

THE ASIAN AGE

LONDON MONDAY 29 APRIL 2024



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Rahul: BJP-BJD have strong relationship like a married couple



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Priyanka says her husband Nick Jonas helped her 'sail' through turbulence of life



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Badminton player Saina Nehwal poses for a photo after a fresh spell of snowfall at Koksar in Lahaul and Spiti district on Sunday. — PTI

Sandeshkhali: SC to hear today WB govt plea over CBI probe

New Delhi: The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea by the West Bengal government challenging the Calcutta high court order which directed a CBI probe into allegations of crimes against women and land grabbing in Sandeshkhali. A bench of Justices B.R. Gavai and Sandeep Mehta is likely to hear the matter. The high court's April 10, 2024 order demoralised the entire state machinery, including the police force, the state government said in its plea before the top court. The CBI is already investigating the case of an attack on ED officials in Sandeshkhali and has registered three FIRs in connection with the incidents on January 5, the day on which ED officials were attacked by a mob when they went there to search the premises of now-suspended Trinamul Congress leader Shahjahan Sheikh in connection with a ration distribution scam case. **Full report on Page 4**

SP candidate from UP's Ballia booked

Ballia, UP: The police have booked Sanatan Pandey, the Samajwadi Party's candidate from the Ballia Lok Sabha constituency, for allegedly spreading enmity and threatening the district election officer, officials said on Sunday. **Full report on Page 5**

4 die in J&K as cab plunges into stream

Srinagar: Amid heavy downpour in the Kashmir Valley's Ganderbal district on Sunday evening, a SUV vehicle carrying a group of tourists skidded off the road and plunged into a mountain stream. Four bodies have been retrieved while one is missing. **Full report on Page 4**

COUNTERPOINT



I promise to uplift your living conditions!



■ 'INDIA to change PM every year' ■ 'Won't allow inheritance tax'

Cong-led Opp. wants a weak govt to make easy profit: PM

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs
NEW DELHI, APRIL 28

Taking the battle for the 18th Lok Sabha to the Opposition-ruled Karnataka, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday addressed four rallies targeting the Congress over appeasement politics, the "inheritance tax" row and deteriorating law and order in the Siddaramaiah government, among other issues. At rallies in Belagavi, Uttara Kannada, Davanagere and Ballari, Mr Modi claimed the BJP's "*majboot sarkar*" has become a threat to the corrupt Opposition, which he claimed plans to give the PM's post to alliance parties for one year each.

Accusing Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of insulting India's rajas and maharajas, the PM, while addressing the rally in Belagavi, said Mr Gandhi chooses to remain silent on the atrocities committed by nawabs, Nizams, sultans and bad-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with former Karnataka chief minister Basavaraj Bommai and BJP leaders during a public meeting for the Lok Sabha elections in Karnataka's Davanagere on Sunday. — PTI

▶ **THE PRIME Minister said Rahul Gandhi chooses to remain silent on the atrocities committed by nawabs, Nizams, sultans and badshahs for the sake of appeasement politics.**

"The Congress has ensured the writings of our history and our freedom struggle with an eye

on appeasement and vote-bank. Even today, the Congress' shehzada (referring to Mr Gandhi) is carrying forward that sin. You might have heard the Congress' shehzada's recent statement; he says Bharat's rajas and maharajas were *atyachari* (oppressive)," Mr Modi said.

"The Congress' shehzada has insulted great personalities like Chatrapati

■ **Turn to Page 4**

Opp: After Ph-2 'washout', Modi 'fear mongering'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 28

The Congress targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday for his political comments and accused him of indulging in "fear mongering" as a "desperate" measure as it faces "washout" in the second phase of the Lok Sabha elections.

The party also criticised the Prime Minister for his political support to the JD(S) candidate from Hassan Lok Sabha seat, Prajwal Revanna, accused of sexually abusing women after several videos surfaced purportedly involving him. Using the opportunity to pin down the BJP, the Congress has questioned the Prime Minister's policies of "Mahila Samman."

