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantees are "false", West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday claimed that the BJP would not even win 200 seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. Speaking at an election rally here, the Trinamul Congress supreme accused the BJP of destroying the country's Constitution drafted by B.R. Ambedkar. "The BJP will not even win 200 seats. What have they done for north Bengal? Do not fall prey to PM Narendra Modi's 'guarantees'. These are nothing but electoral jumla (false)," Ms Banerjee said. The BJP-led NDA is aiming at crossing the 400 Lok Sabha seat mark in the upcoming elections. "You (BJP) have destroyed the country's Constitution drafted by Babasaheb Ambedkar," she alleged. — PTI

FS MEETS TOP OFFICIALS ON 3-DAY U.S. TRIP

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

Foreign secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra made a three-day visit to Washington this week that ended on Friday during which he held discussions with his counterparts and other senior US officials to "consolidate" the bilateral comprehensive global strategic partnership, the Indian embassy in Washington said on Saturday. This comes ahead of the reported forthcoming visit of US NSA Jake Sullivan to India next week. In a statement, the Indian embassy in Washington said, "Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra visited Washington DC, United States from 10-12 April 2024. During his visit, foreign secretary Kwatra undertook a detailed review of the progress made towards further consolidating the India-US comprehensive global strategic partnership. During his visit to Washington DC, foreign secretary had discussions with his counterparts deputy secretary Richard Verma and deputy secretary Kurt Campbell as well as other senior officials. He also held discussions with key counterpart officials at the National Security Council, Department of Defense, Department of Commerce and Department of Energy."



Tamil Nadu minister and DMK leader Udhayanidhi Stalin with party's candidate from Thoothukudi district Kanimozhi Karunanidhi during an election campaign on Saturday. — PTI

Will end poverty in single stroke if Cong wins: Rahul

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, APRIL 13

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday pledged to eradicate poverty in the country "in one stroke", if his party is voted to power in the April-May general election. Addressing a rally in Lal Bahadur Shastri Ground in a village of Bastar district in Chhattisgarh, Mr Gandhi said that Congress would implement the promises made in its poll manifesto as soon as it came to power in the general election to remove poverty in the country.



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during a public meeting in Bastar district on Saturday. — PTI

Mr Gandhi listed out the guarantees of his party and said that under the Mahatma Yojana, ₹1 lakh would be provided annually to a woman in a family. "The Congress, if returned to power at the Centre, would introduce a quota of 50 per cent in government jobs for women. Thirty lakh vacant jobs in the government would also be filled," he asserted. Besides, right to apprenticeship would be legislated to make skill development for the educated unemployed youths mandatory. Such youths would undergo apprenticeship training in the public sector undertakings for a year with an

annual stipend of ₹1 lakh, Mr Gandhi added. He also pledged to abolish the contractual system in the government services if his party is voted to power in the general elections. Mr Gandhi pledged to conduct a caste census in the country. He said that while Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP and the RSS are trying to destroy the Constitution, the Congress and its INDIA bloc partners are out to save it. He described the forthcoming general election as a "battle between two mindsets" — for the Constitution and against the Constitution.

Like Big Boss, Cong a house of disorder, says Rajnath

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, APRIL 13

Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday said the Congress, bogged down by internal strife, is now a house of disorder like the TV show *Big Boss*.

He predicted that the countdown to the decimation of Congress would begin after the ensuing general election. Addressing an election rally at Geddam in Dantewada under south Bastar in Chhattisgarh, Mr Singh said that misgovernance and corruption are the hallmarks of a Congress government whether in state or at the Centre.

He asserted that Congress has become synonymous with scams and scandals and added that money was misappropriated even in the sale of cow dung during the previous Congress rule in Chhattisgarh. "Congress is going to face extinction in the coming days like dinosaurs," Mr Singh said, adding that the young generation would find the grand old party irrelevant after four-five years, he said. The defence minister asserted that BJP however is committed to development and that's the reason why the party is growing.

Iran captures ship with 17 Indian crew, govt steps in

'We are in touch with Iran to ensure safety and release of our people'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

Following the capture of a cargo ship on Saturday by Iran that has 17 Indians on board, India is in touch with Iranian authorities through diplomatic channels both in New Delhi and Tehran to ensure security and early release of the Indians on board, sources said on Saturday.

According to the western media reports, "MSC Aries" is Israel-owned ship. Sources on Saturday said, "We are aware that a cargo ship 'MSC Aries' has been overpowered by Iran. We have learnt that there are 17 Indian nationals onboard. We are in touch with the Iranian authorities through diplomatic channels, both in Tehran and in Delhi, to ensure security, welfare

and early release of Indian nationals."

India had on Friday evening advised its nationals "not to travel to Iran or Israel till further notice". This follows the recent attack on an Iranian diplomatic mission in Syria for which Iran has blamed Israel and vowed retaliation against the Jewish state. India has close ties with both Iran and Israel.

According to online western media reports, Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards seized the Israel-owned container ship in the latest escalation of hostilities between the two countries. Video published online showed two figures sliding from a helicopter down ropes on to the deck of the "MSC Aries", a 366m-long container ship, in the Gulf of

IRNA, IRAN'S state news agency, said the guards' naval forces had captured the ship in the Gulf of Oman close to choke point of the strait of Hormuz

Oman, the reports said. According to the UK-based *Financial Times*, the vessel is owned by Zodiac Maritime — a company controlled by Israel's Ofer family.

IRNA, Iran's state news agency, said the guards' naval forces had captured the ship. The seizure took place in the Gulf of Oman, close to the critical choke-point of the Strait of Hormuz, separating the Arabian peninsula from Iran, it added.

Geneva-based Mediterranean Shipping Company — the world's

largest container shipping line — confirmed that the vessel had been seized by "Iranian authorities" and was owned by Zodiac, the reports said, adding that the ship was operating a service for MSC from the United Arab Emirates port of Khalifa to Nhava Sheva in Mumbai.

"She (the ship) has since been diverted from her itinerary towards Iran," the company was quoted as saying. It added that the ship had 25 crew on board. "We are working closely with the relevant authorities to ensure their well-being, and safe return of the vessel," MSC was quoted by reports as stating.

The seizure is the first in waters off Iran since January, when Iranian forces seized the Greek-owned oil tanker *St Nikolas*.

AAP in fray on 2 seats in Assam, Mann holds rally

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, APRIL 13

Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann, who on Saturday took out a large roadshow at Biswanath in support of an Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate for the Lok Sabha elections, has promised to increase daily wages in the state from ₹250 to ₹450 per day.

The AAP is contesting Lok Sabha polls on two seats in Assam - Dibrugarh and Sonitpur. Recalling many similarities between the people of Assam and Punjab, Mr Mann launched a scathing attack on Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, stating as Mr Sarma's wife owns private schools in the state, the BJP govt is not interested in improving government schools.

The Punjab CM said, "In 2015, the BJP leader Amit Shah had declared Mr Sarma as the most corrupt person. But after joining the BJP, the same person has become innocent for the BJP today,"



Bhagwant Mann

adding that the BJP just lied about everything. "Their every statement of the saffron party is just a jumla," Mr Mann said.

The CM, while addressing a series of public meetings for AAP candidates, said that electricity is absolutely free in Punjab and 90 per cent of the households in Punjab get zero electricity bills. Besides, the "aam aadmi clinics" are functioning in Punjab where all kinds of treatment is free. "If given a chance, we will do the same things for Assam as well," he promised.

Mr Mann refuted that the BJP's plan to finish the AAP by putting its national convener Arvind Kejriwal in jail is not

going to succeed. "You can arrest Arvind Kejriwal, but how will you arrest his thinking? Arvind Kejriwal is not just a person, he is an idea," he added.

He appealed to the people to vote for the AAP candidates and elect them as their representatives in the parliament.

The Punjab CM also said there has been a very old relationship between Assam and Punjab. "Our first guru, Guru Nanak Dev, and ninth guru, Guru Teg Bahadur, visited Assam. There are gurdwara sahibs here," he added.

Earlier, his leader Atishi, during her visit to Assam, exuded confidence about her party opening an account in the state in the Lok Sabha elections. "Given the kind of love and support the AAP has always got from the people of Assam, it is evident that the people of Assam know about the Aam Aadmi party and its chief Arvind Kejriwal," said Ms Atishi.

Uddhav: Poll battle to save democracy

SONU SHRIVASTAVA MUMBAI, APRIL 13

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday said that the upcoming general election is a battle to save democracy and stop dictatorship. He advocated for the coalition government in the country.

Without taking names of Raj Thackeray and Prakash Ambedkar, he said the people are well aware about the people who have extended their unconditional support to the Bharatiya Janata Party and are pretending to be contesting against it.

On the occasion of Gudi Padwa — the beginning of Marathi new year — Raj Thackeray announced his unconditional support for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the saffron party.

Mr Ambedkar has decided to contest Lok Sabha elections separately after his alliance talks with the Maha Vikas Aghadi failed.

■ Saffron party on sticky wicket on 6 seats ■ Agnipath, farmers' stir to play key role

BJP may not be able to repeat 2019 in Raj

SHASHI BHUSHAN and BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI/JAIPUR, APRIL 13

Even after its electoral victory in the Assembly elections in Rajasthan last year, the BJP appears to be on a sticky wicket in at least six Lok Sabha seats. The party insiders indicated that maintaining last general elections' tally of winning 24 of the 25 Lok Sabha seats could "possibly be difficult".

In 2019, the BJP's alliance partner Rashtriya Loktantrik Party won one seat in the desert state. It has been learnt that the BJP is witnessing a

tough fight in some seats of Shekhawati, Hadoti and Marwar regions, where it faces neck-and-neck contests against its rivals.

In Kota parliamentary seat in Hadoti region, the Congress has fielded an influential candidate to take on Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla. The Congress candidate and two time former MLA Prahlad Gunjal — considered to be close to former chief minister Vasundhara Raje — is expected to give a tough challenge to Mr Birla in securing a hat-trick from the seat.

"Belonging to the Gurjar community, Mr Gunjal enjoys a significant fan

IN KOTA parliamentary seat in Hadoti region, the Congress has fielded an influential candidate Prahlad Gunjal to take on Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla

following among his caste and also has hold in Meena community as well and other minority communities, besides enjoying the BJP workers' internal support," sources said.

In the Shekhawati region — dominated by the Jat community of Rajasthan — consisting of three Lok Sabha seats: Churu, Jhunjhunu and Sikar, the BJP is also facing a strong

contest. Apart from farmers' protest, Agnipath Scheme is said to play an important poll factor, as there's at least one man in the armed forces from almost every home in the region. In these three seats, the BJP and the Congress both have fielded Jat candidates.

In Churu, the two time BJP MP Rahul Kaswan, who joined the Congress after being denied the party ticket, is challenging Paralympian Devendra Jhajharia — both belonging to the Jat community. Senior BJP leader and a strong Rajput face Rajendra Rathore will play a decisive role in this

seat. It is also a talk of the town that Mr Rathore played a key role in the denial of ticket to Mr Kaswan. The BJP has been winning the Churu seat since 1999. In 2014 and 2019, Mr Kaswan — son of the then MP Ram Singh Kaswan — won the seat with a massive margin.

In Jhunjhunu, there is a fight between two first time LS candidates; while former BJP MLA Shubhakar Choudhary is eyeing for the seat with the help of his in-law and former BJP MP from the seat Santosh Ahlawat, the INC's Brijendra Ola is a four time MLA from Jhunjhunu.



RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav addresses while releasing "parivartan patra" for the Lok Sabha elections at the party office in Patna on Saturday. — PTI

RJD vows 1cr jobs, ₹1L/yr to 'sisters'

Makes 24 promises in manifesto

Patna, April 13: The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), the largest constituent of Mahagathabandhan in Bihar, on Saturday released its election manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls, promising 1 crore government jobs and ₹1 lakh per year to "sisters" from poor families on Raksha Bandhan.

Bihar former deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav, while releasing the RJD's election manifesto "Parivartan Patra", said the party is making 24 "jan vachan" (public promises) for the 2024 polls, and it will fulfill these commitments. "If the INDIA bloc comes to power at the Centre, the RJD will ensure that unemployed youth across the country get 1 crore government jobs... the process will start on Independence Day this year... it will be like 'berozgari se azadi' (freedom from unemployment)," Mr Yadav said.

