

# THE ASIAN AGE

LONDON WEDNESDAY 17 APRIL 2024



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It is BJP vs Kamal Nath in Chhindwara as it gets ready to witness a fierce battle



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German Chancellor Scholz: Russia's invasion of Ukraine threatens global security

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Shah Rukh Khan to invest a whopping ₹200 crore for Suhana Khan's King



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Canadian singer Nelly Furtado during the premiere of *The Greatest Hits* in Hollywood, California, on Tuesday. — AFP

### Delhi L-G pens open letter to CM, slams govt for water crisis

New Delhi: Delhi lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena has written an open letter to jailed chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, claiming the death of a woman in a fight over fetching water reflects the government's failure and water minister Atishi used the incident for "narrow political goals". Ms Atishi hits back at Mr Saxena over the open letter, holding him responsible for the stoppage of Delhi Jal Board (DJB) works. The Delhi water minister had a few days ago written to the L-G, asking him to suspend the CEO of DJB after a woman was killed following a quarrel with her neighbour over fetching water from a common tap in Delhi's Farsh Bazar area. In the note, Ms Atishi urged Mr Saxena to "institute an independent enquiry into the acts of omission and commission of the chief secretary, as well as officers of the finance department, urban development department and DJB". Full report on Page 2

### 48-hr campaigning ban on Surjewala

New Delhi: The EC on Tuesday reprimanded Congress leader Randeep Surjewala over his remarks against BJP MP Hema Malini and barred him from campaigning for 48 hours. This is the first campaign ban imposed by the poll body in this LS election cycle. Full report on Page 3

### ED makes 4th arrest in Hemant Soren case

New Delhi/Ranchi: The ED has made a fresh arrest in connection with the money laundering investigation against former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren and others, official sources said Tuesday. This is the fourth arrest in the instant case. Full report on Page 3

### COUNTERPOINT



FOR ONE MP TICKET GET 4 MLA TICKETS FREE

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■ Mamata: BJP spreads 'lies' as it fears it will win less than 200 seats  
■ PM alleges TMC 'hatches conspiracies ... but the truth always wins'

## Modi tears into TMC for 'opposing' Ram Navami; Didi warns of 'riots'

RAJIB CHOWDHURI  
KOLKATA, APRIL 16

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday tore into West Bengal's ruling Trinamul Congress for "opposing" the Ram Navami celebration and the Citizenship Amendment Act implementation in the state, but patronising the infiltration of Bangladeshis and Rohingyas across the border.

Mr Modi took chief minister Mamata Banerjee head on over the Ram Navami celebration after the TMC chief cautioned people of the possibility of a "riot" on Wednesday during the Hindu festival. Incidentally, both were in North Bengal and crossed swords against each other from their Lok Sabha election campaign rallies in separate districts of the region.

Mr Modi said at Balurghat in South Dinajpur: "This is the first Ram Navami when Ram Lalla has come to his existence at his temple in Ayodhya. I am aware that the TMC, however, tries all out every year to stop



Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a public meeting ahead of the Lok Sabha elections in Balurghat, West Bengal, on Tuesday. — PTI

▶ THE PM said the TMC has put Bengal on a lease to the infiltrators and criminals. It has given permission to infiltrators, including Bangladeshis and Rohingyas, to derail the demography and legal system of the state.

Referring to a Calcutta high court order allowing

the Ram Navami rally in Howrah, the PM added: "Court has granted permission. Tomorrow processions will be taken out with respect and devotion. I congratulate you for this."

He later told another BJP rally, at Raiganj in North Dinajpur: "Law cannot decide what should get permission or not in Bengal under TMC rule. It is the miscreants and extortionists of the TMC who take the call. In

### Cong, PDP, NC responsible for fake encounters in Valley: Shah

YUSUF JAMEEL  
SRINAGAR, APRIL 16

Union home minister Amit Shah on Tuesday asserted that, after the abrogation of Article 370, terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir is taking its last breath and now no one dares to raise Pakistan flags.

While speaking at a BJP election rally at Paloura in Jammu, Mr Shah said, "After the *manhos saya* (evil shadow) of Article 370 is gone, the terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir is taking its last breath, the stone-pelting and bomb blasts are a thing of the past and the tricolour is flying high everywhere here."

Mr Shah added: "Jis Kashmir kay liye Mookerjee nay diya baidan, woh Kashmir hamara hai (the Kashmir for which Syama Prasad Mookerjee sacrificed his life is ours)."

The Union home minister urged the people of Kashmir not to vote in favour of the Congress, the National Conference or the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the ensuing Lok Sabha elections, as it were these parties that, he alleged, staged fake encounters in J&K and handed the guns over to its youth, ruining their lives in the past. He, however, hinted at the BJP not fielding its candidates for the three Lok Sabha seats in Kashmir when he said that in a hurry to see "lotus

### Shinde meets Salman; 2 held from Guj for shooting



Maharashtra chief minister Eknath Shinde with actor Salman Khan and his father Salim Khan at Khan's residence in Mumbai on Tuesday. The crime branch of the Mumbai police has arrested two shooters who fired at the actor's house. The accused were held in Gujarat's Bhuj district. ■ Report on Page 4 — PTI

### 6, including 3 kids, dead as boat sinks in Jhelum river

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
SRINAGAR, APRIL 16

At least six persons, including three schoolchildren and a woman, died after a boat capsized in the Jhelum river in Srinagar early on Tuesday. While 10 passengers are said to have been rescued, three others are missing. The officials said that 19 people, including schoolchildren, were crossing the river, which has been in spate following heavy rains that lashed the scenic Kashmir Valley over the past few days, in the boat near Batwara, a Srinagar suburb, to report to their schools and work.

The witnesses said the boat turned over and capsized in the middle of the river. The officials said that rescuers, including the men from the Indian Army, the local police, the SDRF and the NDRF, besides the locals, quickly swung into action and launched a massive operation. ■ More on Page 4

### Militants attack Army convoy in N-E; jawan hurt

Ulfa-I claims responsibility for hit

MANOJ ANAND  
GUWAHATI, APRIL 16

An Army jawan was critically wounded when heavily-armed militants on Tuesday morning launched an attack on a convoy of the Assam Rifles and the Indian Army in Assam's Tinsukia district near the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border.

Saying that there were 25 jawans traveling in the convoy, security sources said the militants used rocket launchers and AK-series rifles to attack them. The jawan, identified as Hawladar Om Prakash, co-driver of a truck, sustained multiple bullet injuries and was airlifted to Dinjan Military Station in Dibrugarh for treatment, the security sources said.

The sources said the incident took place at around 8 am in the Namdang area under Margherita police sta-

tion. "The convoy had around 25 jawans and they were attacked with rocket launchers first. Later, the militants opened fire with AK rifles on the troops," the security sources said, adding that the convoy of three Army vehicles was heading towards Margherita from Arunachal Pradesh's Changlang when the firing incident took place. "One vehicle managed to escape but two of them came under attack. They were later rescued by the other troops," the sources said.

Meanwhile, Tinsukia superintendent of police Gaurav Avijit Dilip said in a statement: "Today, ■ Turn to Page 4

### PM attacks RJD over 'jungle raj': 'No plan to change Constitution'

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
with agency inputs  
NEW DELHI/PATNA,  
APRIL 16

Debunking the Opposition's charge that the BJP has plans to scrap the Constitution, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday asserted that he felt "indebted to Baba Saheb Ambedkar's samvidhan", which enabled him to rise from humble origins to the top office. Addressing two election rallies in Bihar's Gaya and Purnea, Mr

▶ THE PM'S comment came a day after Lalu Prasad Yadav raked up utterances made by a number of the BJP leaders who have said that the 'Constitution will be changed if we get a two-thirds majority'

Modi attacked the RJD for "jungle raj" in the state and the Congress over Emergency and "suspending constitutional provisions". Addressing the election rallies, the Prime

Minister spoke extensively of the high esteem in which he holds the Constitution, mentioning his government's measures like "celebrating Samvidhan Diwas, from schools to the Supreme Court and Parliament".

The Prime Minister said: "This year is special. We are going to celebrate 75 years of the Constitution on a scale similar to the Amrit Kaal celebrations, which marked 75 years of Independence. Our intent

### C'garh: Top commanders among 29 Maoists killed

2 jawans, BSF inspector hurt in op

RAHBINDRA NATH  
CHOUDHURY  
RAIPUR, APRIL 16

In the biggest ever counterinsurgency operation in Bastar, Chhattisgarh, 29 Maoists were on Tuesday gunned down in an encounter with security forces in Kanker district. Three jawans, including a BSF inspector, were injured. Two Maoist commanders, Shankar Rao and Lalita Madhvi, who carried a bounty of ₹25 lakhs each, were

among the 29 slain ultras, police sources said. Acting on specific intelligence on the presence of a large number of armed Left-wing guerrillas, including senior Maoist leaders, a joint team comprising personnel of the BSF and district reserve guards, the tribal counterinsurgency wing of Chhattisgarh police, carried out a search operation in Binaguna-Koragutta jungles in Kanker district, police said. ■ More on Page 4

### Envoy to Dublin raps Opp, Cong erupts

'BJP apparatchik': Jairam cites service rules breach, seeks removal

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

Indian ambassador to Ireland Akhilesh Mishra stirred a hornet's nest when he attacked the decades-long erstwhile rule of India's principal Opposition party, the Congress, which he said had "created a deeply entrenched ecosystem of corruption".

The Congress called for Mr Mishra's sacking, saying he behaved as a BJP "apparatchik" instead of acting as an envoy of the country.

The controversy started after a newspaper in Ireland, *The Irish Times*, published an article that reflected its view, which was extremely critical of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government. Mr Mishra, a senior career diplomat belonging to the 1989 batch of the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), promptly issued a rejoinder to the newspaper, but in doing so, he not only defended the government and hailed the leadership of Mr Modi but also ended up attacking the previous Congress party's govern-

ment's popularity and profile not only in India but globally because of his impeccable personal character, integrity and thought leadership on innovative, inclusive governance and sustainable development. As he does not belong to any elite political family, his personal life inspires millions of ordinary people in India and other developing countries... The people of India are excited to witness the vibrancy of democracy in action on the ground."

Attacking the Congress, ■ Turn to Page 2

### Sunak faces stiff resistance over smoking ban plan for under-15s

ADITI KHANNA  
LONDON, APRIL 16

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak faces very vocal resistance against his plans to effectively ban smoking for anyone aged 15 and younger as a new bill comes up for a vote in the House of Commons on Tuesday.

The British Indian leader proposed the Tobacco and Vapes Bill last year and declared his vision for creating a "smoke-free generation" by making it an offence to sell tobacco products to anyone born after January 1, 2009, which covers children



Rishi Sunak aged 15.

Once it clears its parliamentary journey, the new legislation will introduce some of the world's strictest anti-smoking laws in the country. As there is Opposition backing for the bill in Parliament and governing Conservative MPs have a free vote on the bill, any

Tory votes against the bill will not be seen as a full-blown rebellion against the Prime Minister.

But two of Mr Sunak's immediate predecessors, Liz Truss and Boris Johnson, have been leading a very vocal group of Tories who plan to vote against the bill as "un-conservative" and taking away choice from the public.

"The truth is that there is no safe level of tobacco consumption. It is uniquely harmful, and that is why we are taking this important action today to protect the next generation," said UK health secretary Victoria Atkins. — PTI

### Fire rips through Copenhagen's old stock exchange



A fire rages through one of Copenhagen's oldest buildings on Tuesday, causing the collapse of the iconic spire of the 17th-century-old stock exchange. The building, one of the oldest in the Danish capital, was undergoing renovation work when it caught fire, whose cause was yet unknown. ■ Report on Page 6 — AFP

### IPS trainee is India topper; 1,016 qualify in UPSC exam

AGE CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

Aditya Srivastava, a trainee IPS officer, topped the civil services examination 2023, as per the results announced on Tuesday by the Union Public Service Commission.

Animesh Pradhan, Donuru Ananya Reddy, P.K. Sidharth Ramkumar and Ruhani have secured second, third, fourth and fifth ranks, respectively.

A total of 1,016 candidates -- 664 men and 352 women -- have qualified for the examination and have been recommended by the Union Public Service Commission for appointments to various services.

Congratulations the successful candidates, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said their efforts will shape the future of the nation in the times to come.

He also reached out to the unsuccessful aspirants on X, saying, "Setbacks can be tough, but remember, this isn't the end of your journey. ■ More on Page 2

**IN BRIEF**

**JNU students protest over unmet demand**

**New Delhi:** Many students at the Jawaharlal Nehru University here on Tuesday participated in a strike to protest against the administration's neglect of their demands, including "inaction" over a sexual harassment complaint. Classes in various departments, including social sciences, physical science, School of International Students and School of Language, Arts and Aesthetics, and Computer Sciences, were stalled amid the strike. The protest call was given by the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students Union (JNUSU), which has demanded an expeditious investigation into a sexual harassment incident and action against those accused. On March 31, a woman JNU student filed a complaint with the administration against four individuals, including two former students of the university, for allegedly passing sexually derogatory comments at her while she was taking a walk at the JNU Ring Road in the early hours of the day. The union has also asked the administration to take necessary steps to ensure the safety of the victim against alleged attempts at intimidation.

**Woman arrested for dealing in stolen cars**

**New Delhi:** The Delhi police has arrested a 37-year-old woman from Bihar for allegedly selling stolen high-end sports utility vehicles (SUV), the police said on Tuesday. The accused, identified as Lovely Singh, a resident of Patliputra in Bihar, was nabbed on April 3 after an operation was launched following the arrest of her husband, Govind last year, with a stolen Maruti Brezza, deputy commissioner of police (east) Apoorva Gupta said. "On interrogation, Govind revealed that his wife, Lovely, had received numerous stolen luxury vehicles from Delhi and had further sold or supplied them to others in Bihar and Jharkhand," the DCP said. Several police teams were formed to arrest Singh but she kept dodging them by changing her residence, the DCP said. She also resided in well-known societies to avoid suspicion.

**700 Tihar inmates get job in hotels**

**New Delhi:** Around 700 inmates are employed and 12,000 more are presently getting training to work in various sectors after coming out of jail, Tihar's director-general (prisons) Sanjay Baniwal said. Mr Baniwal on Monday said that he is happy to see inmates, who get employed after spending their jail term. Mr Baniwal, who had a stint of Chandigarh DGP, has been posted as Tihar DG since November 2022. Replying to a question over jail reforms during his tenure in Tihar, he said, "We have started skill development programme with the help of Urban Development Ministry inside the prisons."

**POLICE BUSTS SEX RACKET, 17 WOMEN RESCUED**

**Gurgaon:** The Gurgaon police has busted an alleged prostitution racket being run from five spa centres in the city's Manesar area, officials said on Tuesday. The police rescued 17 women working at these spas while arresting the manager of one of the centres, they said. The owners of the five spa centres have also been booked, they added. According to the police, the rescued women were allegedly engaged in prostitution in the spa centres for several months and hail from Jharkhand, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Nepal. Based on a tip-off, five police teams led by ACP Sushila were formed to bust the racket, the officials said. Five cops were sent as decoy customers to these spas to gather information and the police on Monday raided four spa centres in Amrapali Corp-orate Hub, Sector 2 and another at Sector 1 market, all in Manesar, they said. "These spa centres were running for the last six months. Prostitution business was carried out here in the name of spa," said Virendra Khatri, SHO of the Manesar police station. "The raids were conducted after complaints were received for several days," the SHO added. — PTI

**664 men, 352 women qualify civil services exam ■ Ruhani from St. Stephen's ranks 5th Trainee IPS Aditya Srivastava UPSC 2023 topper**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 16**

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) on Tuesday declared the results for the Civil Services Exam 2023, with Aditya Srivastava securing the top rank.