■ **More on Page 5**

PM to address 6 rallies in 2 days in Maharashtra

AGE CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI, APRIL 28

The Lok Sabha election fever is at its peak in Maharashtra with Prime Minister Narendra Modi set to hold as many as six rallies in the state in the next two days. While the Opposition claimed it was a sign that the Bharatiya Janata Party was in panic mode, the saffron party said PM's rallies are part of its strategy to reach out to the maximum voters.

The Prime Minister will address rallies in Solapur, Satara, Pune, Madha, Dharashiv and Latur Lok Sabha constituencies in the next couple of days.

■ **More on Page 5**



Delhi ministers Atishi, Saurabh Bhardwaj, Somnath Bharti and AAP MP Narain Dass Gupta take part in the party's "Walk for Kejriwal" walkathon in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI



SC to hear today Kejriwal's plea against arrest in liquor scam

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 28

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea by Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal challenging his arrest in a money laundering case stemming from the alleged excise policy scam. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta is likely to hear the matter.

Mr Kejriwal had earlier told the SC that his "illegal arrest" in the case constitutes an unprecedented assault on the tenets of democracy based on "free and fair polls" and "federalism".

He claimed it is a "classical case" of how the Centre has misused the ED and its wide powers under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

■ **More on Page 2**

Delhi Cong jolt as chief Lovely quits over AAP alliance

■ **Slams Babaria** ■ **Cong imploding: BJP**

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 28

In a major setback to the Congress ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, senior leader Arvinder Singh Lovely has resigned as the party's Delhi unit chief, citing the alliance with the AAP as one of the reasons. While the AAP termed it an internal matter of its Delhi ally, the BJP called it "implosion" and claimed there will be further repercussions for the Congress.

Mr Lovely's resignation in protest against the alliance with AAP has brought the party's factional feud out in the open, with a section of leaders on Sunday demanding the removal of AICC Delhi incharge Deepak Babaria.

In his resignation letter to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Mr Lovely said the Delhi Congress unit was against the alliance with AAP. He also pointed out that all unanimous decisions taken by the senior Delhi unit leaders have been "unilaterally vetoed" by Mr Babaria. In his resignation letter,



Arvinder Singh Lovely

▶ **ARVINDER SINGH Lovely made it clear that he has only resigned from the party post and is not joining any political party**

he also said that tickets were given to two people who are total strangers to the city Congress and party policies, while referring to the candidature of Kanhaiya Kumar from North-East Delhi and Udit Raj from North-East Delhi constituencies.

Later, at a press conference, Mr Lovely made it clear that he has only resigned from the party post and is not joining any political party.

This is the second time that Mr Lovely has

■ **Turn to Page 4**

Didi soft on terrorists, wants a 'majboor' Central govt: Nadda

RAJIB CHOWDHURI and PRANMOY BRAHMACHARI
KOLKATA/BERHAMPORE, APRIL 28

BJP president J.P. Nadda on Sunday accused West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee of "sympathising with terrorists" in a bid to elect a "*majboor sarkar*" (weak government) instead of a "*mazboot sarkar*" (strong government) in the country.

Mr Nadda, who addressed two Lok Sabha election campaign rallies in two adjoining districts -- Murshidabad and Nadia -- during a day-long tour, also came down heavily on the Trinamul Congress supremo over the violence against women,



J.P. NADDA

▶ **THE BJP president claimed that *mazboot Sarkar*, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, conducted surgical strikes inside Pakistan when it cast an evil eye on our country**

appeasement politics and corruption by her party in the state.

At Berhampore in Murshidabad, the BJP chief alleged, "While we

talk about a *mazboot sarkar*, Mamata Ji talks about and wants a *majboor sarkar* which practices appeasement, makes discrimination, goes soft on terrorists and also has a habit of sympathising with terrorists."