"Unemployment is our biggest enemy but the BJP leaders never talk about it. They had promised 2 crore jobs... but we deliver on our promises," he said. "On the occasion of Raksha Bandhan this year, we will start providing ₹1 lakh annually to our sisters belonging to poor families," the RJD leader said. The manifesto further promised the implementation of the Old Pension Scheme for government employees and LPG cylinders at ₹500. "For better connectivity in Bihar, we will build five new airports at Patna, Bhagalpur, Muzaffarpur, Gopalganj and Raaxaul, besides sanctioning a special package of ₹1.60 lakh crore for the overall development of the state. People of Bihar will also get 200 units of free electricity per month," Mr Yadav added. He asserted that the Agniveer Scheme of contractual employment in armed forces will be discontinued if the INDIA bloc comes to power at the Centre. — PTI

Drunk youths stop Adhir's car; Cong cries TMC plot

Baharampur (WB), April 13: A group of unidentified youths "stopped" the West Bengal Congress president Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury's car in his Lok Sabha constituency Baharampur and shouted "go back" slogan on Saturday.

Mr Chowdhury, who is seeking re-election from the constituency, held the Trinamul Congress responsible for this and alleged that it was a practice started by the state's ruling party from last year's civic polls.

"This is nothing but a ploy to stop me. The local TMC is behind this. They want people not to work for the Congress party. This is the same thing they had done during the civic polls last year," Mr Chowdhury said. The leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha



Congress candidate Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury during his campaign for Lok Sabha elections at Baharampur in Murshidabad district on Saturday. — PTI

claimed that a group of "drunken" youths came in front of this vehicle when he was returning home after campaigning in the afternoon.

"They were yelling: Go back, go back! I stopped and asked them what

their complaints were. Initially, only one person was there, but then several others joined him. I realised that it was organised by the TMC. But they would not be able to stop me in this way," he said. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Minor gangraped in Ranchi, 5 arrested

Ranchi: A 17-year-old girl was allegedly gangraped on the outskirts of Ranchi, police said on Saturday. In her complaint, the survivor said that she went to a fair with her friends on Friday night, and from there, she went to the house of an acquaintance. Already some young men were present in that house, and they allegedly raped her, she told the police. "The survivor said that she somehow managed to escape from the clutches of the youths and found a few villagers outside the house. She narrated her ordeal to them and they brought her to the police station," officer of Ratu police station said. — PTI

Man held for post against Hindu gods

Bhadoli: A youth was arrested from Suryawa area of the district here on Saturday for allegedly posting derogatory comment against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and cartoons of Hindu gods with unparliamentary language on a social media platform, police said. Suryawa police station in-charge Ram Nagina Yadav said that on Friday a complaint was received about one Sonu Kumar posting indecent remarks against PM from his Facebook account. Meanwhile, the Kerala police also claimed to have booked one Nabeel Nasar for allegedly making a deliberate attempt to tarnish the image of PM by an objectionable post on social media. — PTI

Man rides 2-wheeler sans clothes; booked

Nagpur: Police registered a case after a video clip of a 35-year-old man riding a two-wheeler without clothes in late night hours on Nagpur streets went viral, an official said on Saturday. The incident occurred at around 2 am on Saturday and was recorded by a person on his mobile phone, he said. Police have identified the 35-year-old rider. "Parents of the man claimed he had some mental issues. A case was registered under the Indian Penal Code and Motor Vehicle Act for riding a two-wheeler without a driving license," the official added. — PTI

CBI files FIR against Megha Engineering

Continued From Page 1
who allegedly received a ₹73.85 lakhs bribe. The agency has also named two officials of MEBCON AGM (contracts) Sanjeev Sahay and DGM (contracts) K. Illavarsu, who allegedly received payment of ₹5.01 lakhs against the payment of ₹174.41 crores by NMDC Ltd. to MEL against 73 invoices from Megha Engineering general manager Subhash Chandra Sangras and Megha Engineering and unknown others. Mr Chandra and Megha Engineering have also been named as accused in the case, agency said in the FIR. — PTI

SC to hear Delhi CM's plea

Continued From Page 1
March 21 after the announcement of the Lok Sabha polls was "obviously motivated by extraneous considerations." "The intervention of this court is urgently warranted, as over and above the issue of illegal curtailment of liberty, the petitioner's arrest also constitutes an unprecedented assault on the tenets of democracy, free-and-fair elections and federalism, both of which form significant constituents of the basic structure of the Constitution," the plea has said. The arrest was made solely relying on the subsequent, contradictory and highly-belated statements of the co-accused, who have now turned approvers, the plea said, adding that such statements and material were in the possession of the ED for nine months and still the arrest was "made illegally" days before the general election. "The petitioner's arrest bears serious, irreversible ramifications for the future of electoral democracy in India and if he is not released forthwith to participate in the upcoming elections, it will establish a precedence in law for ruling parties to arrest heads of political Opposition on flimsy and vexatious charges before elections, thereby eroding the core principles of our Constitution," Mr Kejriwal said in his appeal,

IAF, Army mark 40 yrs of presence in Siachen

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 13

As India celebrates 40 years of success of "Operation Meghdoot" to secure the strategic heights of Siachen glacier, Indian Air Force role during the operation is also crucial. The operation was launched on April 13 1984, when the Army and Indian Air Force (IAF) advanced to the Siachen glacier to secure the heights dominating the northern Ladakh region.

The operation involved the airlifting of Indian Army soldiers by the IAF and dropping them on the glacial peaks. Although the operation began in 1984, IAF helicopters were already operating in the Siachen glacier since 1978, flying the Chetak helicopters which was the first IAF helicopter to land in the Glacier in October 1978. By 1984, Pakistan's cartographic aggression in the uncharted territory of Ladakh, allowing foreign mountaineering expeditions in Siachen, was becoming a cause of concern.

Having received intelligence inputs about an impending Pakistani military action in the area, India decided to thwart



Playing an irreplaceable role, IAF's tactical and strategic airlifters, An-12s, An-32s and IL-76s transported stores and troops and air-dropped supplies to high altitude airfields.

Pakistan's efforts to legitimize its claim on Siachen. The Indian Army launched "Operation Meghdoot", to secure strategic heights on Siachen with the deployment of troops.

Playing an irreplaceable role in this effort, IAF's tactical and strategic airlifters, An-12s, An-32s and IL-76s transported stores and troops and air-dropped supplies to high altitude airfields, from where Mi-17, Mi-8, Chetak and Cheetah helicopters ferried men and material to dizzying heights on the glacier, far above the limits set by the helicopter manufacturers. Soon, about 300-odd

troops were positioned on the strategically important peaks and passes of the glacier. By the time the Pakistan army reacted by advancing its own troops, the Indian Army was occupying strategically crucial mountain peaks and passes, thereby gaining a tactical advantage.

In extending valuable support to the Army's fight for maintaining military dominance on this desolate glacier since April 1984, the IAF's incredible performance at the extremes of temperature and altitude remains a continuing saga of fortitude and skill.

2,400 Indian Sikh travel to Pak to mark Baisakhi fest

Lahore, April 13: As many as 2,400 Indian Sikh pilgrims arrived here in Pakistan's Punjab provincial capital on Saturday via the Wagah Border to participate in the annual Baisakhi festival, an official said. Sardar Ramash Singh Orara, the first Sikh Minister in Pakistan's Punjab province who is also Pakistan's Gurdwara Parbandhak committee president, along with the evacuee trust property board (ETPB) additional secretary shrines Rana Shahid and other senior officers greeted the Indian pilgrims at the Wagah border. "As many as 2,400 Indian Sikh pilgrims arrived here today to attend Baisakhi festivities in Gurdwara Punja Sahib, Hassanabdul," ETPB spokesperson Amir Hashmi said. The ETPB looks after the holy places of the minority communities in Pakistan. He said that the Indian Sikhs were transported to Hassanabdul by train for the first time after the upgradation of Hassan-abdul Railway Station. — PTI

NHRC probe flags rights violation in Sandeshkhali case

Seeks action taken report in 8 weeks

New Delhi, April 13: In a spot inquiry into the Sandeshkhali case in West Bengal, the NHRC has flagged "several instances of atrocities", saying it indicates that there was a "violation of human rights" due to "negligence" in the prevention of such incidents. The National Human Rights Commission, in its report, also observed that the "pervasive fear of reprisal, coupled with the power dynamics at play, acted as a formidable barrier", preventing individuals from voicing their grievances.

The rights panel has made several recommendations and sought an action taken report within eight weeks on each of the recommendations made therein from the government of West Bengal, the NHRC said in a statement on Saturday. "The commission's spot inquiry has revealed several instances of atrocities inflicted upon the victims, which clearly demonstrate, prima facie, that there was a violation of human rights due to negligence in the preven-

tion of such violation or abatement thereof by the public servant," it said. The report has been uploaded on the NHRC website for "wider dissemination of information," the statement said.

The commission has sent its spot inquiry report to the chief secretary and DGP, Bengal for submitting the ATR. The NHRC report made an observation that "atmosphere due to the atrocities by alleged accused persons rendered the victims silent", and terror made them "reluctant to seek justice".

This "climate of terror" not only "perpetuates the cycle of abuse" but also underscores the urgent need to create a safe and supportive environment for victims to "break free from the shackles of silence", it has observed. The rights panel has also made an observation that the "atmosphere of fear" not only affects the victims but also has a "negative impact" on the growth and health of the children who witness ordeals of their parents at hands of these alleged accused. — PTI

Question PM who is saving Ankita's killers, says Priyanka

PRITHVIRAJ SINGH DEHRADUN, APRIL 13

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday laid hands on Uttarakhand peoples' sore spot when she asked them to ask Prime Minister Narendra Modi who is giving shelter to the killers of 19-year Ankita Bhandari. Ms Vadra attacked the BJP and alleged that Modi's "nari shakti" (Women power) slogans have failed to save the honour and life of the women.

Addressing an election rally in Ramanagar of Pauri LS constituency Ms Vadra said "PM Modi talks about women power from every stage but what happened to Ankita Bhandari. Who is protecting those who exploited and killed her. Modi must tell this to the people of Uttarakhand. When Modi comes to Uttarakhand public must ask him on the stage that who is giving shelter to them." Ms Vadra hit out at the PM appealing voters "Ask Modi who is giving shelter to the killers of Hathras woman burnt in the night."

"Ask Modi who protected those who first outraged the Unnao girl's modesty and then burnt her alive. Where was Modi when the olympic women medal winners wanted him listen to their plights as to atrocities meted out to them."

She said PM is not the one what he speaks for. "Modi doesn't follow what he says and claims himself to be the lone honest man and rest all thieves. Two opposition CMs have been jailed while cases were slapped on other opposition leaders."



Police personnel and forest department officials at the spot after a leopard entered a house in Meerut on Saturday. — PTI

NIA charges 2 accused in Manipur car bomb blast 2 killed in Manipur gunfight

New Delhi, April 13: The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed a chargesheet against two accused, including the key conspirator, in last year's Manipur car bomb blast case in which three people were injured, an official statement issued on Saturday said. The agency filed the chargesheet before a special NIA court in Manipur's Bishnupur on Friday, it said.

The explosion, triggered by a bomb planted in a Mahindra Scorpio, took place on a bridge adjoining Phougakchao Ikhai Awang Leikai and Kwakta area, along Tiddim road (NH-02), in Kwakta ward no. 07 (KMC), Bishnupur on June 21, 2023.

Three people were injured in the blast that damaged the bridge, an electric pole, electrical assets and surrounding houses. Mohammed Noor Hussain alias Tomba alias Mohammed Nur Hasan

Imphal, April 13: Two persons were killed in a gunfight that broke out between two armed groups in Manipur's Imphal East district on Saturday, police said.

The deceased are yet to be identified. The shootout happened at a place close to the border of Kangpokpi district, a police officer said. Additional state and central forces have been rushed in to contain the situation, he said.

and Seiminlung Gangte alias Minlung, who was identified as the key conspirator, were arrested in connection with the blast.