Animesh Pradhan and Donuru Ananya Reddy secured the second and third ranks respectively. Meanwhile, congratulating the successful civil services examinees, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that their efforts will shape the future of our nation in the times to come. Mr Srivastava qualified the examination with electrical engineering as his optional subject. He has done his graduation (Bachelor of Technology) in electrical engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kanpur, according to the results of the Civil Services Examination 2023 announced by the UPSC on Tuesday.

Mr Pradhan, a graduate (B.Tech) in computer science from the National Institute of Technology (NIT), Rourkela, secured the second rank with sociology as his optional subject, it said.



(From left to right) Aditya Srivastava, Animesh Pradhan and Donuru Ananya Reddy secured first, second and third rank respectively.

Donuru Ananya Reddy, who possesses a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in geography from Miranda House, Delhi University, stood third in rank with anthropology as her optional subject.

A total of 1,016 candidates (664 men and 352 women) have qualified the examination and have been recommended by the commission for appointment to various services.

Of the total 1,016 recommended candidates, 347 are from the general category, 115 are from economically weaker sections, 303 are from other backward classes, 165 from Scheduled Castes, and 86 from Scheduled Tribes.

In his posts on X, PM Modi also reached out to the unsuccessful aspirants for the coveted government services, saying they have chances ahead of success while noting that

India is rich with opportunities where their talents can truly shine.

Among the finally qualified candidates, the top five comprise three men and two women candidates, according to the commission.

PK Sidharth Ramkumar and Ruhani have got fourth and fifth ranks respectively in the examination. Ramkumar, a Bachelor of Architecture from the College of Architecture in Trivandrum, secured fourth rank with anthropology as his optional subject.

Ruhani, a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in economics from St Stephens College, Delhi University, secured the fifth rank with economics as her optional subject, according to the results of the Civil Services Examination 2023. The top 25 candidates

comprise 10 women and 15 men. The civil services examination is conducted annually in three stages—preliminary, mains, and interview—by the UPSC to select officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS), and Indian Police Service (IPS) among others.

The recommended candidates also include 30 persons with benchmark disability (16 orthopedically handicapped, six visually challenged, five hearing impaired, and three with multiple disabilities).

The Civil Services Examination (preliminary), 2023, was conducted on May 28 last year.

A total of 10,16,850 candidates applied for this examination, out of which 5,92,141 candidates actually appeared in the examination.

**PM: Your efforts will shape the future of nation**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 16**

Congratulating the successful civil services examinees, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said that their efforts will shape the future of our nation in the times to come. In his posts on X, Prime Minister Modi also reached out to the unsuccessful aspirants for the coveted government services, saying they have chances ahead to success while noting that India is rich with opportunities where their talents can truly shine.

"I congratulate all those who have successfully cleared the Civil Services Examination, 2023. Their hard work, perseverance and dedication has paid off, marking the start of a promising career in public service. Their efforts will shape the future of our nation in the times to come. My best wishes to them," he said.

**Nausheen from Jamia coaching gets 9th rank**

**New Delhi, April 16:** Nausheen, who has secured the 9th rank in the UPSC Civil Services Examination (CSE) 2024, got third time lucky after two previous attempts as she managed to realise her dream of becoming a civil servant. She is among the 31 students from the Jamia Milla Islamia's residential coaching academy who qualified the 2024 Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) Civil Services Examination.

The Jamia topper in the coveted examination attributed her success to her coaching institute while also thanking her friends for contributing to making her dream come true.

"I would like to give the credit for my success to Jamia RCA. I was there since November 2021 after two attempts. The institute played a major role in my success because already selected people were there who helped me a lot. My friends also helped me through notes,



Nausheen

answer writing and everything else and made this possible," she said. It was a celebratory atmosphere at Nausheen's hometown in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, with her parents affectionately feeding her laddu on the joyous occasion as they posed for the camera.

"Our happiness has no bounds, it is difficult to describe it. Till now we used to read interviews of other girls securing first, second, third, ninth, thirty first (rank in the UPSC exam). Now I have my daughter who has secured ninth rank," Nausheen's father said, laughing with joy. — PTI

**L-G pens open letter to CM, slams govt over water problems**

**BHASKAR HARI SHARMA and AVINASH PRABHAKAR NEW DELHI, APRIL 16**

War of words ensued between the Delhi lieutenant-governor and the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) over the water crisis in the city.

L-G V.K. Saxena has written an open letter to jailed chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, claiming the death of a woman in a fight over fetching water reflects the government's failure and that water minister Atishi used the incident for "narrow political goals."

Ms Atishi hit back at the L-G, holding him responsible for the stoppage of Delhi Jal Board (DJB) works. The water minister had, a few days ago, written to the L-G, asking him to suspend the CEO of the DJB after a woman was killed following a quarrel with her neighbour over fetching water from a common tap in the Farsh Bazar area of Northeast Delhi.

In the note, Ms Atishi urged the L-G to "institute an independent enquiry into the acts of omission and commission of the chief secretary, as well as officers of the finance department,

urban development department, and DJB."

Days after the communication, L-G Saxena penned a strongly worded open letter to the CM, currently lodged in Tihar jail after his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case linked to the now-scraped Delhi excise policy scam case.

"Having underlined the inadequate supply of water as the cause behind the incident, Atishi has ironically indicted her own government of more than nine years," the L-G said.

Asserting this "unfortunate incident (woman's death) is not the only such case of its kind in the context of Delhi," he said that many such incidents over water scarcity have happened in the past primarily due to the failures of the government.

The L-G cited official figures to highlight his points. He cited The Economic Survey 2023-24, tabled in the recent Budget Session of the Delhi Assembly.

He said that of the 2.5 crore people in the city, more than 2 crore are deprived of drinking water supply in varying degrees.

**44-year-old kills cop, injures passerby before killing self**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 16**

A 44-year-old man allegedly shot an assistant sub-inspector and then killed himself on Tuesday in the Nand Nagri area of Northeast Delhi, the police said.

According to the police, it received a PCR call at around 11.40 am reporting multiple bullet rounds being fired at the Meet Nagar flyover that killed ASI Dinesh Sharma and injured another person.

ASI Sharma was posted in the special branch of the Delhi police and was

travelling on his motorcycle when the incident took place.

Another victim, Amit Kumar (30), was also travelling on his scooter when he was shot by accused Mukesh, DCP Joy Tirkey said.

Mukesh was a resident of Nand Nagri area, the police said.

According to an eyewitness, Mukesh first shot Sharma and then shot Kumar, who was injured in his leg. He then boarded an auto-rickshaw and asked the driver to take him away from the spot.

— PTI

**'My name is Arvind Kejriwal and I am not terrorist': AAP reads CM message**

**AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 16**

"My name is Arvind Kejriwal and I am not a terrorist" is the Delhi chief minister's message for the countrymen from Tihar jail, AAP leader Sanjay Singh said on Tuesday, slamming the BJP for the treatment being meted out to him in custody.

Accusing the BJP of trying to break him out of "malice and vendetta," he said that Mr Kejriwal will emerge stronger from all of this.

Addressing the media, Mr Singh claimed that a "notorious criminal" lodged in Tihar jail was allowed to meet his lawyer and wife in the barrack while Mr Kejriwal had to meet Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann across a glass screen.

Chief minister Mann met Mr Kejriwal in jail on Monday and alleged that he was not getting the amenities even a hardcore criminal is allowed in Tihar.

"Hurt by the treatment being given to him, Kejriwal has sent a message for the countrymen: 'My name is Arvind Kejriwal and I am not a terrorist,'" Mr Singh said.



AAP MP Sanjay Singh during a press conference in New Delhi on Tuesday.

The AAP leader added, "Kejriwal is being treated like a terrorist and he was allowed to meet the Punjab chief minister across a glass screen."

Mr Singh, who walked out of jail recently after spending six months in a money laundering case, alleged, "In jail number 2 of Tihar, a notorious criminal meets his lawyer and wife inside the barrack. Meetings of other inmates are also held in the office of the jail."

Meanwhile, Director General (prisons) Sanjay Baniwal on Monday said no distinction is made in the treatment meted out to

the inmates and it is ensured they get the same basic rights.

"There is no distinction between a hardcore or a normal criminal. In the jail manual, there is no distinction between the inmates. Every inmate has basic rights and it is my duty to ensure that. These are being ensured to everyone," he said.

Sanjay Singh alleged that the BJP took ₹60 crore from an accused in the alleged liquor scam through the electoral bond but the Prime Minister defended the now-scraped poll bonds scheme in an interview.

**Minor fire in North Block**

**New Delhi, April 16:** A minor fire broke out at the North Block, which houses the ministries of home affairs and personnel, in the high-security Raisina Hills here on Tuesday but no one was injured and no file was damaged, a home ministry spokesperson said.

The cause of the fire appears to be a short circuit on the second floor of the building and it was contained within 20 minutes by the joint efforts of the CISE, CPWD and the Delhi fire services (DFS).

A DFS officer said a Xerox machine, some computers and some documents caught fire.

— PTI



Dr Karan Singh, philosopher-statesman and former Union minister (extreme right), is seen here at the solo painting exhibition of Renuka Varma (second left), Ab to Bas Asman Baaqi Hai, which he inaugurated at the Visual Arts Gallery of India Habitat Centre on Tuesday evening. Diplomat-politician Pavan K. Varma (centre) is also seen. The exhibition will remain open till April 20. — G.N. JHA

**Envoy to Dublin raps Opposition, Cong erupts**

Continued From Page 1  
The Indian ambassador said, "The fight against the deeply entrenched ecosystem of corruption (created by the 55-year rule, including the first 30 years, by a single dynastic party in India) is a major factor behind Mr Modi's ever-growing popularity. There is a huge sense of relief at the grassroots level to witness action being taken and recoveries made from the rich and powerful elites who operated with a sense of entitlement and impunity. The anti-corruption drive itself is so successful

because the government has given a free hand to the relevant agencies (their appointment, constitution and operating procedures are quite similar to the corresponding Irish/British agencies) and the adoption of innovative technology to facilitate detection of the nefarious, multilayered web of corruption and tax evasion by politicians, NGOs and the media."

Dismissing the concerns of the Irish newspaper on the issue of the position of secularism in India currently, the envoy further wrote, "A stereotypical description of India as an '80 per cent Hindu majority' nation is

quite misleading because Hinduism is inherently inclusive and fundamentally pluralistic, since centuries preceding the birth of Buddha or Christ. Numerically, Hindus of India outnumber the entire population of the EU and North America (continent) and obviously do not represent a monolithic vote bank. The Hindus of India possess incredible diversity of thought, ways of life and political beliefs, covering the entire spectrum from extreme left to extreme right. They regularly vote to power non-Hindu

nationalists'. Even now, Mr Modi's BJP rules only in 12 out of 28 states of India. This can happen only in 'Hindu majority' India."

**'Breast cancer to cause 10L deaths a year by '40'**

**New Delhi, April 16:** Breast cancer is now the world's most common carcinogenic disease, with the ailment likely to cause a million deaths a year by 2040, a new Lancet commission has found. Around 7.8 million women were diagnosed with breast cancer in five years till the end of 2020 and about 6.85,000 women died from the disease the same year, it said. Globally, breast cancer cases will increase from 2.3 million in 2020 to more than 3 million by 2040, with low and middle-income countries being "disproportionately affected", the commis-

sion estimated. By 2040, deaths due to the disease will be a million a year, it added. The Lancet report pointed to "glaring inequities" and suffering from symptoms, despair and financial burden due to breast cancer, which are often "hidden and inadequately addressed." "Women's fundamental human rights have historically been accorded lesser respect than men's in all settings, with implications for patient agency and autonomy," said Reshma Jaggi, Emory University School of Medicine, US. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Cong leader to fight against Sena-UBT

**Mumbai:** The Sangli Lok Sabha seat has become a bone of contention in Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) — comprising Shiv Sena (UBT), Congress and Sharad Pawar led NCP — as Congress leader Vishal Patil filed his nomination. Maharashtra Congress leadership said that Patil, grandson of former CM Vasantdada Patil, will be convinced to withdraw his candidature. The Shiv Sena (UBT) has expressed displeasure and asked alliance partners to honour "alliance dharma". As per the seat-sharing pact of the MVA, Sangli seat is with the Shiv Sena (UBT) along with other 20 seats out of 48 Lok Sabha seats of Maharashtra. The Congress party is contesting 17 seats, while the NCP (SP) is contesting 10 seats. The Shiv Sena (UBT) has fielded Chandraraj Patil, a popular wrestler. However, the local Congress leaders have opposed his candidature.

BJP releases 2nd list for Odisha polls

**Bhubaneswar:** After a hiatus of five years, former Union minister and senior BJP Dilip Ray has returned to electoral politics as he made a cut into the second list candidates that was released by the party for Assembly elections in Odisha. The BJP, which had on April 2 cleared 112 names for Assembly polls, released 21 names in the second list. Mr Ray, who was elected to Odisha Legislative Assembly in 2014 by defeating Sarada Nayak of the ruling BJD in Rourkela seat, had refrained from contesting from election in 2019. Mr Ray's return to electoral politics assumes significance as the BJP hopes his participation in the polls will have positive repercussions in Sundargarh constituency. BJP stalwart and former Union tribal affairs minister Jugal Oram is seeking his reelection from Sundergarh.

Cong expels veteran leader from party

**Bhubaneswar:** Veteran Congress leader and sitting MLA of Jatani Assembly constituency, Suresh Kumar Routray has been expelled from the party for six years on grounds of "indiscipline" and "anti-party" activities. This was communicated by the All India Congress Committee in a press release on Monday evening. In the press note, AICC general secretary KC Venugopal said, "Taking note of the complaints of indiscipline and anti-party activities, the Congress president has approved the expulsion of Suresh Kumar Routray from the party for six years with immediate effect." On his expulsion from the party, Routray denied allegations of campaigning for the BJD. "I never campaigned for my son Manmath Routray who is contesting on a Biju Janata Dal (BJD) ticket for

2 DESCENDANTS OF SHIVAJI IN FRAY IN MAHA

AGE CORRESPONDENT MUMBAI, APRIL 16

Two descendants of legendary Maratha King Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj will be contesting the upcoming Lok Sabha polls from Maharashtra. While the Bharatiya Janata Party on Tuesday fielded Udayanraje Bhosale, 13th descendant of Shivaji Maharaj, from the Satara Lok Sabha seat, the Congress has already announced the nomination of Shahu Chhatrapati from the Kolhapur seat. Maharashtra has two royal families with a direct lineage to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj — Satara and Kolhapur. The Satara royal family traces its origin to Sambhaji Maharaj, the elder son of Chhatrapati Shivaji, and Kolhapur royal family traces its origins to Rajaram Maharaj, the younger son of Shivaji. In Kolhapur, Shahu Chhatrapati will be up against sitting MP Sanjay Mandlik of Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena. Mandlik's father Sadashivrao had defeated Sambhaji Chhatrapati (son of Shahu Chhatrapati) in 2009 Lok Sabha election when the royal family scion was NCP candidate, while Mandlik, once close aide of Sharad Pawar, had rebelled and contested as an independent.