Drawing a comparison with the BJP government at the Centre, Mr Nadda claimed that *mazboot Sarkar*, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, conducted surgical strikes inside Pakistan when it cast an evil eye on our country.

The BJP chief pointed out: "We earlier saw terrorists from Jammu and Kashmir getting invited from the Prime Minister's Office in the UPA regime."

■ **Turn to Page 2**

Musk makes surprise visit to Beijing, meets Premier

Beijing, April 28: On a surprise visit to Beijing amid speculation that he may unveil Tesla's autonomous driving technology in the burgeoning electric vehicle (EV) market in China, billionaire Elon Musk on Sunday met Chinese Premier Li Qiang and discussed future expansion plans for his automobile.

The Chinese Premier told Mr Musk that China's huge market

will always be open to foreign-funded enterprises.

China will work hard on expanding market access and improving services to provide foreign-funded enterprises with a better business environment and stronger support so that companies from all countries can invest in China with peace of mind, Mr Qiang said.

— PTI

■ **More on Page 6**

BJP, Cong 'conspired' to weaken BSP: Maya

■ **Says 'selfish' leaders quit BSP** ■ **Demands pvt sector quota for SC/ST**

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, APRIL 28

Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati on Sunday accused the BJP and the Congress of conspiring to weaken her party in Uttar Pradesh by "engineering" the exodus of "selfish" leaders in the party.

Addressing an election rally in Morena in the Gwalior-Chambal region of Madhya Pradesh, Ms Mayawati pointed out

▶ **THE BSP SUPREMO attributed the decline of the Cong to its flawed policies towards the socially and economically backward classes. She said it would not be smooth sailing for the BJP in this.**

that the BSP had ruled Uttar Pradesh four times earlier.

The BJP and the Congress had later conspired to weaken her party in UP by instigating



Mayawati

some selfish leaders of the BSP to break away from it and float new caste-based parties to take on the BSP, she said. She said that a similar situation has prevailed in the Gwalior-

Chambal region of Madhya Pradesh. "These selfish leaders of the BSP have served the interests of the BJP and the Congress", she said.

Training her gun at the Congress, she attributed the decline of the grand old party to its flawed policies towards the socially and economically backward classes. That's why there was a need to rebuild the BSP, she added.

She predicted that it

■ **Turn to Page 4**

Biden pokes fun at Trump's age at WH dinner, amidst Gaza protests

Washington, April 28: US President Joe Biden roared his predecessor and political rival, Donald Trump and poked fun at his age at the annual dinner for Washington's political and media elites, saying "I am a grown man running against a six-year-old". The White House dinner on Saturday night provided the platform for Mr Biden, 81, to continue his criticism of Mr Trump, 77, with cutting humour.

The high-profile event came against the backdrop of growing protests over



Joe Biden

Mr Biden's handling of the Israel-Hamas war.

"Of course, the 2024 election's in full swing and, yes, age is an issue: I'm a grown man running against a 6-year-old," Mr Biden said, referring to former President Trump, whom

he called 'Sleepy Don'.

Mr Biden added, "Age is the only thing we have in common. My vice-president actually endorses me."

"Donald has had a few tough days lately. You might call it 'stormy weather,'" Mr Biden said, an oblique reference to Stormy Daniels, a porn actress who claims she had an affair and received a hush-money payment in the days before the 2016 election, a deal at the centre of his New York trial.

— PTI

■ **More on Page 6**



Actor Sahil Khan at the CP office after he was arrested in connection with the Mahadev betting app case in Mumbai on Sunday. ■ **Report on Page 4**

— PTI

Navy assists oil tanker with 22 Indians aboard hit by Houthis

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 28

The Indian Navy said on Sunday that its explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team had boarded the Panama-flagged crude oil tanker Andromeda Star with Indian crew for risk assessment after it was hit by anti-ship ballistic missiles launched by Yemen's Houthis rebels in the Red Sea.