"The NIA on Friday chargesheeted two accused, including the main conspirator, in the June 2023 Kwatka (Manipur) vehicle-borne Improvised Explosive Device (IED) blast case, in

The incident came a day after three persons were injured in a gunfight between armed village volunteers and unidentified gunmen in Tengenpual district.

At least 219 people were killed after ethnic clashes broke out in Manipur on May 3 last year, when a "Tribal Solidarity March" was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. — PTI

which three persons were injured and several public and private properties were damaged," the statement said.

"They have been charged under various sections of the IPC, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the Explosive Substances Act 1908 and the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984. — PTI

Spirit of patriotism of martyrs will always inspire generations: Murmu PM, Prez remember Jallianwala victims

New Delhi, April 13: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday paid tribute to the people killed in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 and shared a video defining the unparalleled courage and sacrifice of the victims.

In a post on X, PM said, "On behalf of my family members across the country, I pay my heartfelt tribute to all the brave martyrs of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre."

President Droupadi Murmu also expressed heartfelt tributes to the people who sacrificed their lives for the country in the massacre and said the spirit of patriotism of those martyrs will keep inspiring the coming generations.



Students draw a painting of freedom fighters and others at an event of Jallianwala Bagh massacre anniversary in Amritsar on Saturday. — PTI

brave martyrs of Jallianwala Bagh who made an invaluable contribution to the country's freedom movement."

"Jallianwala Bagh is a living symbol of the cruelty and inhumanity of the British rule. This massacre awakened the revolutionary flame hidden in the hearts of the countrymen and made the freedom movement a struggle of the people."

"The lives of the self-respecting people of Jallianwala Bagh are an eternal source of inspiration for sacrifice and dedication for the nation first," Mr Shah added.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh also recalled the sacrifices made by the people at Jallianwala Bagh. — PTI

No need to regulate industry, says PM in chat with gamers

Continued From Page 1
methods and solutions to identify the most sustainable approach. "What are these steps? How do we navigate through it and choose the best approach for success? Take swachhata as an example. The game theme could revolve around cleanliness and every child should play this game. Youngsters should embrace Indian values and understand their true significance," Mr Modi said. The gamers discussed new developments in the gaming industry with the Prime Minister, who stressed how the government has recognised the creativity of the gamers, promoting the gaming industry in India. They also engaged on issues concerning gambling versus gaming while discussing the participation of women in the gaming industry. When gamer Naman Mathur asked Mr Modi if there is any need for regulations for the gaming sector, he said regulate will not be the right word because it is the government's nature to intervene. "There are two things -- either you try to impose restrictions under a law or try to understand and mould it based on our country's needs and bring

adding, the high court judgment failed to appreciate that statements made before a probe agency are not held to be the gospel truth and can always be doubted by the courts. The plea before the apex court further said, "The ED has allowed its process to be used and misused by vested interests as an instrument of oppression to not only invade the liberty of the political opponents in the midst of the 2024 general election of such vested interests but also to tarnish their reputation and self-esteem. Such lawlessness cannot be allowed to be perpetrated under any circumstances."

The high court had cited the ED's claim that Mr Kejriwal conspired and was actively involved in the use and concealment of the "proceeds of crime" to reject his petition against his arrest.

The high court had also rebuked Mr Kejriwal for questioning the timing of his arrest and underlined that an investigation against the "classes and masses" cannot be different. It had also slammed the AAP supremo for "casting aspersions" on the judicial process with his claim about an approver making donations to the ruling BJP at the Centre through electoral bonds, saying the law relating to approvers is over 100 years old and it was not enacted to implicate him.

Flights skip Iran's airspace

Continued From Page 1
operational continuity during such eventualities, are being used instead. This may result in longer flight times on certain routes and associated delays. The situation is being monitored closely and further changes will be made if required," Vistara said in a statement. It remains to be seen how these developments will financially impact both the airlines and the passengers in the long run if hostilities in West Asia continue to rise as the threat of a major conflict between two nations looms in the region. Amid the escalating tensions in West Asia, India had on Friday advised its nationals "not to travel to Iran or Israel till further notice". The travel advisory was issued following the recent attack on an Iranian diplomatic mission in Syria, for which Iran has blamed Israel and vowed retaliation against the Jewish State. In a statement, New Delhi had said, "In view of the prevailing situation in the region, all Indians are advised not to travel to Iran or Israel till further notice." "All those who are currently residing in Iran or Israel are requested to get in touch with Indian embassies there and register themselves." "They are also requested to observe the utmost precautions about their safety and restrict their movements to the minimum."

Jaishankar speaks to UK FS, discusses West Asia situation

New Delhi, April 13: External affairs minister S. Jaishankar on Saturday discussed with his British counterpart David Cameron the "emerging" situation in West Asia arising out of escalating tensions between Israel and Iran. The telephonic conversation between Mr Jaishankar and Mr Cameron came on a day Iranian military seized a cargo ship with Israeli links near the Strait of Hormuz. The ship has 17 Indian crew members.

"Spoke to UK Foreign Secretary Lord @David.Cameron today. Discussed the emerging situation in West Asia as also our bilateral ties," Mr Jaishankar said on X. There have been heightened fears that Tehran may launch an attack on Israel in retaliation to a strike on the Iranian consulate in Syria 12 days ago. Iran blamed Israel for the strike. Amid the escalating tensions between Iran and Israel, Israeli mili-

Vikramaditya may take on Kangana in Mandi LS seat

Continued From Page 1
Chandigarh, is now replaced by Mr Tewari. The party has fielded Paresh Dhanai to take on Union minister Purushottam Rupala from Rajkot. The Congress central election committee (CEC) met in the national capital on Saturday under the leadership of Mr Kharge. It finalised the names of a few Lok Sabha candidates from Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Odisha and Chandigarh. The CEC meeting for Himachal Pradesh was attended by Mr Kharge, Mrs Gandhi, and AICC general secretary K.C. Venugopal.

Himachal Pradesh chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, deputy chief minister Mukesh Agnihotri, Ms Singh and AICC in-charge Rajeev Shukla were the others present in the meeting. The Haryana CEC was attended, besides the top party leaders, by PCC chief Uday Bhan, ex-CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Randeep Surjewala and Kumari Selja. Insiders claim three seats in Haryana have also been finalised but not declared yet. These include Deependra Singh Hooda from Rohtak, Ms Selja from Sirsa and Varun Molana from Ambala.

India on Friday asked its citizens not to travel to Iran and Israel. — PTI

THE ASIAN AGE

14 APRIL 2024



Krishna Shastri Devulapalli
Off the beaten track

My low-budget urban wildlife adventures

In my schooldays, we had this teacher who possibly had the most novel excuse for corporal punishment, which he dispensed with that most innovative disciplinary implement — the bedrock of the Indian education system of the '70s — two wooden scales held together.

"You see," he would say, as he administered the staccato beatings to our drill-clad bottoms, "I am a poor man and cannot buy crackers for Deepavali. The sound of these scales and your yelps of joy are the closest thing I have to festivities."

As a writer with limited resources, like our long-dead teacher, I, too, have found ways to enjoy things on a low-to-no-budget. (Albeit without harming any living being.) Like wildlife sightings, for instance, without leaving our apartment complex.

Last week, early in the morning, as I was about to open the door to my terrace, I saw the gentleman in the picture (clicked by me with a trembling hand) having an intimate moment with himself. It is common knowledge that monkeys are among the most casual and prolific practitioners of auto-eroticism, and don't particularly care that there might be a few of us out there who prefer a more conservative approach to such matters.

KRISHNA SHASTRI DEVULAPALLI

In the interests of protecting the delicate sentiments of everyone at home, I bravely had all the doors closed on a war footing. That our cook and the neighbour's driver had to do it was because I had an important phone call to attend to at the same time. With entry points to our home hermetically sealed, we thought it would be prudent to scare the monkey away before he motivated himself for another bout of ardent self-love. And this we did by jumping up and down, singing a medley of L.R. Eswari's old hits.

Completely unimpressed, but much to our relief, after a bit, the bored fellow sauntered off on his own.

Reassuring the womenfolk of the house that there was nothing to be scared of, a few minutes later, I went into our bedroom. To find lying on my side of the bed, looking perfectly at home, my libidinous simian acquaintance. Evidently he'd managed to squeeze in through an open window. When I screamed spontaneously (in Lata Mangeshkar's voice this time), he stopped for a second from the activity at hand, which, thankfully now, was taking a large swig out of my bottle of Gelusil. He then rolled his eyes at me and proceeded to finish the rest of the bottle. If drinking antacids is some kind of primate-world equivalent of the post-coital smoke, I must have missed that episode on *Animal Planet*.

Five minutes later, from under the safety of my work desk at the other end of the house, where I was taking another important phone call, I was informed by the security guy, the gardener, and my wife that the coast was clear.

To anyone living in Adyar or thereabouts, if you see a monkey with chalky pink stains on his chest fur, please report him for exhibitionism combined with pharmaceutical terrorism.

A few days later, as I was recovering from the excitement of being in such close proximity to a lubricious langur with gastric issues, apparently, it was the turn of reptiles.

'Saar,' came our Watchman Number One's soprano over the intercom. 'Big pambu in the basement, saar, come immediately!'

I looked at my wife. I do that when anything requiring peril and derring-do are involved. She said, 'Not this one, pal. This one's on you.'

The intercom rang again.

'It's a King Cobra, saar!' It was Watchman Number Two.

Ten minutes later, I was in the basement. I would have gone earlier had it not been for an important overseas business call that turned out to be a wrong number. By this time, the snake catcher had arrived, and had caught the King Cobra. I was surprised to find that all he was holding was a smallish, twitchy plastic cover.

'King Cobras are that small?' I asked the gentleman.

'What King Cobra, sir?' said the man, laughing. 'This is just a harmless old grass snake.'

I gave Watchman Number Two a look.

'How did you figure it was a King Cobra?' I asked him.

'It let out a loud hiss, saar, I swear,' he said. 'Two or three times.'

A small silence followed. After which Watchman Number One spoke.

'That was me, saar,' he said, scratching the back of his head, eyes lowered.

'Seeing the pambu, I got scared and spontaneously...'

He grinned sheepishly and made hand and eye gestures worthy of a trained classical dancer which left one in no doubt about the origin of the serial hisses.