A man pours water on himself due to the scorching heat in Agra on Tuesday. — PTI

Do not try to bring down system: SC on WPATs

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

The Supreme Court on Tuesday questioned arguments questioning the sanctity of voting through electronic voting machines based on data of private agencies and cautioned the petitioners against seeking to "bring down the system".

Taking a dim view of calls for reverting to ballot papers, the apex court said the electoral process in India is a "humongous task" and recalled how polling booths were captured in the era of ballot papers to manipulate election results. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta was hearing a batch of pleas seeking 100 per cent cross-verification of the votes cast through using EVMs with voter verifiable paper audit trail. Justice Datta said, "This is a humongous task. You talked about Germany but what is the population there. My home state West Bengal is far more populous than Germany. We have to repose faith and trust in the electoral process. Don't try to bring down the system like this."

In affidavit, Bihar govt backs caste survey before SC

RAKESH K. SINGH NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

Defending the caste survey, the Bihar government has told the Supreme Court that caste-based census was done to ascertain socio-economic conditions to help create better government policies for disadvantaged groups.

In a detailed affidavit, the Bihar government defended the executive decision and said it collected data through the survey on socio-economic conditions to help create better government policies for targeted intervention. Backing the caste survey conducted last year, the Bihar government stressed that it complied with constitutional mandates to achieve social equality.

"The caste survey was carried out under the constitutional mandates and aimed to achieve equality enshrined under the Constitution. The state had declared its aim and object for the survey and has now taken steps to achieve the same on the basis of facts appearing in the survey report," the state government said in its affidavit.

IN A detailed affidavit, the Bihar government defended the executive decision and said it collected data through the survey on socio-economic conditions to help create better government policies for targeted intervention.

Bihar government also gave an overview of the steps taken in pursuance of the findings of the survey report, including quota benefits, housing scheme, employment generation support, small entrepreneur scheme and educational support.

"The copy of the report on data released under the caste-based survey has already been sent to all the departments of the state government for framing plans and making schemes for the welfare of the people of the state. Different departments are working to provide the required welfare benefits to the people of Bihar," the affidavit said.

The affidavit came in response to a clutch of pleas against the decision of the Patna High Court that upheld the Bihar government's decision to undertake caste-based survey.

Shah seeks votes on Ram, UCC & tourism in U'khand

Will take care of Pauri personally, Union minister assures voters

PRITHVIRAJ SINGH DEHRADUN, APRIL 16

Union home minister Amit Shah sought votes for the BJP for the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), Ram temple, border villages, and tourism in Uttarakhand. He assured Pauri voters to take care of Pauri personally if party nominee Anil Baluni wins.

Addressing the last leg of poll rallies on Tuesday for the first phase of voting to be held on April 19 in Kottwar of the Pauri Lok Sabha constituency, Mr Shah said, "Right from the inception of Bharatiya Jana Sangh, our leaders have been consistently demanding, through election manifestos, that the



Union home minister Amit Shah with Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami during a rally at Kottwar in Pauri Garhwal district on Tuesday. — PTI

nation would not have laws based on religion. The country would have a Uniform Civil Code (UCC). Today, I feel proud to say that our Uttarakhand chief minister was the first to enact a Uniform

Civil Code in the country. Now, Prime Minister Modi has given a guarantee in our "Sankalp Patra" (manifesto) to introduce UCC in the whole country on the same lines." He said, "Ram Lalla will

Shah enter's Nath's fort with roadshow

**Bhopal, April 16:** Union home minister Amit Shah on Tuesday held a massive roadshow in Chhindwara, the seat which proved elusive for the BJP in last 44 years. Incumbent MP Nakul, son of Congress veteran Kamal Nath, is pitted against BJP candidate Vivek Bunty Sahu in a multi-cornered contest.

celebrate his birthday after 500 years in the temple, instead of a tent. This, he said "is a proud moment for us for we have seen the consecration of Lord Rama in our lifetime.

Gadkari vows 1L jobs in his poll manifesto

NAGPUR, APRIL 16: Union minister and BJP Lok Sabha candidate from Nagpur Nitin Gadkari on Tuesday released his own "manifesto", promising to create one lakh jobs in the next five years if re-elected and put the urban constituency in Maharashtra among top five cities.

Mr Gadkari's "Vachannama" or election manifesto underlined his vision for Nagpur for the next five years if elected from the Vidarbha city, where voting will take place in the first phase on April 19. Mr Gadkari also gave account of the work done by him as an MP in the last ten years.

He emphasised that in his third term he will work towards making Nagpur "sundar and swachh" (beautiful and clean) and putting it among top five cities in the country in terms of development, sanitation and hygiene. — PTI

BJP to change Constitution: Priyanka in Assam roadshow

'If Cong comes to power, will raise tea workers' wages'

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, APRIL 16

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who on Tuesday led a massive roadshow at Titabor in Assam's Jorhat district, said that the people of India want a change. Asking people to vote for Gaurav Gogoi, Ms Gandhi said that he is a politician who cares for people. "I am here because I know Gaurav Gogoi, who will be your voice in the Parliament," said Ms Gandhi while assuring that the daily wages of tea garden workers will be hiked if the Opposition alliance wins the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Ms Gandhi said that the ruling party wants to "change" the Constitution and if that happens, the common people will suffer the most. Recalling her visit to the state during the Assembly



Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra dances with artists during an election campaign rally in Assam's Jorhat district on Tuesday. — PTI

elections, she said, "When I came to Assam and visited tea gardens before the Assembly polls 2-3 years ago, I had promised to raise the wages if the Congress formed the government. But you chose the BJP, and the wages were not raised from around ₹250."

She said, "I am again telling you that our manifesto has guaranteed to increase the wages of tea garden workers if we

form the government at the Centre." Asserting that Congress candidate Gaurav Gogoi is a man of principle and will continue to be their voice like his father, late chief minister Tarun Gogoi, Ms Gandhi said, "When BJP leaders come to campaign, they talk about irrelevant issues. However, Gaurav Gogoi has always raised people's issues."

I want to serve Chhindwara till my last breath, says Kamal Nath It is Nath vs BJP in Chhindwara seat

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, APRIL 16

"Kamal Nath legacy" had been the major stumbling block for the BJP in its bid to breach its final frontier in Madhya Pradesh-Chhindwara — in the last 12 Lok Sabha polls.

In this poll too, the die is cast for a "Kamal Nath vs BJP" battle in Chhindwara with the Congress veteran's son Nakul, who is seeking reelection in the picturesque constituency, remaining under his shadow.

Seventy eight-year-old senior, veteran of nine Lok Sabha and two Assembly elections, has been seen crisscrossing the hilly region of Chhindwara in the last three months visiting vil-



Union minister and BJP candidate Jyotiraditya Scindia with Madhya Pradesh chief minister Mohan Yadav, former CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan and BJP MP president V.D. Sharma during a roadshow in Guna district on Tuesday. — PTI

lage after village to canvas for his son.

Amid desertion of his party loyalists in the constituency as well as high voltage campaign launched by the BJP to wrest the seat from Congress, Mr Nath has sought to "strengthen his

serve Chhindwara till my last breath", has been his constant refrain during his addresses to the locals.

His close confidants have admitted that the campaign has been "hit to some extent" due to desertion of some of his loyalists in Congress in Chhindwara.

"I have never seen Mr Nath under so much pressure in the past. He tried hard to stop the exodus of leaders in the Congress in Chhindwara", a senior Congress leader, considered close to him, told this newspaper, requesting not to be quoted.

The BJP has claimed that around 2,000 Congress cadres including leaders in Chhindwara have left the party and joined the BJP in the last three months.

Fresh ED arrest in Hemant Soren case

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI/RANCHI APRIL 16

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday said that it has arrested one person Afshar Ali in connection with the money laundering investigation against former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren and others.

The arrested person Afshar Ali was lodged in jail under judicial custody in another money laundering case and the agency has taken his custody in the latest case after seeking a designated court's permission, the sources in the agency said on Tuesday.

This is the fourth arrest in the instant case.

The central agency also undertook some searches in Ranchi against Antu Tirkey, who is allegedly linked to the case. Ali is accused of com-



Hemant Soren

mitting "forgery" for allegedly grabbing some land in Jharkhand in purported connection with the prime accused in the case against Soren and former revenue department sub-inspector Bhanu Pratap Prasad.

The 48-year-old JMM leader Soren was arrested by the ED in January shortly after he resigned as the CM. He is currently lodged at the Birsa Munda jail at Hotwar in Ranchi under judicial custody. Prasad and one Mohammed Saddam Hussain have also been arrested.

The probe against Soren pertains to an 8.86 acre land in Ranchi that the ED has alleged was illegally acquired by the former CM.

'MCC will be applicable to advisers too'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

The Election Commission (EC) has directed the Andhra Pradesh government that the model code of conduct will be applicable to the private advisers to the state government's mutatis mutandis as applicable to minister of the government.

Sources said complaints were received regarding conduct of the advisers and it was found that instead of doing their work, "they are indulging into the political campaign."

"It has been brought to the notice of poll panel that all 40 advisers to the government of Andhra Pradesh are appointed through executive orders only and these advisers are in the rank of Cabinet minister," sources said.

All parties treated at par: EC on probe against netas

EC gets 200 complaints on code violations, acts on 169

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

The Election Commission on Tuesday said that approximately 200 complaints have been filed by various political parties and candidates for the violation of the model code of conduct. Out of these, the EC said, action has been taken in 169 cases.

During the one-month period, 16 delegations from seven political parties met the poll panel to lodge their complaints on alleged violations of model code of conduct and related matters.

"All political parties have been treated at par, time given to all even at short notice and their grievances patiently heard," the poll authority said. Total complaints received from the BJP

DURING THE one-month period, 16 delegations from seven political parties met the poll panel to lodge their complaints on alleged violations of model code of conduct and related matters

were 51, out of which action has been taken in 38 cases. Complaints from the Congress were 59, with action taken in 51 cases, while complaints received from other parties were 90, out of which action has been taken in 80 cases.

However, amid allegations by the Opposition parties that the government was misusing probe agencies to target its leaders, the EC said that while it remains committed to protecting the level play-

ing field and campaign entitlements of parties and candidates, it has not found it correct to take any step that could overlap or overrun the legal judicial process.

The poll panel said it was guided by constitutional wisdom when presented with "live situations" involving political persons, which have been under active consideration and orders of the courts based on criminal investigations.

"While the commission remained unwaveringly committed to protecting the level playing field and campaign entitlements of political parties and candidates, it has not found it correct to take any step that could overlap or overrun the legal judicial process," said the poll panel.

'First we need to win polls,' says Kharge on PM choice

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

**Bengaluru, April 16:** Accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi of seeking to divide the country on the lines of caste, religion, creed, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday called him the "real Sultan of tukde tukde gang."

Modi was already charting programmes for next five years calling all secretaries, he alleged, claiming that, "this kind of over-confidence and arrogance is not good for the country and democracy."

"First we need to win the elections", Mr Kharge said, as he asserted that who will be INDIA bloc's Prime Ministerial face is a matter to be settled only after the results of the Lok Sabha polls are declared.

"The real Sultan of the Tukde-Tukde gang is Modi. He is dividing a country on the lines of caste, religion, creed. We strongly believe that every region and part is India, be it Kashmir, North-east. We have fought for these regions," Mr Kharge said.

He said, "We (Congress) have sacrificed our lives for freedom. He (Modi) comes and claims that he has done everything. He behaves as though (he) is the Sultan of India. What is your contribution to unite the country? The Nehru family went to jail. Show me one person from the BJP or RSS who sacrificed anything for the freedom of this country."

Mr Modi on Sunday called Congress "the sultan of tukde tukde gang", as he accused the Opposition party of having the dangerous intention to "divide, break and weaken" the country. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Vijayalakshmi to be new Kerala HC judge

**New Delhi:** The Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud on Tuesday recommended to the Centre the name of advocate Sreeja Vijayalakshmi for appointment as a judge of the Kerala high court. As per one of the resolutions uploaded on the apex court website, the collegium also recommended that additional judges — Justices Jagannagari Sreenivasa Rao and Namavarapu Rajeshwar Rao — be appointed as permanent judges of the high court of Telangana against the existing vacancies. Another resolution said the collegium has recommended the name of advocate Sreeja Vijayalakshmi for appointment as a judge of the Kerala high court. "The recommendation for appointment of the above candidate judge was made by the HC collegium on December 5, 2023," said the resolution.

Second World War hero dies at 103

**New Delhi:** Veteran air warrior Squadron Leader (ret.) Dalip Singh Majithia, who joined the Indian Air Force during the tumultuous years of World War-II and distinguished himself as a "fearless aviator" during his career, has died. He was 103. The centenarian, who had "over 1,100 flying hours to his name", including missions in aircraft such as Hurricanes and Spitfires, passed away at Uttarakhand's Rudrapur in the early hours of Tuesday, IAF sources said. He was affectionately called "Maji" by his fellow air warriors. Sqn Ldr Majithia's leadership skills were forged and tested in the crucible of war, they said. From patrolling of skies to bombing missions, he took each challenge with grit, skill and unparalleled courage. — PTI

Odisha AIIMS saves 1.1 kg newborn's life

**Bhubaneswar:** In a remarkable display of medical prowess, the department of paediatric surgery at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Bhubaneswar has achieved a monumental success by saving the life of a 1.1 kg low-birth weight newborn afflicted with duodenal atresia, an exceptionally rare condition. The infant, whose name is being withheld for privacy reasons, was born at AIIMS-Bhubaneswar prematurely with duodenal atresia, a congenital anomaly characterized by a blockage in the first part of the small intestine known as the duodenum. This condition, occurring in approximately 1 in 10,000 live births, poses a significant threat to the newborn's life if not promptly treated. After the successful surgery, the newborn was closely monitored in the neonatal intensive care unit.

3 kids, woman among deceased 10 rescued, 3 missing L-G expresses grief 6 die as boat capsizes in Jhelum

YUSUF JAMEEL SRINAGAR, APRIL 16

At least six persons, including three schoolchildren and a woman, died after a boat capsized in Jhelum River in Srinagar — the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir — early Tuesday. While ten people are reported to have been rescued, the three are still missing.

The officials said that nineteen people including schoolchildren were crossing the river — that has been in full spate, following the heavy rains to have lashed Kashmir Valley over the past few days — in the boat near Batwara, a Srinagar suburb, to report to their schools and work.

The witnesses said the boat capsized in the middle of the river. The officials said the rescuers,

including jawans of Indian Army, the local police, the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) besides the locals, quickly swung into action and launched a massive operation.

Three children were declared brought dead at a local hospital, whereas three more persons including a girl and women succumbed there soon thereafter, the police and hospital sources said.

Those who died in the mishap have been identified as Tanvir Fayaz and Mudasir Fayaz, their mother Firdousa wife of Fayaz Ahmed Maik, Razia daughter of Ghulam Muhammad Goojree, Shabir Ahmed Bhat and Gulzar Ahmed Dar—all local residents.

The missing persons are; Farhan Waseem Parrray,



Relatives and locals wail deaths after a boat capsizes in Jhelum River in Srinagar on Tuesday. — H.U. NAQASH

Haziq Showkat and Showkat Ahmed Sheikh.

An official spokesman here said a large-scale rescue operation to locate missing persons is underway. He said four boats of the SDRF, two of the J&K River Police and one each of F&E and NDRF, four Marcos and two SDRF

divers were part of the operation.