"A mission-deployed naval destroyer INS Kochi responded to a maritime security incident involving an attack on a Panama-flagged crude oil tanker," said the Indian Navy in a statement, adding that the oil tanker was intercepted by the Indian Navy ship and an aerial reconnaissance by helicopter was undertaken to assess the situation. The EOD team was deployed onboard the vessel for residual risk assessment.

A total of 30 crew members (including 22 Indian nationals) are reported to be safe and the vessel is continuing its scheduled transit to the next port.

■ **More on Page 4**

SHORT TAKES

3 men arrested for tampering with ATM

New Delhi: Three men have been arrested for allegedly tampering with ATM machines for duping people, the police said on Saturday. Vishal Negi (30), Amit Mehra (37) and Vijay Kumar (26) used to damage card reader slots in ATMs so that when someone puts their card in, it gets stuck there, DCP Ankit Chauhan said. "Later, they would secretly see the PIN number and ask the customer to raise a complaint with the bank. If the customer leaves the ATM without removing the card, the accused used to remove it later and make the transactions," the DCP said. On April 19, at around 7 pm a PCR call regarding an attempt to break into an ATM and gunfire in the area was received at the Hauz Khas police station, he said. The police team was sent to the spot and investigation suggested that two people were attempting to tamper with the ATM and some people tried to nab them, one of them fired a shot and fled. "Several CCTV footage were checked and then the three accused were arrested," the DCP said.

Cop killed after his scooter hits divider

New Delhi: A Delhi police sub-inspector was killed after his scooter hit a divider here, officials on Sunday said. The deceased has been identified as N.K. Pavitharan, who was attached to the crime team of the east district, they said. Around at 10.30 pm on Saturday, Pavitharan lost balance and his scooter hit a divider, leaving him seriously injured, a senior police officer said. The officer further said that he was rushed to the Lady Harding Hospital, where he was declared dead. "Further investigation into the matter has been started," he added.

Guru holds mental health session at IIT

New Delhi: Acharya Prashant, spiritual guru and former civil service officer, interacted with IIT Delhi students on mental health. More than 1,000 people from across the country participated in the session. He said that there is a deep connection between the mind and spirituality. The mind can be controlled through spirituality, which strengthens inner peace and provides a feeling of connection with a power greater than oneself. The workshop was organised under the aegis of the alumni association in Dogra Hall of IIT. He said that the entire environment of the mind changes rapidly. What do we not change, and even after changing everything, we do not find peace? People change houses, change jobs, and even after changing all this, the mind does not find peace.

MAN SERVING LIFE TERM GETS BAIL FOR HIS WEDDING

New Delhi: The Delhi high court has granted a man serving a life term for murder two weeks' parole to attend his engagement ceremony and wedding. Granting the relief to Rahul Dev, the court noted that he was granted parole earlier as well and he had surrendered on time. "In the totality of the facts and circumstances, the present petition is allowed. The petitioner is granted parole for a period of two weeks," Justice Amit Sharma said. Dev was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in 2014 for the offences of murder and causing the disappearance of evidence or giving false information to screen offender under the IPC. He approached the court, seeking parole for four weeks to get engaged and married. The wedding is scheduled for April 30 at an Arya Samaj temple. The nominal roll received from Mandoli Jail, where he is lodged, stated that Dev was in custody for 14 years, six months and 25 days, with remission. The court noted that the status report submitted by the prison reflected that he had availed parole from January 29 to March 5 and surrendered on time on March 6. The court directed that the parole shall be counted from the date of the convict's release and asked him to surrender before the jail superintendent immediately on the expiry of the parole.