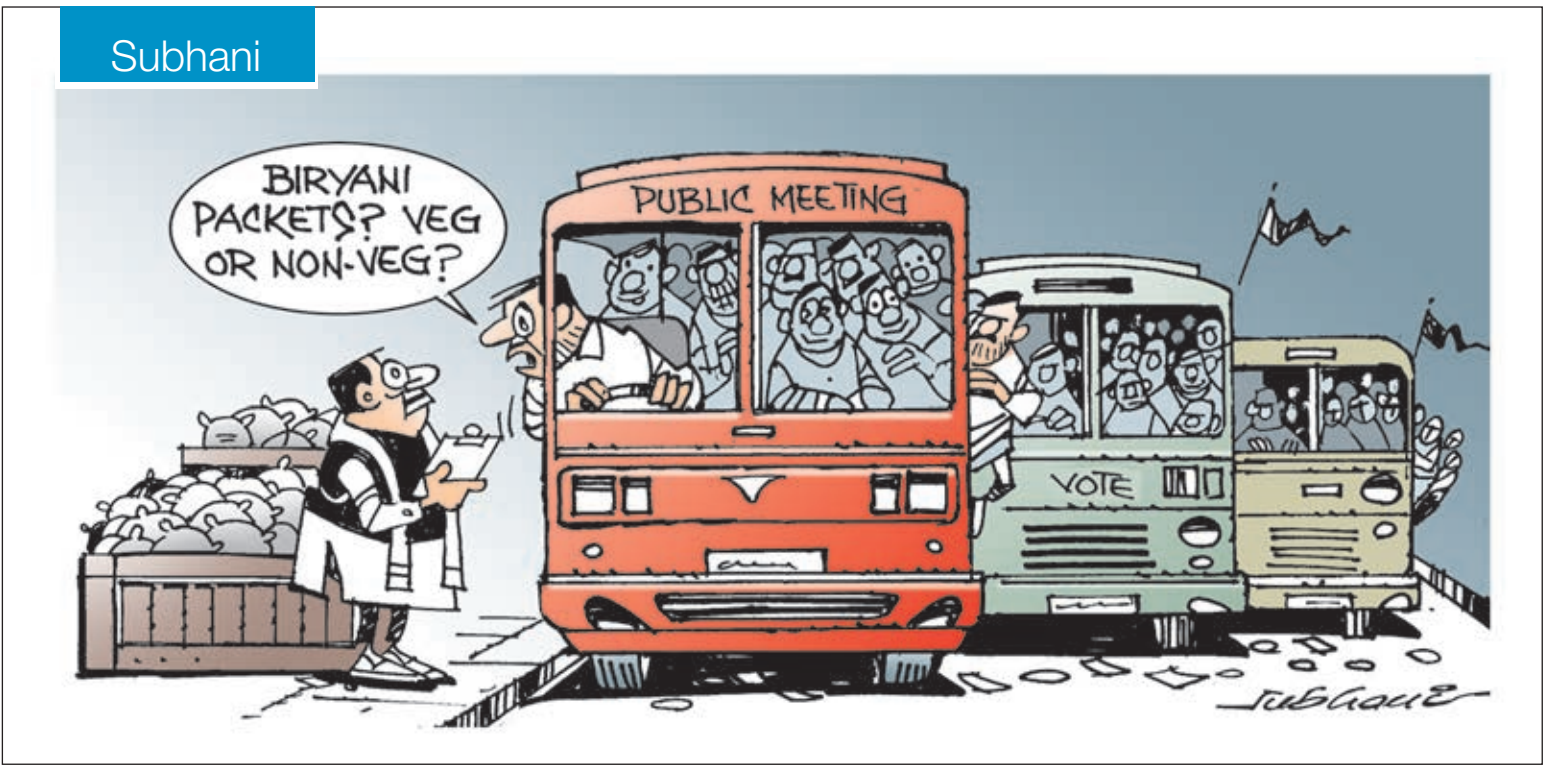
'I'm afraid I can't help you,' I said. 'Because the monkey drank my Gelusil.'

Krishna Shastri Devulapalli is a humour writer, novelist, columnist and screenwriter



To anyone living in Adyar or thereabouts, if you see a monkey with chalky pink stains on his chest fur, please report him for exhibitionism combined with pharmaceutical terrorism

Subhani



Post Ayodhya euphoria, will govt be called to account?



Pavan K. Varma
Chanakya's View

In the perception of most people, the 2024 national elections seem to be a foregone conclusion: victory for the BJP. There can be differences about the estimate of its win, but few doubt the eventual result.

The reasons for this are well-known: the continued popularity of Narendra Modi, the organisation and financial muscle of the BJP, the existence of a narrative and, above all, the absence of a credible Opposition at the pan-India level. In this scenario, the Congress must take the maximum blame, for it is the only Opposition party which still has a semblance of a pan-Indian footprint. If it had reinvented itself in time, it could have become the fulcrum of Opposition unity. But the party remains in drift, with a near defunct organisation, and an inept leadership, surrounded by a largely rootless coterie.

However, in recent weeks, some of the BJP's actions have also left me a little perplexed. Hindutva is its central card. In its political avatar, Hindutva is the blatant use of gaining political dividends by arousing emotional fervour in support of the Hindu faith. All practising Hindus rejoiced at the *prana pratishtha* of the newly built, grand Ayodhya temple. This was the consequence of a Supreme Court (SC) judgement, but it was only to be expected that the BJP would take the credit, especially since the fractured Opposition had no strategy to counter it.

But there appears a nascent feeling that the BJP's Hindutva narrative — supported by the Prime Minister's unending temple darshans — is reaching saturation point. At some time, after the initial euphoria of the Ayodhya temple abates, voters will

ask what the government is doing about issues like unemployment, prices, education, healthcare and rising inequality. There is a certain point up to which *aastha* can be used to deflect attention from legitimate issues of governance. Has that point been reached?

Similarly, the consistent strategy of polarising voters on grounds of religion is fast acquiring a fatiguing predictability. It had resonance initially, but the constant drum beat of Hindu-Muslim vitriol, amplified by large sections of the media, is gradually becoming distasteful and losing its appeal. Most Indians do not like endemic social instability, or unending communal strife. They want to get on with their lives, and move away from the perennial fear of violence, especially on Hindu or Muslim festivals. There is also the realisation that, given the size and geographical spread of the minorities, coexistence is ultimately in the self-interest of Indians themselves. Besides, many Indians worry about the nation's national image, and fear that social disharmony may affect economic growth and prosperity, and marginalise other major problems that urgently need to be tackled.

Thirdly, the BJP's shrill war cry against corruption, is also fast losing conviction. The goal is laudable, but by now, so many of the allegedly corrupt, against whom the party had launched extensive campaigns of protest, have joined the BJP. The proverbial "washing machine" is working overtime in full public view, and people have begun to wonder whether the BJP is fighting against corruption or motivated by political expediency, providing a haven to those it had itself vocifer-

The number of those who were attacked for corruption, find the ruling party with its arms wide open to welcome them. It may appear these double-standards escape the people's attention, but the junta is not so blind or undiscerning...

ously accused of corruption.

The total amorality involved in this process is causing revulsion. The number of those who were attacked for corruption, find the ruling party, whose rousing roar was *na khaonga na khane doonga*, with its arms wide open to welcome them. It may appear that these double-standards escape the people's attention, but the junta is not so blind or undiscerning, and the indignation, even if in whispers, is building.

There is a growing perception too that the relentless attack by agencies like the ED, CBI and income tax (IT) targeting the Opposition, has become excessive. It cannot be a coincidence that the overwhelming number of those investigated or punished by these agencies are opposed to the ruling party. Since 2014 there has been a four-fold increase in the number of cases filed by investigative agencies against politicians. Of these, 95 per cent are against Opposition leaders. Of the 125 prominent leaders booked, raided, questioned or arrested, 115 are from the Opposition.

I am not commenting on the merits of the case. Perhaps, they are guilty. But to argue that courts not giving them bail is proof of their culpability, is specious because Section 45 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), reverses the presumption of innocence. To grant bail the judge has to believe that the accused is *prima facie* not guilty, before the case has been argued on merits, or sometimes even a chargesheet filed. The result is that the judicial

process itself becomes the punishment, with those opposed to the regime spending months if not years languishing behind bars.

Two sitting chief ministers — Arvind Kejriwal and Hemant Soren — have been arrested; the funds of the Congress Party are under lien and huge I-T penalties imposed; and almost every Opposition leader is being summoned by the ED, even after the elections have been announced. Meanwhile, according to the Association of Democratic Reforms, 24 ministers in the Modi Cabinet have charges of serious criminal cases against them, including robbery, attempt to murder and murder, but no investigation seems to have been initiated. In fact, I wonder why the BJP needs this politics of "vendetta" — as the Opposition dubs it — considering that it is already likely to win the forthcoming elections.

Lastly, there are concerns when a political party focusses its entire campaign entirely on one individual. Prime Minister Modi's popularity is undoubted. But for the first time his party is almost entirely marginalised. Mr Modi is ubiquitous. The BJP has become invisible. The only slogan is "Modi ki Guarantee". This over-reliance on only one individual, however electorally efficacious it may be considering the PM's appeal, is dangerous, and contrary to the previous culture of the BJP where there was always a collegial leadership, with leaders like L.K. Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi — among others — participating in decision making under the leadership of Atal Behari Vajpayee.

None of the above will, so late in the day, materially change the fact that Mr Modi is likely to get a third term. However, change is afoot. The BJP must take heed, because the intelligence of the voter should never be taken for granted.

The writer is an author, diplomat and former member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha)

LETTERS
TURNCOATS!

Everybody is urging the eligible voters of the nation to vote, but nobody is telling the candidates not to change parties after they are elected. This is tantamount to cheating as people vote more for the parties they represent than the candidates themselves. Once elected, the people's representative is free to do what he likes. No individual has ever asked the people of the constituency for their opinion on his switching loyalties. This needs to change for the survival of democracy. The manner in which those who have been voted into power change colour would do a chameleon credit!

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

SOCIAL JUSTICE

IN KOLKATA METRO railway coaches, some seats are reserved for women and a few seats for senior citizens and people with disabilities. But there would have been no need to reserve seats for anyone if all the people have enough compassion. The reservation of seats in a train therefore acts as a necessary antidote to inhumanity. Similarly, reservation on the basis of caste indicates that caste hatred and caste favouritism are there in our society. We need caste reservation as an antidote to caste-based nepotism. Let social justice do the final talking.

Sujit De
Kolkata

TAX THE RICH

AS PER the latest study conducted in Paris on inequalities of income and wealth, one per cent of Indians hold 22.6 per cent of income and 40 per cent of the total wealth of the country. This is indeed a disturbing statistic. One way to reduce the inequality is to tax the super-rich. A tax of a mere two per cent on 167 rich families in India will yield a 0.5 per cent rise in national income. This money can be used for development work, education and healthcare. Strangely, none of the big political parties think on these lines. The Congress which is the main Opposition party has often accused the BJP of crony capitalism but has not even touched this aspect in its manifesto. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black.

D.B. Madan
New Delhi

Anita Katyal
Political Gup-Shup



Madhav says no vacancy at top; Vadra's curious pitch for Amethi

Though he usually keeps a low profile, businessman Robert Vadra, husband of Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, has been unusually vocal these days. He has given a spate of interviews pitching himself as the perfect candidate for the Amethi Lok Sabha constituency, once a Gandhi stronghold but now lost to the Bharatiya Janata Party. Robert Vadra maintains that the current MP Smriti Irani has failed to live up to expectations and that the people of Amethi want him to represent them in Parliament. Mr Vadra's statements have predictably confused and intrigued the party. In fact, a few Congress leaders went into a huddle the day Mr Vadra gave his first interview to decode what he meant and to figure out their response to it. One senior spokesperson was ready to give a media bite on this issue but was asked to step back just as he was about to go on air. With the Congress top brass failing to clarify matters, party leaders are left wondering if Mr Vadra has been asked by the Gandhi family to project himself through his public pronouncements, or is he doing so on his

own accord? This will remain a subject of animated discussion and speculation in the Congress till the party announces its candidates for the Amethi and Rae Bareilly seats.

Ram Madhav, India Foundation president and member of the RSS national executive, was left searching for an appropriate answer when asked at the launch of senior journalist Priya Sahgal's book, *The Contenders. Who Will Lead India Tomorrow*, who among the current crop of young leaders have the potential to occupy the country's top post. Tying himself in knots, Mr Madhav refused to pick any names, insisting it was an irrelevant discussion since there is no vacancy at the top and unlikely to be one for many years to come. Mr Madhav's evasive answers and the mandatory high praise for Prime Minister Narendra Modi drew a sharp response from the two other panellists, Abhishek Singhvi of the Congress and former diplomat Pavan Varma, who came down on him like a ton of bricks on issues ranging from the Modi government's misuse of investigative agencies against

Opposition leaders and the promotion of a personality cult in the Bharatiya Janata Party. Given Mr Modi's dominating persona, Mr Varma remarked no one understands more than Mr Madhav the consequences of getting into a discussion on future leaders. Mr Varma was obviously referring to Mr Madhav's abrupt fall from grace four years ago when he was removed as BJP national general secretary and sent back to the RSS.

Former foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla may have lost out on a Lok Sabha ticket from Darjeeling but it appears he is still hoping that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will pick him up for a plum assignment or even a Rajya Sabha seat when he returns to power. This is the current buzz in the Indian diplomatic community which is aghast at how a seasoned and respected diplomat who had such a stellar career is bending over backwards to please the ruling dispensation. For instance, Mr Shringla recently posted on X about how he was "honoured to call on the external affairs minister" and "receive the benefit of his advice and guidance."

He then went on to say that "as an added bonus, he got an autographed copy of the minister's latest book" which he had already started reading. Mr Shringla's former colleagues maintain that his latest actions have robbed him of the credibility he enjoyed as a diplomat.