The deaths in the mishap are being widely mourned across J&K. The residents of Gandabal and its neighbourhood have blamed the callousness on part of the government authorities for the tragic death of the schoolchildren and other

victims. They told visiting reporters that the successive governments have promised them high and tall, but none took any steps towards constructing a bridge spanning the Jhelum in their area. "Today's tragedy is because of the absence of a bridge," said a local.

Jammu and Kashmir lieutenant-governor Manoj Sinha said he is constantly monitoring the situation after six persons are reportedly died in the incident and three others gone missing. In a post on 'X', he said that the administration is providing all possible help to the bereaved families. "I am deeply grieved by the loss of lives due to a boat accident in Srinagar. My thoughts are with the bereaved families & I pray to the Almighty to give them strength to withstand this immense loss."

29 Naxals killed, 3 jawans hurt in C'garh gunfight

2 with ₹25L bounty each among dead

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, APRIL 16

In the biggest ever counter-insurgency operation in Bastar in Chhattisgarh, 29 Maoists were on Tuesday gunned down in an encounter with security forces in Kanker district. Three jawans including a Border Security Force (BSF) inspector were injured in the incident.

Two Maoist commanders Shankar Rao and Lalita Madhvi, who were in the rank of divisional committee (DVC) member in Naxal cadre and carried a bounty of ₹25 lakhs each, were among the 29 slain ultras, police sources said.

Acting on specific intelligence inputs on the presence of large number of armed Leftwing guerrillas including some senior Maoist leaders, a joint team comprising personnel of Border Security Force (BSF) and District Reserve Guards (DRG), the tribal counterinsurgency wing of Chhattisgarh police, launched a search operation in Binaguna-Koragutta jungles under Chhotetbiya police station in Kanker district, police said.

The joint search party came under attack by Maoists near the forested village of Hapatola at around 2 pm on Tuesday, leading to a fierce encounter between them, a police officer of Bastar said. "After the encounter, bodies of 29 Naxals along with huge cache of AK-47 assault rifles, Insas, self-loading rifles (SLRs), carbines, and 303 rifles and huge quantities of arms

and ammunition were recovered at the spot", Bastar range inspector general of police P. Sunderraj told this newspaper.

The 29 slain Maoists were being identified, he added. The search operation still continued in the area.

Border Security Force (BSF) inspector Ramesh Choudhury and two DRG jawans were injured in the incident. They were airlifted from the encounter site to Raipur for medical treatment, police said.

Details on the seizure of weapons would be known after the return of security forces to their camps, a senior police officer said.

This is said to be the biggest casualty suffered by Maoists in a counterinsurgency operation in the conflict zone of Bastar till date.

"The security forces for the first time launched the anti-Naxal operation in the strategic tri-junction of the Maad area in Kanker and Narayanpur districts in Chhattisgarh and Gadchiroli in Maharashtra. This is a surgical strike against Maoists in Bastar", Chhattisgarh deputy chief minister Vijay Sharma, who is also state home minister, said.

In 1st Op as CTF member, Navy seizes 940-kg drugs

PAWAN BALI NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

The Indian Navy ship *INS Talwar*, operating in support of the Canadian-led Combined Task Force 150, conducted its first seizure of illicit narcotics as a member of combined maritime forces, seizing 940 kgs of drugs in the Arabian Sea on April 13.

CTF 150 is one of five task forces under combined maritime force — the world's largest international naval partnership. Indian Navy joined CTF last November.

Combined maritime forces is a 42-nation naval partnership, upholding the international rule-based order by promoting security and stability

CTF 150 is one of the five task forces under combined maritime force — the world's largest international naval partnership

across 3.2 million square miles of water encompassing some of the world's most important shipping lanes.

*INS Talwar* seized 453 kgs of methamphetamines, 416 kgs of hash and 71 kgs of heroin, as part of focused operation Crimson Barracuda.

The ship's specialist boarding teams and Marcos seized 940 kgs of contraband narcotics. The drugs are being disposed off as per CMF SOPs. "I commend the crew of

*INS Talwar* for their efforts throughout this focused operation, and their hard work has paid off with this seizure of 940 kg of drugs," said royal Canadian Navy Capt. Colin Matthews, commander, Combined Task Force 150. "This seizure, the fourth of this Focused Operation, demonstrates the effectiveness and professionalism of CME, and of the Indian Navy, in deterring and disrupting criminal and terrorist activities at sea," he added.

CTF 150's mission is to deter the ability of non-state actors to move weapons, drugs and illicit substances in the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman.

5 killed after bus skids off Odisha flyover

AGE CORRESPONDENT BHUBANESWAR, APRIL 16

As many as five persons were killed and many others sustained injuries, some of them critically, as the bus they were travelling in skidded off a flyover on NH-16 near Barabati in Odisha's Jajpur district Monday night, reports said on Tuesday.

The death figure was confirmed by Chief District Medical Officer (CDMO) of Jajpur, Debasish Moharana. Two passengers died on the spot while three others succumbed at the hospital, the CDMO added.

Chief minister Naveen Patnaik expressed grief over the incident.

SC seeks from states ATR on mob lynching

RAKESH K. SINGH NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked various state governments to notify it in six weeks on the action taken in incidents of mob lynching and cow vigilantism in their respective jurisdictions.

Taking note of the submissions of the parties, a bench of Justices B.R. Gavai, Aravind Kumar and Sandeep Mehta posted for further hearing after six weeks.

The SC was hearing a public interest litigation filed by National Federation of Indian Women — an organisation linked to the Communist Party of

India — seeking directions to the states to take immediate action in consonance with the 2018 verdict of the apex court to effectively deal with incidents of lynching and mob violence against Muslims by cow vigilantes.

"We find that most of the states have not filed reply affidavits to the petition giving instances of lynching. It was expected of them to respond to what action has been taken in such cases. We grant six-week time to the states, that have not filed their replies, to give details of the steps taken by them in such cases," the bench said in its order.

Shooters linked to Bishnoi gang: Cops 2 involved in firing at Salman's house held

BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, APRIL 16

The Mumbai Crime Branch has arrested two shooters allegedly involved in firing outside actor Salman Khan's residence in Mumbai from Gujarat's Bhuj district.

The accused, who were arrested late Monday night, have been identified as Vicky Gupta (24) and Sagar Pal (21) — natives of Masihi in the West Champaran district of Bihar. The police said the two arrested individuals will be brought to Mumbai for further investigation.

According to police, the duo was hired by Anmol Bishnoi's gang and were also paid some amount of



One of the accused, who opened fire outside actor Salman Khan's residence, being produced at Esplanade court in Mumbai on Tuesday. — PTI

money for the crime. The duo confessed to their involvement in the shooting incident outside Khan's home Galaxy Apartments in Bandra.

The actor and several family members were present at home when the attack took place. No one was injured. After opening fire at the

Salman Khan's home, the accused abandoned their bike near a church in Mumbai and then took an autorickshaw to Bandra railway station. They then boarded a train to Santacruz station and hired another auto-rickshaw to continue their journey. They fled to Surat and then, according to police sources, travelled via public transport to Ahmedabad. The shooters reportedly threw their pistols in a river in Surat.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra chief minister Eknath Shinde met Salman's family at their house in Galaxy Apartments and assured the safety of the family.

Militants attack Army convoy in N-E

Continued from Page 1  
around 8 am, unknown miscreants fired upon 3 Assam Rifles vehicles (31 Btl) at location around 700 m from the Assam-Arunachal border, while they were travelling from Changlang, Arunachal Pradesh, to Margherita in Assam. As per information from CO 31 AR, one Army jawan is seriously injured and being taken to hospital. Location falls under Margherita police station.

Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (Ulfa-I) and National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muiviah) were behind the attack.

Ulfa-I on Tuesday afternoon claimed responsibility for their involvement in the encounter, but no official confirmation was available.

Ulfa-I in a press statement to local newspapers claimed that it was part of the "Operation Pratishodh" against the Indian Army and the Government of India. "They killed two of our members and were trying to

forcibly occupy land on the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border. We have given them a proper answer by this attack," it said.

It claimed that several Army jawans were injured in this attack but the authorities were trying to hide it.

"We have managed to injure multiple Army jawans, but the authorities are claiming that only one person was injured. They are airlifting the injured jawans, which is proof many jawans were injured," Ulfa-I claimed.

PM slams TMC for 'opposing' Ram Navami

Continued from Page 1  
Bengal, Ram Navami procession does not get permission."

Mr Modi alleged: "One has to move the court for this. But the TMC government has given permission to those who pelt stones on the Ram Navami and Durga Puja processions."

Earlier, Ms Banerjee accused the BJP of spreading fake videos on the Ram Navami violence in the past in the state. She claimed: "I want to tell my minority brothers and sisters that if you find sloganeering on April 17, it is their day to start riots. However, I want it to be a day of respect for people, a day of unity. Even if they abuse you, stay calm and pray to Allah and ask for them to be packed off."

The CM pointed out: "Don't fall for any provocation. We have to keep the peace. They want to create riots and bring in the National Investigation Agency so that voting does not happen and they can rig the polls."

On the CAA and infiltration, Mr Modi said: "The TMC has put Bengal on a lease to the infiltrators and criminals. It has given permission to infiltrators, including Bangladeshis and Rohingyas, to derail the demography and legal system of Bengal. That's why the Bengal government gives protection to the infiltrators and opposes the CAA which is for giving citizenship to the legitimate migrants."

He elaborated: "TMC does not want citizenship to be given to them to protect its vote

bank. Thus it has put a bet on the future of Bengal. You shouldn't fall for their rumors. You have to punish the TMC for its sin by pressing the button of Lotus."

Ms Banerjee argued: "If the BJP thought they were winning, they would not engage in such a level of lies and propaganda. The BJP will not win this time. They will not even get more than 200 seats. In Bengal, we will win the battle."

She observed: "In Tamil Nadu, Stalin will win. In Punjab, Arvind will win. In Uttar Pradesh, Akhilesh will win. The BJP will be reduced to zero as they inflicted suffering upon the people. I promise that we will remove the Bharatiya Janata Party from the country. This is our pledge."

PM attacks RJD over 'jungle raj'

Continued from Page 1  
to reach out to every nook and cranny of the country where youngsters will be told how our glorious Constitution was drafted and what its significance is."

"People ask me why I care so much for the poor, the dalits. I do so because I have risen from among them. I therefore feel indebted to the social class. I also feel indebted to the Constitution framed by Babasaheb Ambedkar, which helped me reach where I am," the Prime Minister said.

Mr Modi's comment came a day after RJD president Lalu Prasad Yadav, the BJP's principal opponent in Bihar, raked up utterances made by a number of the BJP leaders who have said that the

"Constitution will be changed if we get a two-thirds majority in Parliament."

The Prime Minister, who has been equating the Constitution with sacred books like the Ramayana, Bible and Koran, pointed out that it was under the rule of the Congress, the RJD's ally, that the "Emergency" was imposed and several constitutional provisions were suspended.

"Our opponents are those who had held the Constitution hostage and tried to tamper with it during the Emergency. Those who want power to remain confined within the hands of a family always treat the Constitution as an eyesore. This is the reason why they have even begun to threaten that they will not accept the outcomes of polls held under the provisions of the Constitution. We must remain united to foil their attempts," he said.

Calling the abrogation of Article 370 a "big achievement" of the NDA government, Mr Modi said, "Those who cry hoarse about the Constitution never had the courage to implement it in Jammu and Kashmir. When we bit the bullet and abrogated Article 370, they threatened that the entire region will be on fire."

At the rallies, Mr Modi also pulled no punches in attacking the RJD. He mentioned the party by name and accused it of having ushered in "jungle raj and corruption" while in power in Bihar.

He also claimed credit for all the good work done by the NDA government headed by JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar. Mr Modi stressed that

"the NDA brought Bihar out of the era of jungle raj" and warned that crackdown on corruption will continue in the next five years, apparently referring to the name of Mr Prasad and his family members, including his son and heir apparent Tejashwi Yadav, figuring in scams being investigated by the Central agencies.

In Purnea, he spoke of "ambitious schemes" launched by his government for the development of the district, in particular, and the Seemanchal region in general, drawing a contrast with governments of the past that washed their hands off by "seeing the backwardness of the area as irreversible".

Mr Modi also came down heavily on "vote-bank politics, which has allowed infiltration to flourish in Seemanchal", claiming "this has been to the detriment of the poor, the dalits of the region, many of whom have suffered attacks and even their houses have been set on fire."

"The fate of this region hinges on the poll outcome of June 4," he said, adding, "Those who oppose the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 should know Modi is not someone who can be

Cong, PDP, NC responsible for fake encounters in Valley: Shah

Continued from Page 1  
lotus bloom" in the scenic Valley.

"We are not going to conquer Kashmir, as is being projected by our adversaries. We want to win every heart of Kashmir," Mr Shah said, adding that those who were trying to paint the BJP as evil before the people of Kashmir were actually responsible for stimulating militancy, terrorism and violence in the Valley.

"I want to ask Farooq Abdullah, wasn't it when you were in power that most of the fake encounters took place in Jammu and Kashmir?" the home minister said.

Days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi told a BJP election rally in Udhampur that the Assembly elections in J&K will be held soon and that the day when its statehood will be restored is not far off either, the Union home minister reassured the people that the Assembly elections in the Union Territory will be held as per the directive of the Supreme Court.

"There will be no delay," he said. A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court had in December last year, after unanimously upholding the power of the President to abrogate Article 370, asked the Election Commission to hold the elections to the J&K Assembly by September 30, this year.

## THE ASIAN AGE

17 APRIL 2024

### Protect Manipur diversity: ILP divisive, try to avoid it

Home minister Amit Shah's statement that the Union government will not allow the break-up of Manipur and has conceded the state government's demand for the Inner Line Permit betrays the ad hoc and contradictory positions the Union government and the BJP have been adopting about the strife-torn border state for quite some time now.

The home minister is right when he says the Union government has not allowed the division of the state. The mighty Indian armed forces have the men, material and other resources to protect the political maps of the constituent states of the Indian republic but they can do only so much to unite minds. It has been almost one year since the ethnic conflict between the majority Meitei and the minority Kuki/Zo tribes broke out in Manipur—it was on May 3, 2023 that the first case of arson and looting was reported in the state. Since then, more than 200 people have been killed, countless homes and residential units destroyed and dozens of educational and religious institutions reduced to ashes. Several thousand people became refugees and hundreds of students had to either stop their studies or move out to other states.

**The Inner Line Permit has been a longstanding demand of the Meitei people but the Kuki/Zo have always feared that it will lead to the Meitei who dominate Imphal Valley encroaching on their protected hill areas**

Although a whole year has passed, nothing has returned to normal yet in the state. Little attention has been paid to the job of bringing the two warring groups — the Meitei and the Kuki — to the peace table. Instances of kidnappings and murders continue. Villages still erupt in violence, resulting in casualties. The thousands of rifles and lakhs of rounds of ammunition looted from the police stations have not yet been returned despite appeals even by Mr Shah himself. The Kuki/Zo people have not gone back on their demand for a separate administrative region for themselves. What's worse, despite claims of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the contrary, the Union government and Mr Shah have done precious little to restore the confidence of the people in the government mechanism despite the Supreme Court expressly saying the constitutional machinery has completely broken down in Manipur.

Chief minister N. Biren Singh has been given an unacceptably long rope despite his presence proving to be a divisive factor.