NETA'S NATTER

DELHI BJP 'EXPOSING' WHAT HAD ALREADY BEEN EXPOSED

Amid the flurry of activities related to the Lok Sabha polls, the Delhi unit of the BJP, it appears, has lost track of what needs to be exposed about the Opposition and what has already been exposed. A case in point, the Delhi BJP claimed that the state chief Virendra Sachdeva "will make an expose" and asked the media to accompany them. However, all he did was merely put signboards near the Delhi chief minister's official residence. After the so-called "expose", a senior Delhi BJP leader took a swipe at his own party and said,



"Our state leadership should understand the difference between an expose and putting up a signboard. Installing an iron board near the residence of the Delhi CM and naming the CM House Sheesh Mahal, the corruption den, is hardly a revelation. They should focus on the real exposure of the misdeeds and corruption of Mr Kejriwal and his government."

DELHI'S MAYOR FROM AAP IS A CERTAINTY

After the MCD polls to elect the new mayor and deputy mayor were postponed, the BJP councillors are in a jubilant mood. A section of BJP councillors started dancing in the House to the party's campaign songs during the ongoing session. The councillors from the rival AAP are also brimming with confidence, claiming that no matter what the BJP does, the Delhi mayor will be from their party. "Despite obstructing the mayoral elections, the BJP knows that whenever polls are held, the AAP candidates will emerge victorious. As they don't want to face defeat during the ongoing general election, they have created roadblocks. But it is only delaying the inevitable," said an AAP councillor.



WILL CONG'S FREEBIES DENT BJP'S PROSPECTS IN KARNATAKA?



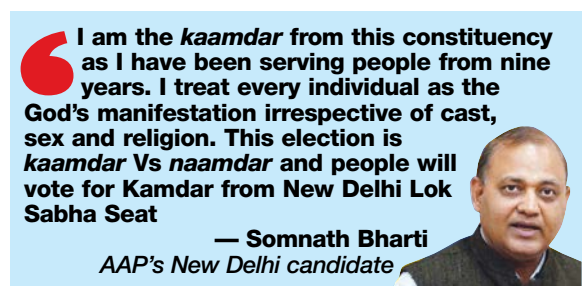
The INDIA bloc is giving a tough contest to the BJP-led NDA in Karnataka. The NDA is finding it difficult to counter the lure of freebies, especially the traction the Congress has earned through the poll doles it promised during the last Assembly elections and the promises it implemented after forming the government. A JD(S) insider said that despite

having an alliance with the BJP, the party cadre is finding it difficult to counter the Congress' "guarantees". The BJP, however, claims that the electors are swayed by these schemes more in Assembly elections than in national elections. Also, it is banking on Modi's schemes and their beneficiaries to neutralise the impact of the Congress schemes.

This poll is *kaamdar* vs *naamdar*, people will vote for me: Bharti

AVINASH PRABHAKAR
NEW DELHI, APRIL 28:

AAP's New Delhi Lok Sabha seat candidate Sonmath Bharti says that this election is "*kaamdar* versus *naamdar*" and the people will vote for him as he has served this constituency for a long time. In an interview with *The Asian Age*, Mr Bharti took a dig at his BJP rival Bansuri Swaraj, saying that on one hand, the party has been opposing dynastic politics and on the other hand it has fielded former Union minister Sushma Swaraj's daughter from the constituency. On being asked about how he analyses opponent candidates, Mr Bharti said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP always talk about "*kaamdar* and *naamdar*" and urge people to vote for "*Kaamdar*." "I am the *Kaamdar* from this constituency as I have been serving people for nine years. I treat every individual as God's manifestation irrespective of caste, sex, and religion. This election is *kaamdar* Vs *naamdar* and people will vote for *Kaamdar* from the New Delhi Lok



Sabha seat," said the AAP candidate. He added further that he is the symbol of "*Jantavard* and *kaamdar*" while his rival is a symbol of "Pariavard and *Naamdar*." "BJP always says let's oppose dynasty politics. Is not the BJP candidate of this constituency a symbol of dynast politics...?" asked Mr Bharti. Talking about his campaign strategy, as the election is a few weeks away, Mr Bharti said, "I am not new to this area as I have been serving people for the last nine years. I am a three-time MLA of this area and have put everything at stake to ensure that all public living in my constituency is looked after as my family." "The people can't be fooled by the BJP in the name of religion. I am a

staunch devotee of Lord Ram and Lord Hanuman. But we have not made religion a political tool. Because of my work in the constituency, people have brought me to this stage. Today again I am seeking their blessing to be elected as the MP of New Delhi Lok Sabha constituency. The election is one month away and my campaign started nine years back," he said.