There is clearly a lack of coordination between the respective teams handling the election programmes of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and former party chief Rahul Gandhi. This was clearly on display when Mr Kharge launched the party's "Ghar Ghar Guarantee Initiative" in Delhi North-East parliamentary constituency recently where he distributed pamphlets on the party's "Paanch Nyay Pachees Guarantee" schemes. However, the Congress president's effort and message was virtually lost as the timing coincided with Rahul Gandhi's speech after he filed his nomination papers from Wayanad. Naturally, this event hogged the limelight while Mr Kharge got no play in the media. Rahul Gandhi does not hold any office but it does not appear so as the Congress communica-

tions department continues to publicise his programmes and speeches as they did when he was party chief.

Former Maharashtra chief minister Prithviraj Chavan was initially tipped to be fielded by the Congress from the Satara Lok Sabha constituency. He is currently the MLA from Karad, an Assembly constituency in Satara. There were tough behind-the-scenes negotiations between the three partners in the Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance. Nationalist Congress Party (SP) leader Sharad Pawar apparently even agreed to concede the seat to Mr Chavan provided he contested on his party's ticket. Mr Chavan was unwilling to do so though he fell foul of the Congress leadership as he was among the 23 Congress leaders who had written to former party president Sonia Gandhi to press for internal elections and organisational reforms. In the end, Mr Chavan lost out as the Satara seat has gone to Sharad Pawar's party which has given the ticket to Shashikant Shinde.

Anita Katyal is a Delhi-based journalist

SHORT TAKES

SECRET AGENT: U.S. EX-ENVOY GETS JAIL TERM

Miami, April 13: A former career US diplomat was sentenced on Friday to 15 years in federal prison after admitting he worked for decades as a secret agent for Cuba, a plea agreement that leaves many unanswered questions about a betrayal that stunned the US foreign service.

Manuel Rocha, 73, will also pay a \$500,000 fine and cooperate with authorities after pleading guilty to conspiring to act as an agent of a foreign government. In exchange, prosecutors dismissed more than a dozen other counts.

GLOBAL GANG NABBED IN \$686M CANNABIS SCAM

Madrid, April 13: Police forces led by Spain have arrested a gang which allegedly defrauded 645 million euros (\$686.41 million) from victims in 35 countries in a scam centred around cannabis plants for medicinal use.

The gang mounted a marketing system and attended international cannabis fairs to convince victims to invest in the system.

Nine suspects, who have not been named, were detained on April 11 on suspicion of fraud in Spain, Britain, Germany, Latvia, Poland, Italy and the Dominican Republic.

KIM, TOP CHINESE OFFICIAL HAIL 'NEW CHAPTER'

Seoul, April 13: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and China's top legislator hailed a "new chapter" of Beijing-Pyongyang relations on Saturday, in one of the most high-level meetings between the two in years.

Beijing's third highest-ranking official Zhao Leji — a member of the powerful Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party's Politburo — made a goodwill visit to the nuclear-armed North this week as the two countries mark 75 years of diplomatic ties. China is North Korea's most important economic benefactor and diplomatic ally.

174 PEOPLE IN TURKEY CABLE CAR RESCUED

Istanbul, April 13: The last of 174 people stranded in cable cars high above a mountain in southern Turkey were brought to safety on Saturday, nearly 23 hours after one pod hit a pole and burst open, killing one person and injuring seven when they plummeted to the rocks below. Interior minister Ali Yerlikaya announced the successful completion.

A total of 607 search and rescue personnel and 10 helicopters were involved, including Turkey's emergency response agency, AFAD, the Coast Guard, firefighting teams and mountain rescue teams.

HUNDREDS FREED TO MARK NEW YEAR IN LANKA

Colombo, April 13: Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe granted amnesty to nearly 800 convicts to mark the traditional Sinhala and Tamil New Year on Saturday, his office said.

The amnesty of 779 inmates followed the release of 1,000 prisoners to mark Christmas.

A prisons official told AFP that a recent spate of amnesties had eased congestion in the island country's still-overcrowded jails.

As of Friday, there were just under 30,000 inmates in Sri Lankan prisons.

RIVER BARGES BREAK LOOSE IN PITTSBURGH

Pittsburgh, April 13: A large group of river barges broke loose and floated down the Ohio River in Pittsburgh, damaging a marina and causing bridge closures before the boats were pinned to the riverbank or went over a dam downstream, officials said.

Pittsburgh police, fire and emergency medical services responded around 11:25 pm on Friday to reports of the barges floating uncontrolled down the river, Pittsburgh Public Safety said in a statement.

The area had been hit by flooding following heavy rains on Thursday.

Knife attacker kills 6 in Sydney mall, shot dead

8 people, including 9-month-old baby, suffer stab wounds

Sydney, April 13: An attacker who fatally knifed six people in a Sydney mall was shot dead by police in the beachside suburb of Bondi on Saturday, police said, as hundreds fled the scene.

The assailant was shot by a police officer after he attacked shoppers in the busy Westfield Bondi Junction shopping centre, police said in a statement.

Five of the six victims killed were women, while eight people, including a nine-month-old baby, were taken to hospital with stab wounds, New South Wales Police commissioner Karen Webb said.

Police at this stage do not believe the attack was terrorism-related, Webb said. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said there was no indication yet of the man's motive.

"This was a horrific act of violence, indiscriminately targeting innocent people going about an ordinary Saturday doing their shopping," he told a press conference.

"Tonight the first thoughts of all Australians are with the victims of these terrible acts."

Australia has some of the world's toughest gun and knife laws, and attacks such as the one on Saturday are rare.

Emergency services were called to the mall, about three kilometres (1.9 miles) from Sydney's iconic Bondi Beach and popular with children and families, just before 4 pm (0600 GMT) after the stabbing reports, police said.

The mall will remain closed on Sunday while an investigation continues, police said. — Reuters

HISTORY OF VIOLENT CRIMES IN AUSTRALIA

APRIL 1996
35 killed after lone gunman Martin Bryant went on a shooting spree at a cafe and tourist site in Tasmania.

DECEMBER 2014
3 people, including attacker Man Haron Monis, were killed when police stormed a cafe in Sydney's Martin Place to free hostages held at gunpoint for 16 hours.

JANUARY 2017
5 killed after a 26-year-old man deliberately drove into pedestrians in Melbourne. More than 20 others were also injured.



Families walk out of the Westfield Bondi Junction mall after a stabbing incident in Sydney, on Saturday. — AFP

DECEMBER 2017
19 injured after Afghan former refugee Saeed Noori, 32, deliberately drove into dozens of pedestrians in Melbourne.

NOVEMBER 2018
An attacker in Melbourne was shot by police after he set fire to a pickup truck laden with gas cylinders in the city centre and stabbed three people, killing one. The attacker died in hospital. Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack.

'Run, run, run': Chaos at mall

Sydney, April 13: A man stabbed six people to death at a busy Sydney shopping centre on Saturday before he was shot dead by a female police inspector after he turned and raised a knife, New South Wales assistant police commissioner Anthony Cooke told reporters.

"They just said run, run — someone's been stabbed," one witness told ABC TV in Australia. "(The attacker) was walking really calmly like he was having an ice cream in a park. And then he went up the escalators ... and probably within about a minute we heard three gunshots."

"I saw all the people running and I didn't know what was happening," said Ayush Singh. "I thought it was some people playing a prank or something and after some time I saw a guy with a knife running from the footpath to the cafe where I work."

Singh said he saw the man running just metres away as he wielded a knife. "I didn't hear him say anything," he added. "Just a random guy stabbing people. Mad guy."

Roi Huberman, a sound engineer at ABC TV said that he sheltered in a store during the incident.

"And suddenly we heard a shot or maybe two shots and we didn't know what to do," he said. — AP

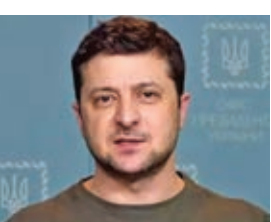
Assault on Ukraine eastern front, Russia claims village

Kyiv, Washington, April 13: Ukraine's commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky said on Saturday the situation on the eastern front had worsened significantly and Russia claimed the capture of village Pervomaiske near industrial town of Avdiivka.

A Russia-installed official in Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region said that shelling by Ukraine's military had killed 10 people in the town of Tokmak.

China has surged sales to Russia of machine tools, microelectronics and other technology that Moscow in turn is using to produce missiles, tanks, aircraft and other weaponry for use in its war against Ukraine, according to a US assessment.

"The situation on the eastern front has deteriorated significantly in recent days," said Syrsky, who took over as commander-in-chief. — AFP



Volodymyr Zelenskyy GERMAN PATRIOT SYSTEM FOR KYIV

Kyiv, April 13: Germany will supply a US-made Patriot air defence system and air defence missiles to Ukraine at a "critical time" as Kyiv struggles to defend its energy system from Russian bombardment, — Reuters

Workers at Khmelnytsky nuclear power station on Thursday poured a symbolic cubic metre of concrete for the reactors, which will use US technology and fuel, as Ukrainian and US flags fluttered.

The project is aimed at increasing Ukraine's energy security and reducing its dependence on Russian nuclear technology. — AFP

Thousands flee Urals flooding

Orenburg, April 13: Russian emergency services on Saturday said they had evacuated thousands of people from the Orenburg region in the south of the Urals as flood water continued to rise.

On Saturday afternoon, the river level reached almost 12 metres (39 feet), more than 2.5 metres above the level considered critical. The Ural River flows through the centre of Orenburg. Flood water covered the embankment promenade and swirled around houses and a high-rise apartment blocks built close to the river.

Almost 14,000 people have been evacuated from Orenburg and the surrounding region.

Eldar Rakhmetov, an official from the ministry of emergency situations said: "There has been an increase in the number of homes flooded since this morning." — AFP

In the city of Orenburg, the Ural River breached its banks, submerging streets and residential areas and water levels continued to rise on Saturday.

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promenade and swirled around houses and a high-rise apartment blocks built close to the river.

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Eldar Rakhmetov, an official from the ministry of emergency situations said: "There has been an increase in the number of homes flooded since this morning." — AFP

Qantas redirects flights to avoid Iran airspace

Sydney, Ottawa, April 13: Australian airline Qantas said on Saturday it would redirect its long-haul flights between Perth and London to avoid Iran's airspace amid soaring Middle East tensions.

Canada has warned citizens to avoid all travel to Israel, Gaza and the West Bank, upgrading its risk assessment of the region due to the increased threat of attacks on Israeli territory.

Foreign minister Melanie Joly posted a statement on social media site X late on Friday and said Canadians already in the area should consider leaving by commercial means.

"With a heightened risk of attacks on Israeli territory, the regional security situation remains highly volatile & could escalate without notice," Joly posted. The federal government had previously advised Canadians to avoid non-essential travel to the region.

US President Joe Biden cut short a weekend trip to Delaware on Saturday for urgent consultations in Washington on the Middle East, the White House said, as tensions soar amid growing fears of an attack on Israel. He said on Friday that he expected Iran to attack Israel "sooner, rather than later" and warned Tehran not to proceed.

A Qantas spokesperson told AFP the airline would temporarily adjust the flight paths due to "the situation in parts of the Middle East".

"We'll reach out to customers directly if there's any change to their booking," the spokesperson said.

The Perth-London flight, which is usually a non-stop 17-and-a-half hour journey, will now stop in Singapore to refuel, allowing it to carry a full load of passengers on an alternate route. The return



A Palestinian inspects the damage to a home in the village of Mughayir near Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, on Saturday. — AFP

U.S. TROOPS IN REGION AS WAR CLOUDS LOOM

Gaza Strip, April 13: Troop reinforcements from the US headed to the region on Saturday, with fears of wider war growing more than six months into Israel's battle against Hamas.

After pulling forces from Khan Younis one week ago, Israel's military said on Saturday it was continuing to operate against militants in central Gaza. In Deir al-Balah, fire burned in the rubble of a destroyed mosque.

Israel's military "demanded that the whole area be evacuated" before it was "wiped out in minutes", said Abdullah Baraka, a witness. — AFP

MISSING ISRAELI TEENAGER FOUND DEAD IN W. BANK

Jerusalem, April 13: Israeli military and police said the body of a missing Israeli teenager who was likely killed in a Palestinian attack was found on Saturday in West Bank, in an incident that could trigger violence.