Mr Shah said the Union government has conceded the chief minister's position that Manipur cannot remain united without an Inner Line Permit, "an official travel document issued by the state government to allow the inward travel of an Indian citizen visiting the state for a specific time period". This means that henceforth outsiders visiting the state for extended periods will be required to show this document. The Inner Line Permit has been a long-standing demand of the Meitei people but the Kuki/Zo have always feared that it will lead to the Meitei who dominate Imphal Valley encroaching on their hill areas. It is a divisive issue. India is a nation of diversities; every state is a mini-India, and comes with its own specialties and requirements.

The BJP and its leaders, who always call for uniformity in every matter of statecraft, will do well to remember that the survival of the republic is possible only through the recognition and promotion of the diversities and through efforts aimed at finding and preserving strands of unity amongst them. This is true for every state, and is true for India that is Bharat; not for Manipur alone.

### Hopes rise of good monsoon

The expectation of an above-normal monsoon this year, as expressed by the Indian meteorological department, comes like music to the ears. April is that time of the year when the Met puts out its early forecast, which would regularly be one of the "normal monsoon ahead" kind of prognostication, perhaps only to be imagined from an arm of the State that would not like to be pessimistic even if the outlook by data is not all that bright.

This is one year, after more than a decade, in which the IMD is venturing to make a "better than normal" forecast because historical data dating back to 1951 suggests that India experienced above-normal rainfall on nine occasions when La Nina followed an El Nino event. Indeed, the law of averages would support such an assumption.

The IMD may have been a tad optimistic last year when its forecast proved less accurate than that of the private weather service SkyMet, which had cautioned us to expect a less than bountiful rainfall year, which is exactly what happened.

Except for pockets like Chennai and a few southern districts that saw extraordinary rainfall events in December 2023, the monsoon for the nation was less than normal, and severely deficient in states like Karnataka and weak in Kerala.

A weakening El Nino, to be replaced by a La Nina event that has been historically associated with a good monsoon is likely to develop during the second half this year, is the basis on which the forecast sounds so good.

With the SkyMet forecast too being sanguine about normal rainfall, at 102 per cent of the long period average of 886 mm for June-Sept, as compared to IMD's 106 per cent, it does appear that farmers can be a bit ginger in their step this season even as the sun scorches in the summer. The IMD forecast does come with the rider that some parts of the northwest, east and the northeastern parts of the country should not expect the same bountiful rain.

As the fastest growing major economy in the world — GDP grew at 7.8 per cent in Q1 2024 as compared to China's 5.3 per cent — India has reason to anticipate a monsoon of plenty that may lead to greater rural income and higher spending, besides bettering the lot of the grower. None would grudge them their good fortune if the rain upholds the Met men's optimism.

## THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



## Challenge for India, world after Iran strikes at Israel



K.C. Singh

Tensions had been mushrooming across the entire West Asian region ever since the October 7 lethal attack by Hamas on Israeli settlements and troops around Gaza, in which they also seized several hostages, many of whom still remain in captivity. Global opinion has gradually swung behind the Palestinians after Israel's "scorched earth" approach as it tried to wipe out Hamas. Israel showed limited concern for civilian casualties as hospitals, churches and mosques were bombed, alleging they were atop an underground labyrinth of hundreds of miles of tunnels. Hamas fighters, its leadership and hostages were supposedly in that maze.

One episode of ceasefire provided some respite to civilians, hounded from one temporary shelter to another, facing disease and starvation. US President Joe Biden, facing criticism at home for pandering to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has only partially and infrequently succeeded in coaxing Israel to moderate its brutal military campaign. In Israel, public demonstrations had reignited over the hostages not being rescued. The Israelis were being just held back from invading Rafah, the last surviving big city in Gaza.

On April 1, Israel bombed the Iranian diplomatic complex in Damascus, killing seven Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps personnel. More significantly, among them were three senior commanders overseeing liaison with Iranian allies like Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Bashar al-Assad government in Damascus. After the killing of Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, a celebrated Iranian commander of the Quds Force, by the US, this was a strategic win for Israel. But it came at the cost of riling Iran and breaching

internationally recognised sanctity of diplomatic missions. The debate then shifted to how and when Iran would retaliate. There were no takers for Iran quietly absorbing the loss.

The Iranian retaliation came on the night of April 13-14, with over 300 ballistic and cruise missiles, including drones, fired at an Israeli air base in Israel's southern desert. The Israeli anti-missile defence, called the Iron Dome, and its Air Force combined with similar defence offered by US naval vessels and aircraft took out all but seven missiles. Israel claimed that the damage was minimal, with only one Arab girl hit by shrapnel. The reaction of G-7 countries, which went into a huddle, was sharper over the Iranian retaliation than the initial Israeli provocation.

The Indian government's positioning is interesting. The Damascus Iranian embassy bombing was not condemned, but mere distress expressed over escalating tension and breach of international norms. This was akin to India seeking observance of international humanitarian law and not vociferously condemning the merciless Israeli targeting of civilians in Gaza.

More disturbing, though hardly surprising, is India's bilateral labour transfer agreement, finalised during last year's India trip of Israeli foreign minister Eli Cohen. In the past Israel employed nearly 80,000 Palestinians from the West Bank, and 17,000 from Gaza. After the attack on October 7, Israel plans to substitute them with workers from China, Sri Lanka and India. Bangladesh is skipped, perhaps due to the workers' religion. From India, Israel seeks 42,000 workers for the construction industry and another 8,000 as health workers. This accord invited attention due to an Indian travel advisory about the danger now of travel to Israel, only days after dis-

patching the latest batch of workers. This is a typical case of contradictory policies followed by different arms of the government. Its implications are in fact wider than simply the security of the workers. It has been obvious since the BJP-led government assumed office in 2014 that when Lal Krishna Advani began his foreign travel as home minister with Israel, I conveyed informally to his close friend that he needed to moderate his hawkish anti-Muslim image. A trip to Israel did not achieve that.

While Israel has had broad support across India, for Prime Minister Narendra Modi it is more than friendship with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Despite the current Israeli coalition government having rapidly bigoted ministers from the extreme right fringe, the Indian government appears to be unconcerned about close engagement. Israeli finance minister Bezalel Smotrich also oversees the occupied West Bank, despite his known support for expanding settlements.

National security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, convicted in 2007 on terrorism charges, strongly advocated "free fire" authority to security forces in dealing with Palestinians. The suspected transfer to Indian agencies of Pegasus, an invasive phone-tapping virus, underscores the malignant dimension of India-Israel bonhomie.

Considering the eight million-plus Indian diaspora in the Arab Gulf countries, the policy of Indian labour depriving Palestinians of their jobs is myopic. The rush to show large recruitment for jobs abroad, as the Lok Sabha election approaches, hardly answers the Opposition's charge of high unemployment. The

assumption is that because the ruling families of the UAE and Saudi Arabia want to engage Israel, they will block any backlash. The six Gulf Coordination Council members met last week in Doha to approve a "Vision for Regional Security", which accepts Israel's legitimate place in a regional security order. But they also could not ignore the Palestinian question. Popular resentment in the GCC nations can lead to quiet scaling back of Indian recruitment by individual entities.

External affairs minister S. Jaishankar has been balancing India's relations with Iran and Israel. But the language of official statements betrays differential empathy for Israel. This will become more difficult if Israel retaliates against Iran directly. Until now, Israel has used cyber sabotage, assassination of Iranian nuclear scientists, etc. But a direct attack can ratchet up tension multi-fold.

The latest Israel-Iran standoff has served Mr Netanyahu's primary purpose of distracting attention from the Israeli killing of civilians in Gaza, especially with the Rafah operation imminent. It also reduces the pressure on him to quit and face fresh elections. The Iranian attack seemed to be carefully calibrated to minimise damage. It came with forewarnings, targeted an isolated airbase and the US played along to negate it. It is a bit like the Pakistani retaliation to Balakot in 2019 when their fighter jets hit an uninhabited part of an Indian military facility. The aim in both cases being to satisfy public opinion without causing excessive damage, thereby avoiding counter-reaction.

If so, any further conflagration may be avoided. If, however, Israel uses the opportunity to decapitate Iran's strategic nuclear infrastructure, then the next Iranian attack would be modulated to hurt. Iran would have gauged weaknesses in the Israeli defensive system after analysing the last attack. The world is keeping its fingers crossed.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.

## LETTERS LOOK WHO'S TALKING

The intent of the ex-judges who wrote to the CJI about external forces trying to pressure the judiciary may be noble, but leaves out the identity of those who are allegedly guilty of it. Signatories to the letter would have done well to specify those they saw as responsible. In recent times, many SC rulings have gone against government moves and there's been a sustained attack on SC judges. Since it is ex-judges of the court signing the letter, the government should take up the matter immediately and take it to a logical conclusion. Any attack on the judiciary must be seen as an attack on the State.

Anthony Henriques  
Mumbai

## COMMONEST CANCER

A NEW *Lancet* commission has found breast cancer to be the world's most common cancer, likely to cause a million deaths a year by 2040. Around 7.8 million women were diagnosed with breast cancer in five years till the end of 2020 and about 685,000 died from the disease. Globally, breast cancer cases will increase from 2.3 million in 2020 to more than three million by 2040, with low- and middle-income countries being "disproportionately affected". The *Lancet* report pointed to "glaring inequities" and suffering from symptoms, despair and financial burden due to breast cancer, which are often "hidden and inadequately addressed". Better communication between patients and health professionals is a crucial intervention that could improve quality of life.

Bhagwan Thadani  
Mumbai

## ADIEU, DEREK

THE DEATH OF ENGLAND'S left-arm spinner Derek Underwood takes away one of the game's most outstanding practitioners of the craft. 'Deadly' Underwood bagged 297 scalps in 86 Tests, the highest ever for an English spinner. He revelled on uncovered pitches commonly used for much of a 24-year First Class career from 1963 to 1987. Cricket lovers will recall his magnificent spell of 7-50 over arch-rival Australia in the 1968 Oval Test when the match was heading for a draw. He and wicketkeeper Alan Knott forged a lethal combination for Kent and England. Unfortunately, their involvement in Kerry Packer's World Series Cricket and the rebel tour of South Africa cut short their Test careers.

N.J. Ravi Chandrer  
Bengaluru

Skand Tayal



### Amid tensions in Korea, Opp. win in Parl polls huge setback to Yoon

In the elections for the 300-member South Korean National Assembly on April 10, the main Opposition Democratic Party won 175 seats while the conservative bloc led by President Yoon Suk Yeol's People Power Party won only 108 seats. This is even less than the 114 seats held by President Yoon's supporters in the outgoing House. The results have also strengthened forces within the conservatives opposed to President Yoon.

Under South Korea's Constitution, the President has only one five-year term. The National Assembly's term is four years. President Yoon was elected in March 2022 with 48.56 per cent of the vote against the Democratic Party rival who received 47.83 per cent. In the face of rising youth unemployment, unaffordable rents and the high cost of higher education, the popular mood is against President Yoon. The Yoon government's plan to increase medical school seats was stoutly opposed by the doctor fraternity, and led to chaos in medical services in hospitals.

After assuming office in May 2022, President Yoon Suk Yeol adopted a strongly pro-American foreign policy. He is a former prosecutor with little foreign policy experience. He also reversed the pro-North Korea policies of his left-of-centre Democratic Party predecessor, President Moon Jae-in.

The most dramatic foreign policy shift by President Yoon was to make earnest efforts to promote strategic trust with Japan and in tempering the ever-simmering anti-Japan sentiments among South Korea's

public. Nudged by the United States, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida responded positively. This new-found confidence between the current leaderships of South Korea and Japan led to the historic trilateral summit of the US, Japan and South Korea hosted by President Joe Biden at Camp David in August 2023. The "Spirit of Camp David" document could be a game-changer for future strategic equations in the Indo-Pacific. The "Spirit of Camp David" brings together two key US defence allies and bind the three democracies to greater military and security cooperation. The document voices "concern over China's dangerous and aggressive behaviour" in the South China Sea and calls for a "peaceful resolution of the cross-Taiwan Straits issues". It also expands the area of security cooperation between the three allies from Northeast Asia.

In the Ukraine-Russia conflict, the two Koreas are firmly in opposite camps. North Korea has been sending artillery shells to Russia with reportedly a contract to supply one million shells worth \$24 billion to Russia. On the other hand, South Korea's President is openly backing Ukraine and had attended the two Nato summits held after the Russian attack on Ukraine—in Madrid in 2022 and Vilnius in 2023. This is the first time ever that a South Korean President attended Nato summits.

Stung by the continued economic sanctions, North Korea has adopted a very hardline stance towards both South Korea and the US. Speaking at the North Korean Supreme Peoples' Assembly on January 15,

2024, Chairman Kim Jong Un called for change in North Korea's Constitution to designate South Korea as a "primary foe and invariable principal enemy".

North Korea's supreme leader also declared the goal of "completely occupying, subjugating and reclaiming" South Korea in case a war broke out on the Korean peninsula. Signalling a complete turnaround from the policy of accommodation and rapprochement pursued during 2018-19, Chairman Kim declared that seeing Seoul as a partner of reconciliation was "a serious anachronistic mistake". Formally ending the policy of widening bilateral cooperation, North Korea dismantled three agencies: Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country, National Economic Cooperation Bureau and Kumgusan International Tourism Administration.

North Korea is more confident and aggressive after Chairman Kim's visit to the Russian Far East in September 2023 when he met President Vladimir Putin and toured a Russian cosmodrome. Later, in November 2023, North Korea successfully placed a spy satellite, Malloryong-1, in orbit after several failed attempts. Ominously, a North Korean statement in February 2024 claimed that this satellite had captured detailed images of the White House, the Pentagon and several US aircraft-carriers.

South Korea's polity is almost evenly divided between left-of-centre Democratic Party, which advocates an even-handed approach towards the US, the nation's security guarantor, and its main economic partner, China; and the ruling Conservatives, who

pursue a more pronounced pro-US policy.

South Korea's attempts to reduce its dependence on exports to China from the present 20 per cent of total exports of \$632 billion are not showing the expected results. While South Korean exports to China declined by 20 per cent in 2023 to \$125 billion, imports from China declined by only eight per cent to \$143 billion. The trade deficit of \$18 billion in 2023 is the first such bilateral shortfall with China in 31 years.

With lack of control over the National Assembly now, President Yoon's legislative agenda will suffer. During his almost two-year term, only about 29 per cent of the bills submitted by the government have been approved by the National Assembly.

During the election campaign, the Democratic Party proposed a more balanced approach on Ukraine and Taiwan. Despite this setback, Mr Yoon is unlikely to change his strongly pro-US foreign policy. Taking a clear pro-Israel position, the Yoon administration "strongly" condemned Iran's massive attack on Israel on April 13. No positive movement is likely in inter-Korean relations in the remainder of President Yoon's term, till May 2027.

There is strong bipartisan support for strengthening South Korea's "special strategic partnership" with India. The National Assembly poll results are unlikely to have any impact on the growing economic and strategic bilateral relationship.

The writer is a retired diplomat and has served as India's ambassador to South Korea

SHORT TAKES

**B'DESH COLLISION OF BUS, PICKUP TRUCK KILLS 14**

**Dhaka, April 16:** At least 14 people, including five members of a family, were killed on Tuesday when a bus and a pickup truck collided head-on in Bangladesh's Dhaka-Khulna highway, police said.

The accident occurred in Faridpur when a bus bound for Magura city in the Khulna Division collided with a Dhaka-bound pickup truck, leaving 11 people dead on the spot, the *Dhaka Tribune* newspaper reported. Police said that two persons died while being taken to hospital and another died undergoing treatment.