The 14-year-old went missing on Friday, authorities said, and they described his killing as "a terrorist attack".

PM Benjamin Netanyahu said the assailants would be found.

As Israeli forces searched on Friday, Jewish settlers in the area entered a nearby Palestinian village and set houses and cars ablaze. — Reuters

Trump rally; tax speech by Biden

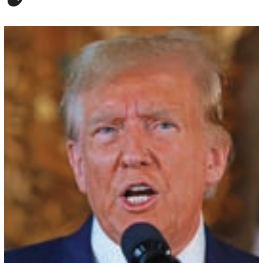
Philadelphia, Palm Beach, April 13: Former US President Donald Trump heads to the battleground state of Pennsylvania on Saturday for a rally and a fundraiser just days before he is set to go on trial in New York over an alleged hush money scheme.

Meanwhile, he offered a political lifeline on Friday to House Speaker Mike Johnson, saying the beleaguered GOP leader is doing a very good job, and tamping down the far-right forces led by Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene trying to oust him from office.

He will be closely followed by President Joe Biden, who will make three Pennsylvania stops next week, speaking first in his hometown of Scranton about his push to reform the US tax code.

With 19 electoral votes — one of the highest counts among all 50 states — and voters that swing between backing Democrats like Biden and Republicans like Trump, Pennsylvania is a top prize in the 2024 presidential election and is likely to see many more visits in coming months.

Biden won Pennsylvania in 2020 by less than 1.5%, or roughly 80,000 votes, after Trump beat Hillary Clinton there by



Donald Trump

JUDGE DECLINES TO DELAY TRUMP HUSH MONEY CASE

New York, April 13: The judge in Donald Trump's hush money criminal case on Friday turned down the former president's request to postpone his trial because of publicity about the case.

It's the latest in a string of delay denials that Trump has gotten from various courts this week as he fights to stave off the trial's start, scheduled to begin Monday with jury selection. — AP

less than 45,000 votes in 2016. Opinion polls taken in March swing from showing Biden with a 10-percentage-point lead to Trump up 4 points, election data site FiveThirtyEight shows. — Reuters

PAK OPPN TO LAUNCH DRIVE AGAINST GOVT

Islamabad, April 13: Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's party under the umbrella of a grand opposition alliance on Saturday announced a countrywide movement against the alleged rigging in the February 8 election and the government established by tampering of the mandate.

The launch of the movement indicates that the dream of post-election peace and political stability will be wilting sooner than expected.

The six-party alliance that includes Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, in a late-night meeting decided to come together under the banner of Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-i-Pakistan.

Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party chairman Mehmood Khan Achakzai was nominated as president of the alliance at the hours-long meeting. — PTI

PAK LANDMINE BLAST KILLS 3 CHILDREN

Peshawar, Karachi, April 13: At least three children were killed on the spot and one injured in a landmine explosion in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

At least 11 people were shot dead by militants in Pakistan's Balochistan in two separate incidents, authorities said, as the region witnessed a surge in terror attacks in recent days.

Two Pakistan Army soldiers were killed on Saturday during an intelligence-based operation in which a wanted terrorist and ring leader Saleem alias "Rabbani" was gunned down while two other militants sustained injuries in the gun battle in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The tragic incident occurred in Wanna town of the South Waziristan district. — PTI

RULES RELAXED The market for carbon credits is still reeling from a period of turbulence

Carbon credits market to get a huge boost

New York, April 13: The world's main verifier of corporate climate targets will let companies use carbon credits to reduce the broadest scope of their emissions, relaxing earlier guidance and galvanising a controversial market for green finance.

The United Nations-backed Science Based Targets initiative said it will allow the use of credits to cut emissions from value chains, otherwise known as Scope 3, according to a statement on its website.

The market for carbon credits is still reeling from a period of turbulence, following revelations of projects that failed to deliver on emissions cuts. At the same time, the finance industry and carbon credit providers are positioning themselves to reap the monetary benefits of the growing market for offsetting reported emissions.

The decision could help boost the market, which currently is valued somewhere between \$2 billion and \$2.5 billion, to more



Market valued between \$2 bn and \$2.5 bn. It is expected to reach \$1 trn by 2050. — Agencies

than \$1 trillion a year by 2050, according to Kyle Harrison, head of sustainability research at BloombergNEF.

"For Scope 3-heavy companies, working towards and achieving net zero

under SBTi is a moonshot without some reliance on carbon credits," he said. Market participants were quick to respond to the move. Rich Gilmore, chief executive at Carbon Growth Partners, said the decision could be "massively consequential" for the future of carbon prices.

Sonia Zugel, CEO of ESG Playbook, called the adjustment "a huge change" to SBTi's framework.

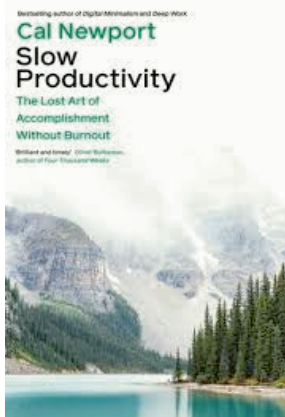
Tej Virk, co-founder of NLX Capital, said the relaxed guidelines will

"invigorate the demand for voluntary carbon credits." SBTi's decision "signals a crucial shift towards the acceptance of carbon credits in corporate climate strategies, promising to boost both the market and the efficacy of these credits in achieving real-world climate action."

New guidelines represent "a significant step forward in scaling carbon markets and climate action," said Teresa Hartmann, chief ratings officer at BeZero Carbon. — Bloomberg

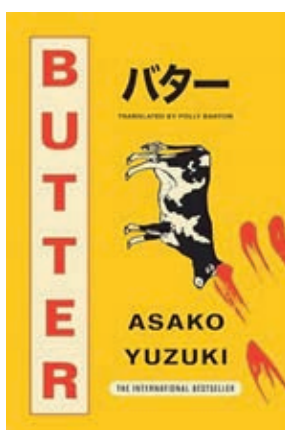
INDIAN TOP 10 BESTSELLERS

- NON-FICTION**
- ACCELERATING INDIA'S DEVELOPMENT**
Karthik Muralidharan
Penguin Viking, ₹1,299
 - WHY BHARAT MATTERS**
S. Jaishankar
Rupa, ₹695
 - THE COOKING OF BOOKS**
Ramachandra Guha
Juggernaut, ₹699
 - BEING HINDU, BEING INDIA**
Vanya Vaidehi Bhargav
Penguin Viking, ₹1,299
 - THE INCARCERATIONS**
Alpha Shah
HarperCollins, ₹699
 - SAVARKAR AND THE MAKING OF HINDUTVA**
Janaki Bakhle
Princeton, ₹999
 - SLOW PRODUCTIVITY**
Cal Newport
Penguin
₹799
 - CIRCLES OF FREEDOM**
T.C.A. Raghavan
Juggernaut, ₹799
 - BAHRISONS: CHRONICLE OF A BOOKSHOP**
Anuj Bahri and Anchal Malhotra, India Research Press, ₹350
 - OUTLIVE**
Dr Peter Attia
Penguin
₹799



- FICTION**
- BUTTER**
Asako Yuzuki
HarperCollins, ₹599
 - LORENZO SEARCHES FOR THE MEANING OF LIFE**
Upamanyu Chatterjee
Speaking Tiger, ₹699
 - LISTEN FOR THE LIE**
Amy Tintera
Penguin, ₹799
 - UNTIL AUGUST**
Gabriel Garcia Marquez
Penguin, ₹799
 - MEDEA**
Rosie Hewlett
Penguin, ₹799
 - SWALLOWING THE SUN**
Lakshmi Mureshwar Puri, Aleph, ₹599
 - THE FURY**
Alex Michaelides
Penguin, ₹799
 - THE COVENANT OF WATER**
Abraham Verghese
Grove Press, ₹699
 - THE BOOK OF EVERLASTING THINGS**
Aanchal Malhotra
HarperCollins, ₹799
 - PLENTIFUL SPRING**
Plentiful Spring
India Research Press
₹399

- Bahrisons, New Delhi



Not long ago, democracy was almost snuffed out in Dhaka



Jayanta Roy Chowdhury

review

Through the 2000s, Bangladesh was increasingly hostage to a chaotic whirlwind which saw Jihadists raising their ugly head, attempting to turn the nation into yet another terror-stricken Afghanistan. Pinak Chakravarty, India's former high commissioner to Bangladesh who was witness to much of what happened in that country in two stints at Dhaka details in his new book, *Transformation: Emergence of Bangladesh*, how the nation escaped the fatal claws of terror to emerge as an Asian powerhouse.

The book traces the history of Bengal from ancient times to the birth and progress of Bangladesh, as a new nation in the sub-continent, studying Mujib and Hasina's role in nation building as well as the uncertain period of military coups and counter-coups and revolts in between.

Chakravarty talks of the curious case of how a ship *MV Mecca* arrived in Bangladesh in 2001, soon after the Taliban were ousted from Kandahar after bombardment by US forces, carrying Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters seeking refuge. This happened after Begum Zia came back to power leading a coalition of her Bangladesh Nationalist Party and two Islamist

groupings — Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oiko Jot. A few years later, came the sensational case of the Chitragong arms haul. The Bangladesh coast guard and local police at the deep-water Chitragong port caught people loading arms and ammunition at a jetty into waiting trucks. The jetty was controlled by the Minister for Industry Motiur Rehman Niazi, a Jamaat leader who had during the liberation war of 1971 helped the Pakistani Army in killing Bangladeshis civilians.

The weapons cache with nearly 5,000 automatic rifles, machine guns and rocket launchers was meant for India's proscribed ULFA, whose leader Poresh Barua was then "hiding" in Dhaka in broad daylight.

Things really got out of hand when the radical anti-US, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh carried out a grenade attack on Sheikh Hasina at a rally in August 2004 which when investigated pointed fingers at Prime Minister Begum Khaleda's son Tarique Rehman who ran a parallel government from Dhaka's 'Hawa Bhaban' as among the plotters. The grenades for the outrage came from Pakistan.

The terror nexus and the rising anarchy within Bangladesh alarmed not only ordinary Bangladeshis but foreign pow-

ers ranging from neighbour India to the US and European nations who had been victims of a number of terrorist incidents since 9/11. Chakravarty writes, "When I arrived in Dhaka (as India's envoy), on January 7, 2007, Bangladesh was teetering on the brink of chaos." A caretaker government backed by the army took over soon afterwards.

The caretaker regime reached out to India, which was watching the incidents unfold with some amount of alarm having witnessed many murderous coups in the neighbourhood before. The chief adviser in the caretaker regime — Dr Fakruddin Ahmed, a former World Bank economist and



TRANSFORMATION: EMERGENCE OF BANGLADESH AND EVOLUTION OF INDIA-BANGLADESH TIES
By PINAK RANJAN CHAKRAVARTY
KW Publishers
pp. 233; ₹1,880

friend of then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh — as well as the army chief Gen. Moeen Uddin Ahmed were invited to Delhi.

While Dr Singh broke the ice with his old friend by saying "Excellency, we are both in our respective chairs by accident," his colleague then minister for external affairs Pranab Mukherjee told Gen. Moeen that India wished to see: (a) Bangladesh return to democracy; and (b) an end to terrorism and safe harbour for Indian insurgent groups like the ULFA.

Soon afterwards, Chakravarty writes, "Moeen conveyed to me that they tried to arrest Paresh Barua but he fled into Myanmar. Whether this was the truth or not was difficult to judge. Baruah may have been told to leave Bangladesh."

However, where India played a crucial role in bringing back democracy to Dhaka lay in nipping the so-called "minus two" formula which the caretaker government had promoted and almost got away with. The formula was simple — get rid of both the Awami League chieftain Sheikh Hasina and BNP's Begum Zia and create a third political force to run Bangladesh.

The caretaker regime banned Hasina from returning from the US where she was visiting her son. When she returned defying the regime, she was arrested. At the same time the military-backed government tried to exile Khaleda off to Saudi Arabia and form a 'King's party' of turncoat politicians.