**9 CORPSES FOUND ADRIFT IN BOAT OFF BRAZIL**

**Barcelona, April 16:** Brazilian police investigating the grim discovery of a boat full of corpses say the dead were likely African migrants from Mali and Mauritania.

Fishermen off Brazil's northern coastal state of Pará found the boat adrift on Saturday in the Atlantic ocean. Brazil's Federal police said in a statement late on Monday it had recovered nine dead in total.

"Documents and objects found near the bodies indicate that the victims were migrants from the African continent, from the region of Mauritania and Mali," the statement read.

**MUSLIM STUDENT LOSES PRAYER BAN CHALLENGE**

**London, April 16:** A Muslim pupil lost a UK court challenge on Tuesday against a top London school's ban on prayer rituals, in a case about freedom of religion in schools that captured national attention.

The student, who cannot be named, took legal action against Michaela Community School in northwest London, claiming the policy was discriminatory and "uniquely" affected her faith due to its ritualised nature.

She argued the school's prohibition of on-site prayer was "kind of discrimination which makes religious minorities feel alienated from society".

**MACRON PAYS TRIBUTE TO WWII HEROES**

**Vassieux-en-Vercors, April 16:** President Emmanuel Macron is on Tuesday to pay tribute to the heroism of members of the World War II Resistance based at a remote Alpine plateau who were attacked by the Nazi army and French collaborationist forces.

Resistance members used the Vercors Plateau as a refuge after the occupation of France from 1940.

Macron is making a series of high-profile commemorations to remember resistance heroes but also to note the role played by native French collaborationist militia.

**TRUMP RETURNS TO COURT FOR JURY SELECTION**

**New York, April 16:** Five more prospective jurors were dismissed from Donald Trump's historic hush-money trial on Tuesday, as lawyers try to choose a panel of 12 residents of heavily Democratic Manhattan to hear the Republican former US president's criminal case impartially.

The proceedings so far have underscored the challenges of the task.

Roughly half of 96 potential jurors summoned on Monday were dismissed after saying they could not impartially judge the polarising businessman-turned-politician Trump, who is mounting a comeback White House bid in the November poll while battling four separate criminal cases.

Those dismissed on Tuesday said they had scheduling conflicts, concerns about balancing juror service with their jobs, or had thought more overnight and come to the conclusion they could not be fair.

Merchan excused one juror who said many of his family, friends and colleagues in finance were Republicans and it would be hard for him to be impartial.

"Being in the finance and accounting world, a lot of people tend to intellectually slant Republican," said the juror, who grew up in Texas.

"Even though I feel like I can be impartial, there might be some implicit bias surrounding that."

**Israel vows 'response' to Iran's April 13 strikes**

**Israeli tanks back in northern Gaza, warplanes hit Rafah**

**Jerusalem, Cairo, April 16:** Israel and Iran traded threats after Tehran's first-ever direct attack on its arch foe sharply heightened Middle East tensions and as the Gaza war ground on with no truce in sight.

Israel's war Cabinet was set to meet for the third time in three days on Tuesday, an official said, to decide on a response to Iran's attack, amid international pressure to avoid further escalating Middle East conflicts.

Meanwhile, Israeli tanks pushed back into some areas of the northern Gaza Strip on Tuesday which they had left weeks ago, while warplanes conducted air strikes on Rafah, the Palestinians' last refuge in the south of the territory, killing and wounding several people, medics and residents said.

Residents reported an internet outage in the areas of Beit Hanoun and Jabalia in northern Gaza. Tanks advanced into Beit Hanoun and surrounded some schools where displaced families have taken refuge, said the residents and media outlets of the militant Palestinian group Hamas.

Israel's military chief Lieutenant General Herzl Halevi on Monday vowed "a response" after Iran and its allies launched a barrage of over 300 missiles, drones and rockets at Israel at the weekend.

Iran said its large-scale attack was an act of self-defence following a deadly Israeli air strike on its consulate in Syria, and that it would consider the matter "concluded" unless Israel retaliated.

Meanwhile, Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi also warned that "the slightest action against Iran's interests will definitely be met with a severe, extensive and painful response". — *Agencies*



Smoke billows during Israeli bombardment in Khan Yunis, on Tuesday. — *AFP*

**UPTICK IN VIOLENCE AFTER A WEEK**

**US TREASURY PREPARING NEW IRAN SANCTIONS AFTER ISRAEL ATTACK**

US treasury secretary Janet Yellen is preparing fresh sanctions on Iran in response to Iran's attack on Israel. "The attack by Iran and its proxies underscores the importance of Treasury's work to use our economic tools to counter Iran's malign activity."



**ISRAELI STRIKES IN LEBANON KILL THREE, INCLUDING HEZBOLLAH COMMANDER**

Israeli strikes in Lebanon on Tuesday killed three people, including a Hezbollah field commander, Lebanese security sources said, an uptick in violence after at least a week of relative calm. Israel said Ismail Baz, killed in a strike on a car near the southern town of Ain Ebel, was the commander of Hezbollah's coastal sector and was involved in planning rocket and anti-tank missile attacks on Israel.

Iran said its large-scale attack was an act of self-defence following a deadly Israeli air strike on its consulate in Syria, and that it would consider the matter "concluded" unless Israel retaliated.

Meanwhile, Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi also warned that "the slightest action against Iran's interests will definitely be met with a severe, extensive and painful response". — *Agencies*

**CHINA, U.S. DEF. CHIEFS TALK, 1ST TIME SINCE 2022**

**Washington, April 16:** US defence secretary Lloyd Austin spoke with his Chinese counterpart Dong Jun via video teleconference Tuesday, the Pentagon said, in the first substantive talks between the superpowers' defence chiefs in nearly 18 months.

The US has been working to strengthen defence cooperation with its allies in the Asia-Pacific region to counter China's growing influence, but also wants to maintain lines of communication with Beijing to prevent tensions from spiraling out of control.

"The two officials discussed US-PRC defence relations and regional and global security issues," the Pentagon said in a statement, referring to the People's Republic of China. "Secretary Austin emphasised the importance of continuing to open lines of military-to-military communication between the United States and the PRC" following talks between the two sides in recent months, the statement said.

Austin also "reiterated that the United States will continue to fly, sail, and operate — safely and responsibly — wherever international law allows," and "underscored the importance of respect for high seas freedom of navigation guaranteed under international law, especially in the South China Sea."

Austin's last significant interaction with a Chinese counterpart occurred in November 2022. — *AFP*

**US: Pak sustained N-plan despite economic turmoil**

**Washington, April 16:** Pakistan sustained its nuclear modernisation efforts last year despite its economic turmoil as its contentious relationship with India continues to drive its defence policy, the top US intelligence official has told Congress.

The remarks by Lt Gen Jeffrey Kruse, director of the Defence Intelligence Agency came during a Congressional hearing on China on Monday. Kruse told lawmakers that Pakistan has sought international support, including from the UN Security Council, to resolve its dispute with India about Kashmir. Separately, Islamabad and New Delhi have maintained an uneasy ceasefire along the shared Line of Control since February

**CLEAN CHIT TO EX-ISI CHIEF IN FAIZABAD STIR**

**Islamabad, April 16:** Pakistan's former Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) director general Lieutenant General (ret'd) Faiz Hamid has been exonerated by the inquiry commission established to investigate the 2017 sit-in by a headline religious group in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, it emerged on Tuesday. — *PTI*

2021, he said. "Pakistan has sustained its nuclear modernisation efforts despite its economic

**ISRAEL IS STILL IMPOSING AID CURBS, SAYS UN**

**Geneva, April 16:** Israel is still imposing "unlawful" restrictions on humanitarian relief for Gaza, the UN human rights office said, despite assertions from Israel and others that barriers have eased.

Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip triggered by Hamas' deadly cross-border attacks on Oct. 7 has turned much of the Gaza strip into a wasteland, with people now displaced and crowded into disease-ridden shelters.

The amount of aid now entering Gaza is disputed, with Israel and US saying aid flows have risen in recent days but UN agencies say it is below bare minimum levels. — *Reuters*

**Rwanda scheme delayed again**

**London, April 16:** Britain's upper house of Parliament again proposed changes to Rishi Sunak's divisive law to send asylum seekers to Rwanda on Tuesday, delaying one of the prime minister's flagship policies he hopes could help change his party's electoral fortunes.

Sunak has invested huge political capital in the Rwanda scheme before a poll later this year he is predicted to lose, saying it will help meet his pledge to stop thousands of people arriving in Britain without permission in small boats.

The House of Lords, upper house of Parliament, for a third time sought to make changes to the new legislation after the House of Commons lower house of Parliament rejected its second set of proposals on Monday.

But the move is unlikely to stop the legislation from getting approval this week, meaning it will become law. Sunak hopes to start flights to Rwanda as soon as possible, but the scheme might still be challenged in the courts.

The legislation will now return to the House of Commons on Wednesday

ic turmoil. Terrorist violence against Pakistani security forces, civilians also rose last year." — *PTI*

Washington, April 16: Cash-strapped Pakistan would need two or three years to implement structural reforms prescribed by the IMF, finance minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has said, warning that the country would be looking for another bailout programme if it fails to go through these measures. — *PTI*

Washington, April 16: Cash-strapped Pakistan would need two or three years to implement structural reforms prescribed by the IMF, finance minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has said, warning that the country would be looking for another bailout programme if it fails to go through these measures. — *PTI*

**Schools shut ahead of storm; govt staff working remotely**

**Rains lash UAE, Oman flood toll 18**

**Dubai, April 16:** Heavy rains lashed the United Arab Emirates on Tuesday, flooding out portions of major highways and leaving vehicles abandoned on roadways across Dubai.

Meanwhile, the death toll in separate heavy flooding in neighboring Oman rose to 18 with others still missing as the sultanate prepared for the storm.

The rains began overnight, leaving massive ponds on streets as whipping winds disrupted flights at



A vehicle moves on a flooded road in Bahrain's Sitra island, on Tuesday. — *AFP*

Dubai International Airport, the world's busiest for international travel and the home of the long-haul

carrier Emirates. Police and emergency personnel drove slowly through the flooded streets. — *AP*

**RUSSIA ORDERS FRESH EVACUATIONS IN SIBERIA OVER FEARS OF FLOODING**

**Moscow, Petropavlovsk, April 16:** Russia on Tuesday began fresh evacuations from towns and villages in western Siberia threatened by devastating floods, as Kazakh leader Kassym-Jomart Tokayev met with people evacuated from rising water on his side of the border.

More than 2,000 houses were flooded in Kazakh-

**Paintings saved from 17th century building Spire collapses in Copenhagen blaze**

**Copenhagen, April 16:** A fire ripped through Copenhagen's Old Stock Exchange, one of the capital's most famous landmarks, on Tuesday, engulfing its spire which collapsed in a scene reminiscent of the 2019 blaze at Paris' Notre-Dame Cathedral.

Emergency services, employees from the Danish Chamber of Commerce, including its CEO Brian Mikkelsen, and even passers-by were seen carrying large paintings away from the building in a race to save historic artefacts from the flames.

A video showed the flaming spire breaking in half as it tumbled down, sending a large part crashing to the ground next to a fire truck. "Everybody is crying at the Danish Chamber of Commerce right now. It's their workplace, but also their history," Mikkelsen said, shaking



The tower of the historic Boersen stock exchange stands in flames as the building is on fire in central Copenhagen, on Tuesday. — *AFP*

his head in disbelief. "It's our cultural heritage that I'm looking at. It's 400 years that have shaped Danish cultural

history and the society we live in today." Denmark's National Museum sent 25 employees to help evacuate artefacts. — *Reuters*

**Kyiv runs out of missiles to stop Moscow's strike**

**Kyiv, Moscow, April 16:** A lack of air defence missiles prevented Ukraine from thwarting a Russian missile attack last week that destroyed the biggest power plant in the region around the capital Kyiv, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said.

The Kremlin reacted coolly on Tuesday to French President Emmanuel Macron's call for a truce in international conflicts during the Paris Olympics, saying Ukraine might use it as an opportunity to regroup and rearm.

Suspending armed conflicts under an "Olympic truce" is a longstanding tradition, and Macron said in an interview on Monday that he would work towards achieving one when Paris hosts the Summer Games from July 26 to Aug. 11.

Zelenskyy's comments, which follow repeated warnings from his government to its allies about scarce air defences, reflect the dire situation Ukraine finds itself in as Russia scales up strikes on its energy system.

"There were 11 missiles flying. We destroyed the first seven, and four (remaining) destroyed Trypillia. Do you know why? Because there were zero missiles. We ran out of missiles to defend Trypillia," he said in the interview with *PBS*.

*Reuters* was not able to independently verify the account. — *Reuters*

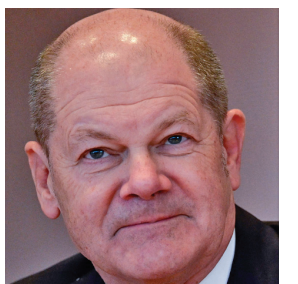
**Scholz flays Russia during China visit**

**Beijing, April 16:** German chancellor Olaf Scholz told Chinese leader Xi Jinping who hosted him in Beijing on Tuesday that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine threatens global security, in an appeal call for China to apply greater pressure on its neighbour and close strategic partner to resolve the conflict.

Scholz also told Xi at their meeting that the use of nuclear weapons in the 2-year-old war should not even be threatened, German media reported. Russian President Vladimir Putin warned last month that Russia is ready to use nuclear weapons if its sovereignty or independence is threatened, his latest such threat since invading Ukraine.

Scholz told Xi that Germany's "core interests" were impacted by the war against Ukraine, which has threatened to spread into a regional conflict and has disrupted energy and global food supplies and other trade.

Russia's actions "violate a principle of the United Nations Charter and the principle of the inviolability of national borders," Scholz was quoted as saying by German media. — *AP*



Olaf Scholz

**ARREST FOR CAR BOMBING OF DOUBLE AGENT**

**Moscow, April 16:** Russia's FSB security service said it had detained a man who tried to kill an ex-staffer of Ukraine's main security service in Moscow last week with a car bomb on Kyiv's orders.

A powerful explosion ripped through a Toyota Land Cruiser Prado belonging to Vasily Prozorov, a former Lieutenant Colonel in Ukraine's SBU security service. — *Reuters*

China has refused to criticise the invasion and has maintained ties with Russia. — *AP*

**India's reliance on Russian arms down, says US**

**Washington, April 16:** India in 2023 showcased itself as a global leader as it demonstrated a greater willingness to counter China's activity throughout the Indo-Pacific region and took steps to modernise its military and reduce its dependency on Russian origin-equipment, the top US intelligence official has told Congress.