India discreetly passed on the message that it did not approve of such shenanigans. "I expressed the view (to Gen. Moeen) ... that the "minus two formula"

was unlikely to succeed," the author says in his book.

Possibly on advice from Mukherjee, Chakravarty told the general that "releasing the two Begums and allowing normal politics to resume" would be the best bet and help the caretaker regime go down in history as having taken the right path.

The rest, as they say, is history. The Begums were released and Sheikh Hasina stormed back to power on the crest of a massive people's mandate in 2008.

He also talks of the China card, which Bangladesh and others in the sub-continent have played vis-a-vis India to extract "maximum benefits from both powers." Bangladesh's strategy seems to be one of "hedging", at times signalling sensitivity to Indian concerns and at times strengthening ties with China.

For instance Bangladesh, mindful of Indian sensitivities, cancelled a proposed Chinese project to build a dual-use port at Sonadia Island which could have hosted Chinese spy ships. Instead, it gave the Chinese a contract to build a port at Payra "approachable through a 75 km long canal, a very unlikely place for a naval base."

Though it would be too much of a stretch to believe that Bangladesh will fall into China's orbit, Chakravarty in a chapter at the end (aptly named 'Vexed Issues'), warns, "There is a rising clamour (within Bangladesh's polity) for greater alignment with China. China's sudden benevolence towards Bangladesh is not altruistic. It has geostrategic dimensions against India's security interests."

The writer is a senior journalist

Mita Kapur: I followed my instincts

As a journalist, food memoirist, lit fest producer, and founder and CEO of Siyahi, India's leading literary consultancy, MITA KAPUR has been a well-known name in the world of Indian literature. However, it is as literary director for the prestigious JCB Prize for Literature that she has built herself a lasting legacy. Kapur explains to



Mita Kapur

Sucheta Dasgupta what goes into the presentation of this award and why she is passionate about nurturing talent in this field.

Please tell us a bit about your interest in literature. What sparked it off?

As a family, all of us read copiously. I grew up surrounded by books. Majoring in English Literature and then being a journalist led to a natural segue into the field — I just followed my instincts.

What makes this prize special and/or different from others?

More the number of Prizes around, better the chances of great new books being discovered. Having said that, what sets the JCB Prize for Literature apart is ensuring that all 10 books on the longlist and their authors get due attention from when it is announced. Through collaborations and marketing efforts with online and offline stores we start pushing for shelf space starting September, when the longlist is announced, and try to keep the books in conversation through the literature festival season. Alongside that, to ensure complete transparency, the Prize process, including the jury deliberations are audited by a third-party auditor.

How did the idea of this prize first come about?

This is the seventh year of the JCB Prize for Literature, and the vigour and integrity with which the Prize continues to function comes from its founder, Lord [Anthony] Bamford, and JCB's desire to create an enduring cultural legacy in India, based on its substantial and long-standing involvement in the country's social and economic life. One of the core pillars on which the Prize was established was to ensure that not only are we able to highlight distinguished Indian writing but in the process are able to make a difference in the author's life, be it through the promotion of their work or awarding a cash prize that will allow them to focus directly on the writing alone. Year on year, the Foundation team dedicates various collaborations offline and online, to ensure that the books that are longlisted, find new readers, and the authors a better platform for their writing.

How is the jury selected for the award of this prize?

Following the spirit and essence of the JCB Prize, the jury reflects the diversity of all kinds — region, languages, expertise in various art and literary fields, sensitivity, and respect to all forms of creativity including the prime focus — storytelling that is groundbreaking and excellent.

Name a book that you have recently read and enjoyed.

The Midnight Library by Matt Haig and *Lessons in Chemistry* by Bonnie Garmus.

What kind of books are you looking forward to reading in the seventh year of the prize?

The Prize is dependent on the entries made by publishers.

JURY ANNOUNCED FOR JCB PRIZE 2024

The JCB Prize for Literature has unveiled its jury for 2024. In the seventh year of the prize, the members of the jury are **Jerry Pinto**, author, translator and poet; **Deepthi Sasidharan**, art historian and curator; **Shaunak Sen**, filmmaker, and writer; **Tridip Suihred**, writer and translator and **Aqui Thami**, an accomplished artist and academic. Jerry Pinto will be the chair of the jury for 2024. — Agencies

TIPU'S CARPENTER AND HIS EUROPEAN QUEST



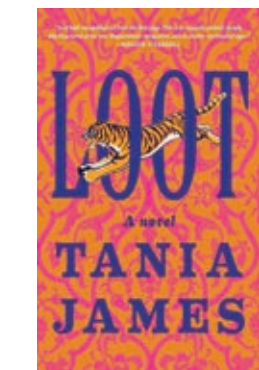
Kushalrani Gulab

review

After I read the first four parts of Tania James's historical novel *Loot*, I just sat there, shivering with delight because they had taken me wholesale into another era, complete with sights, sounds, smells and emotions. Set in Mysore during the reign of Tipu Sultan, these sections of the book introduce Abbas, the son of a master woodcarver and a young man with a penchant for making hand-cranked movable toys. The toys are so quaint that a noble lady of Tipu's zenana orders them often, making Abbas somewhat curious about things he mustn't be curious

about, such as the lifestyles of people with power. This brings Abbas to the attention of Tipu himself (spies are everywhere — in Srirangapatna and the lady of the zenana has made the dreadful mistake of backing the wrong people in politics), and changes the young man's life forever.

Tipu wants an automaton constructed, one that shows a tiger about to eat an Englishman. Du Leze, a Frenchman at Tipu's court, can put the mechanisms together. But a wood carver is necessary and Tipu gives Abbas a choice: work with Du Leze or die. Even if



LOOT: A NOVEL
By TANIA JAMES
Penguin Hamish
Hamilton
pp. 289, ₹599

Abbas wasn't naturally inventive, wasn't already interested in moving figures, his choice was clear. Life in Tipu's summer palace is fascinating. Abbas makes his first use of a chamber pot, eats well, learns from Du Leze, makes friends, acquires lovers, meets a future love interest. The tiger automaton is finished and is the talk of the territory. But then Du Leze returns to France, Tipu loses to the British, and Abbas must decide whether to follow his mentor and become someone in the world or remain unknown in his devastated country.

After I read the fifth part of *Loot*, I was slightly puzzled. This part shows Abbas on his way to Europe on a ship belonging to the East India Company, but the narrative is in the voice of sailor Thomas Beddeicker, which makes things slightly confusing. Thomas focuses on Abbas, but Abbas doesn't do much to deserve this focus other than exist as a Hindustani carpenter among English sailors. In fact, the hero of this part of the book the voyage itself — the hardships of sea travel

at a time when scurvy was a major risk and nations at war attacked even commercial ships belonging to the enemy. Still, I thought hopefully, Abbas is in France now. Surely there'll be some movement in his story.

After I read the rest of *Loot*, I was so disappointed that I didn't want to even acknowledge the book's existence with a review. Abbas' story is so slender, so slight, that it's hardly a story at all. He grows in age but not in personality; his character simply exists to move the novel from one historical backdrop to another. Make no mistake, I love these historical backdrops. They are stunningly detailed. But with such a weak plot and even weaker characterisation, *Loot* left me feeling despoiled. What this book needs is a do-over.

Kushalrani Gulab is a freelance editor and writer who dreams of being a sanyasi by the sea



IN OTHER NEWS
Itamar Vieira Junior (born 1979) is a Brazilian writer whose novel *Torto Arado [Crooked Plow]* which won three literary awards had been short-listed for the 2024 International Booker Prize. His work is a blend of magic and social realism. He was born in Salvador, Bahia, and has a PhD in Ethnic and African Studies from the Federal University of Bahia. He

also wrote a short story collection titled *A Oração do Carrasco [The Executioner's Prayer]* (2017). Translated by Johnny Lorenz, *Crooked Plow* follows the lives of two sisters, their family and a spirit, and is about the lives of subsistence farmers in the Brazil's poorest region, three generations after the abolition of slavery in that country. It has been described as powerful and piercing.

'Muslim question' sheer propaganda, there is no promised land



Anand K. Sahay

review

This provocatively titled book by a well-known journalist commentator — it may be unfair to call the author a "Muslim" journalist — may have done well to clarify the meaning and import of "Hindu India" although the context is clear from the writing — that the severe anxieties analysed here are based on the lived experience of an entire religious community across India under the Narendra Modi government, transcending class and other factors.

The explication may have been useful because Muslims have always lived in "Hindu India" in a broad sense, although such an expression was not in usage

in the west that were to constitute the main body of Pakistan had given no quarter in the first place to Jinnah's thesis for a separate homeland for Muslims. Regrettably, today, it is the outcome of Jinnah's thesis, abetted by the colonial rulers, that is remembered and not the fact that bulk Muslims stayed put in their homes whichever side they happened to be on. A twist of political fate has sowed great social, political and psychoses.

It was important to show this with a fuller treatment because for our Muslims, as much as for any other religious community, what came to be known as India was their home — their home and there was or could be no other, no matter what the majoritarian religious Right in India has gone on about for the past century — and with greater stridency under the Modi dispensation. Indeed, this is an important and fundamental point made in the book, and needed elucidation and elaboration. Perhaps a subse-

quent edition can fill the gap.

The book may be seen as a broad sweep capture in some detail of the attempt at cultural degradation, the denial of justice, and open attacks by the official machinery and its political canopy as well as organised hoodlum gangs — the uncivil civil

society — on all sections of the Muslim community, raising questions within the country as well as in the altered perception of India in the world outside. As such, the book is worthy of reflection by all modern Indians, the country's civil society as a whole, and its government and various other institutional structures.

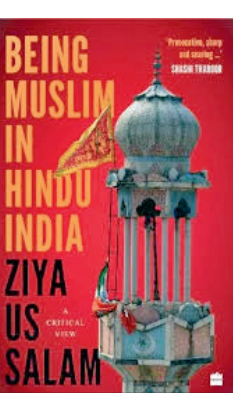
The book is not just about the political marginalisation of our Muslims and the attempted brazen reduction of their civic status in the Modi era, or indeed about insufficient care to ensure them proportionate economic opportunities in the India left after the wound of Partition.

The author quotes from the eminent sociologist, the late Prof. Imtiaz Ahmed, whose work on the operation of the (Hindu) caste system among our Muslims is renowned, "The grand design has finally unfolded itself. If Muslims cannot be annihilated physically (they are too many), annihilate them culturally so that they can be converted to the

The Muslim-majority provinces in the west that were to constitute the main body of Pakistan had given no quarter in the first place to Jinnah's thesis for a separate homeland for Muslims

indifference toward it and sought to deploy social media and rumour-peddling methods to discredit it.

There have been Hindu-Muslim rifts in India, typically propagated by political actors in the modern era. There has also been open violence at times. But there has not been the "Muslim question" on the lines of Europe's "Jewish question" of the 18th to the 20th century, leading to mass imperialism-aided emigration to Palestine and on to the violent processes culminating in the making of the violent anti-Muslim and anti-Arab state of Israel, which had not been envisaged perhaps even by early Zionists. For India's Muslims, there is no "promised land" or its equivalent. They always belonged here. No communal ideology can alter that basic historical fact. This book helps to further that understanding although it can at times be dreary with its amplification of recorded crimes committed against the Muslim communities with impunity.



BEING MUSLIM IN HINDU INDIA
By ZIYA US SALAM
HarperCollins
pp. 313, ₹599

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	319
	Riyan Parag, RR	284
	Sanju Samson, RR	264
PURPLE		
	Yuzvendra Chahal, RR	11
	Jasprit Bumrah, MI	10
	Kagiso Rabada, PBKS	9

Short takes

Jake credits Punter for his dream debut

Delhi Capitals young batting sensation Jake Fraser-McGurk says if he could handle the nerves on his IPL debut, the credit goes to coach Ricky Ponting, who advised him to time the ball instead of swinging his bat wildly. Fraser-McGurk, who turned 22 on Thursday, was handed debut on Friday against LSG.

"My instincts are aggressive, but before I went out to bat, Ricky said just focus on the timing, middle the ball, don't try to hit it too hard," he said.