The remarks by Lt Gen Jeffrey Kruse, director of the Defence Intelligence Agency came during a Congressional hearing on defence intelligence countering China. "During the past year, India has showcased itself as a global leader by hosting the Group of 20 economic summit and demonstrated a greater willingness to counter PRC's (People's Republic of China) activity throughout the Indo-Pacific region," Kruse told members of the House Armed Services Committee — the subcommittee on intelligence and special operations. "India," he said, "has advanced partnerships with regional South China Sea claimants, such as the Philippines, through training and defence sal-

**HINDUS IN U.S. UNDER ATTACK: CONGRESSMAN**

**Washington, April 16:** Observing that there is a substantial increase in attacks against Hindus in the US, an Indian-American Congressman has said that this was just the beginning of a coordinated anti-Hindu attack, as he asked the community members to unite against hate crimes. Congressman Shri Thanedar's remarks came during a news conference. — *PTI*

and deepening cooperation with the US, Australia, France and Japan." "In 2023, India took steps to modernise its military to compete with China and reduce its dependency on Russian-origin equipment. India conducted sea trials for its first domestically produced aircraft carrier and also has negotiated with several Western countries on the transfer of key defence technologies." — *PTI*

## quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	72,943.68 -0.62
Nifty 50	22,147.90 -0.56
S&P 500*	5,055.91 -0.22
Dollar (₹)	83.53 -0.08
Pound Sterling (₹)	104.02 0.16
Euro (₹)	88.81 0.11
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	72,628.351 0.49
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	89.97 -0.14
IN 10-Yr bond yield	7.190 0.015
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.651 0.023

\* As of 8:30 PM IST

## Cropin platform to aid build AI farm solutions

Agri-tech firm Cropin Technology on Tuesday announced the launch of 'Aksara', an open-source micro language model to build frugal and scalable artificial intelligence solutions for the agriculture. The first version of Aksara will cover the nine crops viz. paddy, wheat, maize, sorghum, barley, cotton, sugarcane, soybean, and millets for five countries in the Indian sub-continent.



## Mahindra brings new Bolero Neo SUV variants

Mahindra has introduced the new Bolero Neo+ SUV in India with prices starting from ₹11.39 lakh for the entry-level P4 trim, and going up to ₹12.49 lakh for the top-end P10. The new SUV is a three-row, 9-seater version of the sub-compact Bolero Neo SUV. The Bolero Neo+ is powered by a 2.2-litre mHawk diesel engine that produces 118 BHP and 280 Nm of torque. The SUV is available in three colours - Napoli Black, Majestic Silver, and Diamond White.

## Cipla Health to market Ivia cosmetic brands

Pharma major Cipla will acquire the cosmetics and personal care distribution and marketing business of Ivia Beauté, including the latter's brands Ikin, Astaberry and Bhimsaini, on a worldwide basis for ₹130 crore. "This move not only solidifies our presence in the expansive and dynamic beauty and personal care sector but also builds on our established footprint in Tier 2-6 cities," Cipla Health CEO Shivam Puri said.



## Zomato launches large order fleet to serve parties

Zomato on Tuesday introduced India's first large order fleet, designed to serve orders for a gathering of up to 50 people for group events like parties. The company's CEO Deepinder Goyal shared the announcement in a series of posts on microblogging site X, formerly Twitter, saying that an "all-electric fleet" will be used to deliver the large orders, which were earlier served by multiple regular fleet delivery partners.

## Bullish domestic demand, rising working-age population key IMF revises India growth forecast for FY25 to 6.8%

Washington, April 16: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on Tuesday raised India's growth projection to 6.8 per cent from its January forecast of 6.5 per cent citing bullish domestic demand conditions and a rising working-age population. With this, India continues to be the fastest growing economy of the world, ahead of China's growth projection of 4.6 per cent during the same period.

"Growth in India is projected to remain strong at 6.8 per cent in 2024 and 6.5 per cent in 2025, with the robustness reflecting continuing strength in domestic demand and a rising working-age population," said the latest edition of the World Economic Outlook (WEO) released by the IMF.

At the same time, growth in emerging and developing Asia is expected to fall



● **AT THE same time, growth in emerging and developing Asia is expected to fall from an estimated 5.6 per cent in 2023 to 5.2 per cent in 2024 and 4.9 per cent in 2025.**

from an estimated 5.6 per cent in 2023 to 5.2 per cent in 2024 and 4.9 per cent in 2025, a slight upward revision compared with the Jan. 2024 WEO Update.

"Growth in China is projected to slow from 5.2 per cent in 2023 to 4.6 per cent in 2024 and 4.1 per cent in 2025, as the positive effects of one-off factors including post pandemic boost to consumption and fiscal stimulus ease and weakness in the property sector persists," the IMF said.

Global growth, estimated at 3.2 per cent in 2023, is projected to continue at the same pace in 2024 and 2025. The forecast for 2024 is revised up by 0.1 percentage point from the Jan. 2024 WEO update, and by 0.3 percentage point from the Oct. 2023 WEO, the IMF said. Policymakers should prioritise steps toward greater economic resilience such as strengthening government finances and revitalising economic growth prospects, said Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, chief economist of the IMF.

with prospects, said Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, chief economist of the IMF.

"Despite gloomy predictions, the global economy remains remarkably resilient, with steady growth and inflation slowing almost as quickly as it rose. The journey has been eventful, starting with supply-chain disruptions in the aftermath of the pandemic, an energy and food crisis triggered by Russia's war on Ukraine, a considerable surge in inflation, followed by a globally synchronised monetary policy tightening," he said.

The chief economist said global growth bottomed out at the end of 2022, at 2.3 per cent, shortly after median headline inflation peaked at 9.4 per cent. Growth this year and next will hold steady at 3.2 per cent, he said.

— PTI

## Google's AI arm to invest \$100 bn in tech

Vancouver, April 16: The chief of Google's AI business said that over time the company will spend more than \$100 billion developing artificial intelligence (AI) technology - another sign of the investing arms race that has gripped Silicon Valley.

Google DeepMind chief executive officer Demis Hassabis was asked at a TED conference in Vancouver about a potential \$100 billion supercomputer dubbed "Stargate,"

being planned by Microsoft Corp. and OpenAI.

"We don't talk about our specific numbers, but I think we're investing more than that over time," Hassabis replied, without giving details on the spending. He also said and that Alphabet Inc. has superior computing power to rivals including Microsoft. Hassabis co-founded DeepMind in 2010 before it was acquired by Google a decade ago.

● **THE GLOBAL interest sparked by OpenAI's ChatGPT showed Hassabis that the public was ready to embrace AI systems.**

"That's one of the reasons we teamed up with Google back in 2014, is we knew that in order to get to AGI we would need a lot of compute," he continued, referring to artificial general intelligence - a

debated threshold that can mean machines which perform better than humans on a wide array of tasks.

"That's what's transpired," he said. "And Google had and still has the most computers."

The global interest sparked by OpenAI's ChatGPT showed Hassabis that the public was ready to embrace AI systems, he said, even if they were still flawed and prone to errors. — Bloomberg



## TCS, ACCENTURE, COGNIZANT IN TOP FIRMS LIST

New Delhi, April 16: Tata Consultancy Services has topped the LinkedIn's latest list of top companies to work for in India, followed by Accenture and Cognizant in the second and third place respectively.

Professional networking platform LinkedIn on Tuesday released the 2024 Top Companies list for India wherein IT companies bagged the top three ranks, while financial services firms dominated the list with 9 out of 25 companies in this sector.

The 8th edition has derived insights from LinkedIn data, and lists the top 25 large companies, 15 best mid-size companies, and provides insights on in-demand skills, top locations, and the largest job functions within these companies.

Silicon valley of India, Bengaluru was named the top location where these top companies are based and looking to hire talent, followed by Hyderabad, Mumbai Metropolitan Region, and Pune. — PTI

## Petrol demand up 7%, diesel usage down 9.5% in April

FC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

Fuel demand is likely to go up as India's petrol consumption surged 7 per cent in the first half of April, but diesel sales were down by 9.5 per cent.

Petrol sales of three state-owned firms, which control 90 per cent of the fuel market, rose to 1.22 million tonnes during April 1-15 as against 1.14 million tonnes of consumption in the same period last year, a preliminary data of state-owned firms showed on Tuesday.

As per the data, the diesel demand, however, dipped by 9.5 per cent to 3.14 million tonnes. While petrol sales were up mostly due to an increase in



use of personal vehicles on the back of a price cut, crop harvesting season as well as the onset of summer which will increase the demand for air conditioning in cars is likely to reverse the trend in diesel demand.

Petrol and diesel prices were last month reduced by ₹2 per litre, ending a nearly two-year-long hiatus in rate revision. "Month-on-month petrol sales dropped 3.6 per cent

when compared to 1.27 million tonnes of consumption in March 1-15. Diesel demand too was down 2.7 per cent month-on-month when compared to 3.22 million tonnes in the first half of March," the data showed.

Jet fuel (ATF) sales also rose 10.4 per cent year-on-year to 3,35,700 tonnes during April 1-15, 2024. But this was 1.2 per cent lower month-on-month, the data showed.

The cooking gas LPG sales were up 8.8 per cent year-on-year at 1.2 million tonnes in April 1-15, 2024. Month-on-month, LPG demand fell 11.6 per cent against 1.36 million tonnes of LPG consumption during March 1-15, the data showed.

## iPhone exports from India rises 2-fold to \$12 bn

New Delhi, April 16: Apple's iPhone exports from India almost doubled to \$12.1 billion in 2023-24 from \$6.27 billion in the preceding fiscal, trade intelligence platform The Trade Vision said on Tuesday.

The total smartphone exports from India surged to \$16.5 billion in 2023-24, up from \$12 billion in the preceding year. This surge underscores the broader impact of Apple's presence on the industry, driving growth and innovation in the Indian manufacturing ecosystem, the company stated.

Apple's iPhone exports from India witnessed a staggering increase from \$6.27 billion in the fiscal year 2022-23 to \$12.1 billion in 2023-24, representing a massive surge of nearly 100 per cent. This exponential growth underscores the pivotal role that India now plays in Apple's global supply chain, The Trade Vision LLC stated.

"Apple's decision to ramp up its manufacturing operations in India has been motivated by various factors, including the need to diversify its supply chain, mitigate risks associated with geopolitical tensions, and capitalise on India's burgeoning consumer market."

"Initiatives such as the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme introduced by the Indian government have further incentivised companies like Apple to invest in local manufacturing," said Monika Oberoi, vice



● **THE PRESENCE of India-made iPhones in the US market has been steadily gaining momentum, marking a significant stride in Apple's strategic shift of its global manufacturing base to India.**

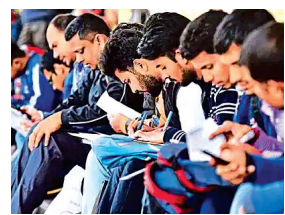
president - Sales and Marketing, The Trade Vision LLC.

According to the trade intelligence platform, the presence of India-made iPhones in the US market has been steadily gaining momentum, marking a significant stride in Apple's strategic shift of its global manufacturing base to India.

"Of particular significance is the United States' status as the largest importer of smartphones from India, with imports totalling approximately \$6 billion in the fiscal year 2023-24."

"Out of this substantial figure, Apple iPhones constituted a significant portion, accounting for \$5.46 billion. This represents a substantial increase from the \$2.1 billion recorded in the fiscal year 2022-23, indicating the growing preference for Indian-made iPhones among American consumers," Trade Vision stated.

— PTI



## UNEMPLOYMENT RATE IN INDIA TO DECLINE BY 97 BPS: REPORT

New Delhi, April 16: India's unemployment rate is likely to decline by as much as 97 basis points by 2028 as the country's economy hits the \$5 trillion mark, fuelling a rise in employment, a new report said on Tuesday.

Unemployment rate is projected to fall from 4.47 per cent in 2024 to 3.68 per cent in 2028, the India Employment Outlook 2030 report by thinktank Observer Research Foundation (ORF) said.

"India's job market is experiencing a transformation as the country has become the world's fastest growing large economy in the aftermath of Covid pandemic," the report said.

The country's young population, whose median age is 28.4 years, holds a key to fuelling economic expansion.

The ORF said the report identifies sectors that the country's 600-million-plus population of people aged 18-35 years regard as aspirational, as these sectors could act as engines of growth in the years ahead.

Nilanjan Ghosh, a director at ORF said, "policymakers and public sector schemes could partner more closely with other stakeholders to identify employability and skilling gaps. The next step would be to upgrade curricula and skills to make India's talent pool more industry ready." — PTI

## COAL INDIA CAPEX JUMPS 6.5% TO ₹19,840 CR IN FY24

New Delhi, April 16: State-owned CIL on Tuesday said its capital expenditure increased by 6.5 per cent to ₹19,840 crore in FY24. The company's capital expenditure was ₹18,619 crore in FY23, Coal India Ltd (CIL) said.

"CIL achieved 120 per cent target satisfaction over the year's capex target of ₹16,500 crore. For the fourth fiscal on sequence CIL's capex breached the budgeted target," the PSU said.

CIL is aiming to have adequate infra in place to evacuate increased quantities of coal produced in future. This includes setting up first mile connectivity projects with coal handling plants and silos; rail sidings, rail lines and roads. — PTI

## Road works in FY25 to grow at 8% to 13,000 km

SANGEETHA G CHENNAI, APRIL 16

Around 13,000 km long road projects are expected to be executed in FY25. Ahead of elections, completion of road projects led to 20 per cent growth in second half of FY24.

Execution of road projects is expected to grow at a slower pace by 5-8 per cent in FY25 to 12,500-13,000 km, finds ICRA.

In 2024, projects had recorded a robust expansion of 20 per cent in FY24. The awarding of new projects was significantly impacted in FY24 amid a delay in approval from the cabinet for the revised cost estimates of Bharatmala Pariyojana Phase 1.

Consequently, the overall awards declined by 31 per cent to 8,551 km in FY24 from 12,375 km in FY23. A similar trend was seen in FY19 before the last General Elections, when the project awarding had declined by over 67 per cent.

Even in HIFY24, the execution of projects was impacted on account of the prolonged monsoon in certain geographies. This had a bearing on the number of productive days and resulted in the muted growth during that period.



However, things improved in the second half.

"The execution situation started improving from September 2023 with road construction witnessing a surge of 30 per cent in H2 FY24, enabling an overall growth of 20 per cent in FY24 to 12,349 km from 10,331 km in FY23, slightly higher than ICRA's estimate of 12,000 km for that fiscal. This increase was supported by Ministry's focus on the completion of projects ahead of the general elections," said Vinay Kumar G, vice president and Sector head - Corporate Ratings, ICRA.

The Ministry's project award pipeline is above 45,000 km as of March 2024. Among the awarded projects, Hybrid Annuity Model and Engineering, Procurement and Construction continue to dominate the sector.

## New users to pay fee to like, post, reply on X

New Delhi, April 16: In a bid to restrict the onrush of bots and fake accounts, new users on social media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) may now be required to pay a small annual fee to be able to like, post, bookmark, and reply.

Users can still follow accounts and browse X for free, the company said. "This is to reduce spam and to create a better experience for everyone," it said.

The new users, however, will be able to use all

usual features for free after three months, Elon Musk, the owner of American technology company X Corp, which owns X, said.

However, whether the new norms will be rolled out in select locations or worldwide is not clear.

"Unfortunately, a small fee for new user write access is the only way to curb the relentless onslaught of bots. Current AI (and troll farms) can pass 'are you a bot' with ease," Musk posted on X. — PTI

VOLUME | GAME

## Japanese carmakers playing catch-up with likes of Tesla, BYD

## Nissan to use giga casting to cut costs

Yokohama (Japan), April 16: Nissan Motor Co. will use giga casting, a manufacturing process pioneered by Tesla Inc., to make part of its electric vehicles (EVs) as the automaker joins global rivals in pursuing the innovation to cut costs.

The carmaker will use machines with about 6,000 tons of force to make the rear floors of EVs to be sold from fiscal 2027 onward, according to an announcement Tuesday.

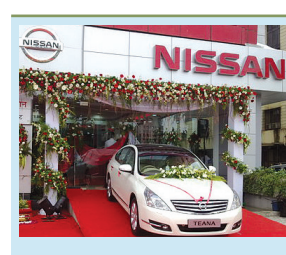
The process will reduce manufacturing costs by 10 per cent, Nissan said, and

is part of its broader strategy to achieve cost parity between EVs and combustion-engine vehicles by fiscal 2030.