"That sort of helped me ease my nerves, went out there and had a great innings, and hopefully continue doing it."

Langer and Rahul spurred Badoni

Young Lucknow Super Giants batter Ayush Badoni credited skipper KL Rahul and coach Justin Langer for keeping faith in him despite his disappointing run early in the ongoing IPL season, saying their support helped him perform against the Delhi Capitals, albeit in a losing cause. The 24-year-old Badoni struck an unbeaten 55 off 35 balls to help resurrect LSG's innings and post a competitive 167 for 7, a target which the Delhi Capitals achieved in 18.1 overs here on Friday.

"The start of the season was not good but I was doing well at the nets. So I am thankful to KL Rahul and Justin Langer for backing me and giving me chance," Badoni said.

"I was quite motivated because I was batting well at the nets so I was just backing myself, I was just waiting for the knock which came today."

SHIMRUN RIOT

Quick-fire Hetmyer makes sure Royals win

Mullanpur, April 13: Rajasthan Royals defeated Punjab Kings by three wickets in their IPL match here on Saturday. Asked to bat first, Punjab Kings, who played without their injured skipper Shikhar Dhawan, didn't get any momentum in their innings with lower-order batter Ashutosh Sharma (31), Jitesh Sharma (29) and Liam Livingstone (21) managing to take the team close to the 150-mark.

In reply, Rajasthan huffed and puffed their way to the victory target of 148 with a ball to spare, thanks to Shimron Hetmyer's 10-ball 27 after Yashasvi Jaiswal (39), Tanush Kotian (24), Riyan Parag (23) frittered away starts.

Kagiso Rabada (2/18) was the best bowler for Punjab with his two wickets.

Earlier, Rajasthan Royals bowlers under Avesh Khan and Keshav Maharaj exploited a sticky pitch to the hilt to restrict Punjab Kings to an underwhelming 147 for eight.

Pacer Avesh (2/34) and left-arm spinner Maharaj (2/23) did not allow any breathing space to Kings' batters after Rajasthan skipper Sanju Samson opted to field first.

Ashutosh Sharma (31, 16b), Jitesh Sharma (29, 24b) and Liam Livingstone (21, 14b) tried to force the pace but Punjab needed more than those pretty little cameos.

But the Kings had a rather quick start to their innings with 26 runs coming in the first three overs as Atharva Taide, who came in for injured skipper Shikhar Dhawan, hammered a couple of fours off pacer Kuldeep Sen.

However, the brakes were soon applied as Taide's mistimed pull off pacer Avesh Khan ended in the hands of Sen inside the circle.

Thereafter the Punjab batters struggled to muster any sort of momentum on a pitch that gripped a bit, especially for left-arm spinner Maharaj and leg-spinner Chahal.

However, a slice of cred-



Rajasthan Royals batsman Shimron Hetmyer plays a shot against Punjab Kings in Mohali on Saturday. — AP

it should also go to veteran pacer Trent Boult who conceded just 15 runs in his three power play overs, a stage when the pitch was still fine for batting.

The last three power play overs could only fetch 10 runs for Kings as they ended that passage with a modest 38 for one.

In the next five overs, the hosts struggled to hit even one boundary as they laboured to 53 for four in 10 overs, losing Jonny Bairstow, stand-in skipper Sam Curran and Prabhsimran Singh, all consumed by the combination of a slow deck and accurate spinners. — PTI

KOLKATA SEEK HOME COMFORT AGAINST LSG

Kolkata, April 13: Two-time champions Kolkata Knight Riders will seek home comfort in their bid to return to winning ways when they face a depleted Lucknow Super Giants in an IPL match here on Sunday.

The match will be KKR's first of the five matches at home on the trot and the Gautam Gambhir-mentored side will be fully aware this can prove decisive to clinch the play-off spot for first time since 2021.

In the points tally, nothing separates the two teams, both of whom have secured three wins each, and lost their respective last-round matches.

KKR's over-reliance on their Caribbean ageing duo of Sunil Narine and Andre Russell was exposed by CSK when they lost by seven wickets in their previous outing. Narine (27) and Russell (10) failed with the bat and the team, who had posted two 200-plus scores from three matches on the back of the Caribbean duo's blazing form, could manage an under par 137/9 at Chennai.

That sums up KKR's batting that has relied on some odd fireworks and missed an anchor in the absence of Nitish Rana (finger injury), who is slated to sit out of another match.

While KKR will be favourites at Eden, LSG will not give up easily, even as they will miss their pace sensation Mayank Yadav for a second successive match. — PTI

ACTION TODAY

KKR VS LSG

FROM 3.30 PM, LIVE ON STAR SPORTS

Teams	P	W	L	N/R	Points	Net RR
RR	6	5	1	0	10	+0.767
KKR	4	3	1	0	6	+1.528
CSK	5	3	2	0	6	+0.666
LSG	5	3	2	0	6	+0.436
SRH	5	3	2	0	6	+0.344
GT	6	3	3	0	6	-0.637
MI	5	2	3	0	4	-0.073
PBKS	6	2	4	0	4	-0.218
DC	6	2	4	0	4	-0.975
RCB	6	1	5	0	2	-1.124

Focus on Dhoni as CSK face Mumbai

Mumbai, April 13: The legendary Mahendra Singh Dhoni will be in the spotlight in what could be his final game at the iconic Wankhede Stadium when defending champions Chennai Super Kings take on Mumbai Indians in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday.

Dhoni returns to the hallowed turf of Wankhede for the first time ever as a non-captain of the CSK, potentially in his last IPL season. It will also be his first appearance as just a player for any team since November 2005.

Even at 42, Dhoni's glove-work remains impeccable and so does his assessment of the game like always. But CSK will hope that his tactical acumen also helps them improve a dismal away record this season, having suffered two defeats on the road.

CSK would also hope their recent record against MI — four wins in last five matches including their seven-wicket win here last season — holds them in good stead.

ACTION TODAY

MI VS CSK

FROM 7.30 PM, LIVE ON STAR SPORTS

Two of IPL's most successful teams with five titles each, both sides are witnessing a tectonic shift of leadership change with Hardik Pandya taking over the mantle from Rohit Sharma at MI and Rituraj Gaikwad succeeding Dhoni at CSK, but there is nothing that suggests their intense rivalry would expect any such shift.

If anything, CSK's bowlers could be put to sword by the rampaging MI batters who have gone hammer and tongs at the flat pitches here, scoring in excess of 230 against Delhi Capitals and chasing down nearly 200 against RCB with more than four overs to spare. — PTI



Chennai Super Kings player Shivam Dube (right) trains with a teammate at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Saturday, ahead of their match against MI.

BRIEF | BYTES

GILL FINISHES DAY 1 OF OTAGO RALLY IN TOP-3

New Delhi, April 13: India's fastest rally driver Gaurav Gill of JK Tyre put himself in contention for a podium finish after grabbing a top-three place at the end of the opening day of the Otago Rally in New Zealand.

Gill and his New-Zealand-based co-driver Jared Hudson were third on the timesheets, a little over 30 seconds behind overall leader Jack Hawkeswood and 11 seconds adrift of second-placed Robbie Stokes. Gill and Hudson were piloting 2022 APRC champion and 10-time Otago Rally winner Haydon Paddon's Hyundai i20 N Rally2 machine. On day one, the drivers navigated through eight stages. — PTI

TENNIS GIRLS GO DOWN TO KIWIS IN BJK CUP

Changsha (China), April 13: Ankita Raina could not win the crucial second singles and later lost the decisive doubles match with partner Prarthana Thombare as a historic play-offs place slipped out of India's grasp after a 1-2 defeat to New Zealand in the Billie Jean King Cup here on Saturday. India remained in Asia/Oceania Group I by finishing third in the tournament.

Rutuja Bhosale put India ahead with her 6-2, 7-6 (5) win over Monique Barry in the opening singles. Raina needed to win the next match against world No. 169 Lulu Sun but was outgunned 2-6, 0-6.

A win in that match would have earned India a place in the play-offs for the first time. — PTI



Newcastle United's Alexander Isak (centre) scores against Tottenham Hotspur during the English Premier League match at St. James' Park in Newcastle, England, on Saturday. — AP

Five-star Man City go top of EPL

Manchester (England), April 13: Manchester City moved to the top of the Premier League as lowly Luton were eased aside 5-1 at the Etihad, while Newcastle thrashed Tottenham 4-0 on Saturday.

Amid a gruelling schedule, Pep Guardiola could hardly have wished for a kinder fixture in between the two legs of his side's Champions League quarterfinal against Real Madrid.

Guardiola made six changes from a thrilling 3-3 draw in the Spanish capital on Tuesday and City

seemed set for a stress-free afternoon from the moment they opened the scoring after just two minutes. Erling Haaland's shot deflected in off the unfortunate Daiki Hashioka into his own net.

Yet the floodgates refused to open as the English champions had to wait until after the hour mark before making the points safe when Mateo Kovacic smashed in Julian Alvarez's cross at the edge of the box.

Haaland scored five then the sides met in the FA Cup in February. The Norwegian had to

THE RESULTS

Manchester City (Hashioka 2-og, Kovacic 64, Haaland 76-pen, Doku 87, Gvardiol 90+3)	5
Luton (Barkley 81)	1
Newcastle (Isak 30, 51, Gordon 32, Schar 87)	4
Tottenham	0
Brentford (Arblaster 63-og, Onyeka 90+3)	2
Sheffield United	0
Burnley (Brownhill 74)	1
Brighton (Muric 79-og)	1

settle for just one time this time when scored from the penalty spot for his 20th Premier League goal of the season.

ISAK DOUBLE

Alexander Isak scored twice, while Anthony Gordon and Fabian Schar were also on target as the Magpies moved up to sixth and kept their slim chances of Champions League football next season alive.

Newcastle are 10 points adrift of Tottenham and Villa with six games remaining but have the far easier run-in. — AFP

Pragg is up against Alireza in Round 8

Toronto, April 13: Indian Grandmasters R. Praggnanandhaa and D. Gukesh would look to bridge the gap with his performance and stands as the favourite with half point more than Praggnanandhaa, Gukesh and top seed Fabiano Caruana of United States.

Gujrathi on 3.5 points is known to rise towards the end of tournaments and one can expect him to come firing in the second half along with Hikaru Nakamura, who shares the fifth spot with him.

Praggnanandhaa will be up against Frenchman Firouz Alireza, while Gukesh will take on compatriot Vaidit Gujarathi when the tournament resumes on Saturday.

While all three Indians have had a decent outing in the open section so far, it is defending champion Nepomniachtchi who is in prime position to complete a hat-trick of titles at the halfway stage.

WRESTLER RADHIKA MAKES 68KG FINAL AT ASIAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), April 13: Radhika was the lone Indian woman wrestler who assured herself of a medal, her second at the senior Asian Championships, by reaching the 68kg final here on Saturday.

Radhika, who won a silver at the U23 Asian Championships last year and also finished second at the senior Asian Championships in 2022, put up a dominant show in her weight category. She won the first bout by technical superiority against Kazakhstan's Albina Kairgeldinova and then pinned Kyrgyzstan's Gulnura Tashtanbekova.

She will now face Japan's Nonoka Ozaki in the gold medal bout. Shivani Pawar (50kg) lost her quarterfinal 'by fall' to Ziqi Feng but made it to the bronze medal round after the Chinese entered the final. — PTI

NEPAL'S AIREE SMASHES SIX SIXES IN OVER

Al Amerat (Qatar), April 13: Nepal's hard-hitting Dipendra Singh Airee became the third batter to smash six sixes in an over in T20 internationals here on Saturday.

Airee achieved the feat against hosts Qatar during the ongoing ACC Men's Premier Cup T20 International fixture here. Thus, Airee joined an elite company of Yuvraj Singh (against Stuart Broad during T20 World Cup 2007) and Kieron Pollard (against Sri Lanka's Akila Dananjaya in 2021) as batters with six maximums in one over.

The 24-year-old Airee remained unbeaten on a 21-ball 64 that included three fours and seven sixes at a monstrous strike rate 304.76.

In fact, the Nepal man became the fifth batsman to achieve this rare feat in international cricket. — PTI

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