Japanese carmakers are playing catch-up with the likes of Tesla and Chinese giant BYD Co. to carve out a share of the global EV market.

For manufacturers like Nissan, which makes Japan's most popular EV, the high prices of battery-powered cars are proving a major hurdle to more widespread adoption.

That's where giga casting comes in. The process



● **THE CARMAKER has previously announced a target for an additional 1 million vehicle sales within three years and will introduce 30 new models, including 16 EVs.**

uses huge machines to cast entire sections of a chassis in a single step, replacing the need to weld together dozens of separate parts and wringing out savings of time, equipment, labour and cost.

Tesla spearheaded the approach, and Japan's Toyota Motor Corp. is among carmakers committing to use it.

The process is similar in principle to die-casting, which is already used to

make small auto parts.

"We have been using casting boards for front air conditioner structural parts at our Tochigi plant for more than 10 years," said Hideyuki Sakamoto, executive vice president for manufacturing and supply chain management. Nissan is "quite experienced in casting car structures," he said.

The carmaker has previously announced a target for an additional 1 million vehicle sales within three years and will introduce 30 new models, including 16 EVs. — Bloomberg

# 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	361
Riyan Parag, RR	318
Sunil Narine, KKR	276

PURPLE	
Yuzvendra Chahal, RR	12
Jasprit Bumrah, MI	10
Mustafizur Rehman, CSK	10

# JUST JOSTLE!

## Buttler century as Royals pull off record run chase

Kolkata, April 16: Rajasthan Royals pulled off the Indian Premier League's biggest run chase to beat Kolkata Knight Riders by two wickets here on Tuesday. Asked to bat first, KKR rode on Sunil Narine's 56-ball 109 to post 223/6 in the allotted 20 overs.

In reply, Rajasthan were in all sorts of trouble at one stage but Jos Buttler blasted his way to an unbeaten 60-ball 107, as the visitors completed the chase in the last ball of the match.

After his team was asked to bat first on a fresh pitch, Narine blazed away to a 49-ball 100 to lead KKR's charge in this top-of-the-table clash at Eden Gardens.

However, Buttler had other ideas as he did the job for Royals from an extremely difficult position.

Earlier, it was a one-man show from KKR as Narine (109 off 56) batted till the 18th over, first stitching 85 runs with Angkrish Raghuvanshi (30) and then adding 51 runs with Andre Russell (13).

Trent Bolt eventually got the better of Narine, but not before the opener amassed 109 off 56 balls with the help of 13 fours and six sixes, displaying supreme confidence and skill against one of the best attacks of the IPL.

Not only did he pierce the field with ease, he also unleashed a relentless attack on R Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal, keeping the fielders busy by playing shots in the V.

Having reached fifty in 29 balls, the Trinidadian took just 20 deliveries to get to his maiden T20 century, pulling Chahal to the midwicket boundary.

Clad in a crisp white T-shirt, team owner Shah Rukh Khan sent a flying kiss from the stands.

On the field, his West Indies teammate Russell jumped in joy, giving him a bear hug as Narine waved his bat in a muted celebration.



Rajasthan Royals batter Jos Buttler plays a shot on way to his century during the match against Kolkata Knight Riders at Eden Gardens in Kolkata on Tuesday. Rajasthan Royals won by two wickets. — PTI

### Short takes

#### Every game is like semi for RCB: Coach

After his side's sixth defeat in seven matches in the ongoing IPL, Royal Challengers Bengaluru head coach Andy Flower confessed that each of their remaining seven matches will have to be treated like a semifinal. "It is obviously knockout time and every game is like a semifinal for us now. But we will have to think that we will come back stronger," Flower said on RCB Game Day.

RCB conceded the highest-ever IPL total — 287/3 — as the Hyderabad batters went on a merry ride against their directionless bowlers. "It was a really tough night in the field, of course, as they finished so powerfully that it probably took the wind out of our souls," he said.

#### Head says they want to attack Power Play

Sunrisers Hyderabad have taken T20 batting to the next level with sustained range-hitting in the IPL, and Travis Head said maximising Power Play segment was central to their aggressive approach. Head, whose 39-ball 100 led SRH to a record-setting 287/3 against RCB on Monday, underscored that approach with a fifty inside the Power Play.

"We've definitely got a lot of power through our top and middle-order and I think we've sort of got to tailor the way we want to play around that power that we've got, especially in power play," said Head.

The Australian opener has a perfect ally at the top in an equally belligerent Abhishek Sharma, who blunts slower bowlers upfront while Head goes about destroying the pacers.

POINTS TABLE						
Teams	P	W	L	N/R	Points	Net RR
RR	7	6	1	0	12	+0.677
KKR	6	4	2	0	8	+1.399
CSK	6	4	2	0	8	+0.726
SRH	6	4	2	0	8	+0.502
LSG	6	3	3	0	6	+0.038
GT	6	3	3	0	6	-0.637
PBKS	6	2	4	0	4	-0.218
MI	6	2	4	0	4	-0.234
DC	6	2	4	0	4	-0.975
RCB	7	1	6	0	2	-1.185

## GT, Delhi look for consistency

Ahmedabad, April 16: Gujarat Titans will be striving for much needed consistency when they meet Delhi Capitals in an IPL match here on Wednesday.

Unlike the past two editions, the Titans have not been able to play like a well-oiled machine though they still have time to fix the flaws.

A last ball win over table leaders Rajasthan Royals on April 10 was just the kind of result the Titans needed to infuse fresh life to their campaign.

They have only managed only two wins from their first six games but with another eight matches remaining, the Shubman Gill-led team has enough time to turn things around.

The absence of Mohammad Shami has hurt them but they must best use the available resources. Umesh Yadav has taken seven wickets but has leaked more than 10 runs per over.

His new ball partner Spencer Johnson and the seasoned Mohit Sharma

### ACTION TODAY

**GT VS DC**

**FROM 7.30 PM,**

**LIVE ON STAR SPORTS**

too can improve on their economy rate.

Star spinner Rashid Khan has been at his frugal best but would like to have more wickets in his kitty.

Delhi Capitals, on the other hand, have struggled to assemble their playing eleven due to form and fitness issues.

After four losses in five games, they got a much needed boost with the win against Lucknow Super Giants but they still have a lot to sort out if they are to push themselves for a place in the play-offs.

The presence of a fit again Kuldeep Yadav made a huge difference as he broke the backbone of the opposition with three timely strikes in Lucknow. — PTI

### SCOREBOARD

**Kolkata Knight Riders:** Phil Salt c & b Avesh Khan 10, Sunil Narine b Boult 109, Angkrish Raghuvanshi c Ashwin b Sen 30, Shreyas Iyer lbw b Chahal 11, Andre Russell c Jurel b Avesh Khan 13, Rinku Singh not out 20, Venkatesh Iyer c Jurel b Sen 8, Ramandeep Singh not out 1. Extras (b-4, lb-4, w-13) 21. **Total (for 6 wickets in 20 overs) 223.**

**Fall of wickets:** 1-21, 2-106, 3-133, 4-184, 5-195, 6-215.

**Bowling:** Trent Boult 4-0-31-1, Avesh Khan 4-0-35-2, Kuldeep Sen 4-0-46-2, Yuzvendra Chahal 4-0-54-1, Ravichandran Ashwin 4-0-49-0.

**Rajasthan Royals:** Yashasvi Jaiswal c VR Iyer b Arora 19, Jos Buttler not out 107, Sanju Samson c Narine b Harshit Rana 12, Riyan Parag c Russell b Harshit Rana 34, Dhruv Jurel lbw b Narine 2, Ravichandran Ashwin c Raghuvanshi b Varun 8, Shimron Hetmyer c SS Iyer b Varun 0, Rowman Powell lbw b Narine 26, Trent Boult run out (SS Iyer /Starc) 0, Avesh Khan not out 0. Extras (lb-1, nb-1, w-14) 16. **Total (for 8 wickets in 20 overs) 224.**

**Fall of wickets:** 1-22, 2-47, 3-97, 4-100, 5-121, 6-121, 7-178, 8-186.

**Bowling:** Mitchell Starc 4-0-50-0, Vaibhav Arora 3-0-45-1, Harshit Rana 4-0-45-2, Sunil Narine 4-0-30-2, Varun Chakravarthy 4-0-36-2, Andre Russell 1-0-17-0.

## MAXWELL TAKES 'MENTAL, PHYSICAL' BREAK

Bengaluru, April 16: Royal Challengers Bengaluru all-rounder Glenn Maxwell has decided to take an indefinite "mental and physical" break from the IPL, blaming his wretched batting form for the decision.

Maxwell's absence from RCB's match against Sunrisers Hyderabad here on Monday was initially attributed to a finger injury he suffered during the previous match against Mumbai Indians.

But he later admitted to dropping himself from the squad. "It was a pretty

easy decision. I went to Faf and the coaches after the last game (vs Mumbai Indians) and said it was probably time we tried someone else (in his place)," Maxwell said in the post-match press meet.

"It's actually a good time to give myself a bit of a mental and physical break, get my body right. If I'm required to get in during the tournament, I can, hopefully, get back into a solid mental and physical space where I can make an impact," he added.

This is the second time



in his career that Maxwell has opted out of competitive cricket in order to gather himself.

He had taken a similar break in October 2019, stating that he felt mentally and physically ruined at that time. The 35-year-old made his comeback a cou-

ple of months later.

In the ongoing IPL, Maxwell has been quite underwhelming with the bat in the six matches he has played this season, contributing just 32 runs at an average of 5.33 and a strike-rate of 94.

"I felt like I wasn't contributing with the bat, and with the results and the position we find ourselves on the table, I think it's a good time to give someone else an opportunity to show their wares, and hopefully, someone can make that spot their own," Maxwell said. — PTI

### BEIJING | HALF MARATHON

## RUNNERS APPEAR TO HAND WIN TO CHINESE STAR, UNDER SCANNER

Bangkok, April 16: Organisers are investigating a half marathon race in Beijing after three African runners appeared to let China's top long-distance runner move ahead of them shortly before the finish line and sprint to victory, sparking public speculation that the result was rigged.

There was a flood of public reaction online expressing suspicion about the race after video from the final moments of Sunday's Mengniu Beijing Half Marathon circulated online. On Monday, organisers of the race issued a statement saying they would investigate the results.

"A special investigation team has been set up to conduct an investigation, and the results of the investigation will be released to the public in a timely fashion," organisers said.

The Beijing Sports Bureau, which was in charge of the race, did not respond to a request for comment.

He Jie, who won the marathon at the Asian Games and holds the Chinese national record in the event, was trailing behind three runners from Kenya and Ethiopia as they approached the finish line. One of the runners then seems to gesture for the others to slow down as He moves in front and sprints to the finish line.

One of the other runners, Willy Mngat of Kenya, told BBC Sport Africa that they allowed He to win but that they had been hired to serve as pacemakers and were not competing to win the race. — AP



Performers take part in the official ceremony of the flame lighting for the Paris Olympics at the Ancient Olympia site in Greece on Tuesday. The flame will be carried through Greece for 11 days before being handed over to Paris organisers on April 26. — AP

## Games torch relay launched in Olympia

Olympia (Greece), April 16: The torch relay for the Paris 2024 Olympics set off Tuesday from Olympia, the birthplace of the ancient Games, after the flame was lit in a ritual inspired by antiquity and marked by messages of hope amid multiple global crises.

"The Olympic flame that we are lighting today symbolises this hope for a better future," said

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach.

Owing to cloudy weather, Greek actresses in the role of ancient priestesses used a flame lit in a rehearsal Monday in the 2,600-year-old Temple of Hera, near the stadium where the Olympics were born in 776 BC.

Carrying the flame in a pot, Greek actress Mary Mina lit the torch for the

first bearer, 2020 Olympic rowing champion Stefanos Ntouskos.

Retired swimmer Laure Manaudou, who won a gold medal at the 2004 Athens Olympics, followed as France's first torchbearer in Olympia.

The torch harks back to the ancient Olympics when a sacred flame burned throughout the Games. The tradition was revived in 1936 for the

Berlin Olympics.

During the 11-day relay on Greek soil, some 600 torchbearers will carry the flame over a distance of 5,000 kilometres (3,100 miles) through 41 municipalities.

"In ancient times, the Olympic Games brought together the Greek city states, even — and in particular — during times of war and conflict," Bach said. — AFP

### CANDIDATES | CHESS

## Gukesh draws to stay in joint lead

Toronto, April 16: Indian Grandmaster D. Gukesh held on to the joint top spot with Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi after they played out an easy draw in the 10th round of the Candidates chess tournament here.

The all-Indian duel between R. Praggnanandhaa and Vidit Gujrathi also ended in a draw while Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura defeated Firouza Alireza and Nijat Abasov respectively to come back within striking distance of the two leaders.

With just four rounds to come in the biggest event of the year, Gukesh and Nepomniachtchi have an identical six points each with Praggnanandhaa, Caruana and Nakamura half-a-point behind.

Gujrathi, on six points, is sole sixth while for all practical purposes, Alireza and Abasov are out of the race with 3.5 and two points respectively. Nepomniachtchi has not been taking many risks in the event with either colour and his solid play makes him the only player who is unbeaten after 10 rounds.

The Ruy Lopez as white

### THE RESULTS

**Round 10 (Indians unless specified):** **Men:** Ian Nepomniachtchi (6) drew with D. Gukesh (6); R. Praggnanandhaa (5.5) drew with Vidit Gujrathi (5); Hikaru Nakamura (Usa, 5.5) beat Nijat Abasov (Aze, 3); Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 5.5) beat Firouza Alireza (Fra, 3.5). **Women:** Nurguyal Salimova (Bul, 4) lost to R. Vaishali (3.5); Zhongyi Tan (6.5) drew with Koneru Humpy (4.5); Aleksandra Goryachkina (Rus, 5.5) lost to Tingjei Lei (Chn, 6.5); Kateryna Lagno (Fid, 5.5) drew with Anna Muzychuk (Ukr, 4).

gave the Russian just an optical advantage after the opening and the 17-year-old Gukesh ensured parity with some timely exchanges leading to a rook and pawns endgame.

The contest was almost uneventful other than the opening part and in the endgame.

Praggnanandhaa has also been very solid with just a lone loss early in the second round against Gukesh. The 18-year old faced the Berlin defense by Gujrathi who equalised easily as black.

— PTI

## WRESTLER ROHIT LOSES BRONZE BOUT IN BISHKEK

Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), April 16: Wrestler Rohit Dahiya lost his bronze medal bout to a top-ranked Uzbek grappler as India finished their Greco-Roman campaign at the Asian Championships without a single podium finish here on Tuesday.

On a day when all other Indian Greco-Roman wrestlers continued to struggle, Dahiya (82kg) was the only one to enter the bronze medal round, but he lost to Mukhammadkodir Rasulov, ranked No.1 here, on points.

The other three wrestlers on show on Tuesday, Parvesh (60kg), Vinayak Siddheshwar Patil (67kg) and Ankit Gulia (72kg), got eliminated in the preliminary rounds.

However, Dahiya, who had represented the country in the 2022 World U-20 Championships in Sofia, despite losing his quarterfinal bout to Japan's Yoshida Taizo on points 7-2, made it to the bronze medal round as the opponent he had lost to made it to the final.

In the 60kg category, Parvesh lost his pre-quarterfinal bout by technical superiority to Kazakhstan's Galym Kabdunassarov. — PTI