Mr Bharti said that the campaign had a different colour prior to the arrest of chief minister Arvind Kejriwal but now the narrative has changed and people are angry and will not allow the BJP to win a single seat. "People are saying enough is enough. There is a narrative amongst the public that if it continues like this, democracy will

be over in the country. The arrest of Mr Kejriwal is the beginning of the end for Mr Modi's reign," he said. Speaking to the newspaper, he also objected to the slogans made by BJP and said it is high time that the Election Commission and Supreme Court should come out to ensure free and fair elections. "BJP is violating all rules and regulations of the election every day, but the election commission does not take this into consideration," he said. On the question of the star campaigner of the party, which also includes the jailed chief minister, he said, "Mr Kejriwal has become an idea now in the country. Despite his body being captured in jail, he continues to be a source of inspiration and the chief star campaigner for us. Everyone is saying 'Mai bhi Kejriwal and mujhe bhi arrest karo.'" While speaking on the alliance with Congress, he said, "AAP is wholeheartedly supporting Congress on three seats where they have fielded the candidates and similarly, we are getting their support on the ground."

Tihar revoked permission to Sunita to meet CM, says AAP

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 28

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday claimed that the Tihar Jail authorities have revoked the permission for Sunita Kejriwal, the wife of incarcerated chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, to meet her husband.

"The meeting, which was scheduled for tomorrow (Monday), has now been cancelled, leaving both the Kejriwal family and AAP supporters dismayed," said the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), adding that the Tihar Jail administration has not cited any reason yet for cancelling Sunita Kejriwal's meeting.

However, the prison administration is yet to respond to the AAP claims.

In a post on X in Hindi, the Aam Aadmi Party said, "At the behest of the Modi government, the Tihar jail administration cancelled Sunita Kejriwal's meeting with her husband Arvind Kejriwal. The Modi government is crossing all limits of inhumanity."

Delhi Cabinet minister Atishi is scheduled to meet Mr Kejriwal on Monday while Punjab chief minister Bhagwant Mann will meet him on Tuesday.

Section of leaders demand removal of Babaria

Cong feud out in open after Lovely quits post

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 28:

The resignation of Congress Delhi unit chief Arvinder Singh Lovely in protest against the alliance with AAP brought the party's factional feud into the open, with a section of leaders on Sunday demanding the removal of AICC Delhi in-charge Deepak Babaria.

A scuffle also broke out outside Mr Lovely's residence as his supporters allegedly pushed ex-Congress MLA Asif Mohammed Khan who had reached after his resignation.

While the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) termed it as an internal matter of the Congress, the BJP said Mr Lovely has listened to the voice of his conscience as no patriot can stand with those who talk about dividing the country and claimed there would be further repercussions for the Congress.

Some party workers gathered outside Mr Lovely's residence and raised slogans against Mr Babaria who, meanwhile, stressed that all DPCC leaders were taken into confidence on the alliance issue and Mr Lovely should have aired his views before the party panels.

"Ahead of the formation of the alliance with the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi, the DPCC leaders and workers were taken into confidence. He (Lovely) was part of all the committees and panels. He should have raised his objections back then. Anyone who distances themselves from any party or posts tends to find a reason to do so," Mr Babaria told reporters.

As a scuffle broke out outside Mr Lovely's resi-



Former Delhi Congress chief Arvinder Singh Lovely during a press conference in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

dence, Mr Khan said, "This was an internal matter and he should have reached out to the Congress president. By releasing his resignation letter in the media, he is providing an advantage to the BJP."

Mr Khan alleged that the BJP will replace its East Delhi candidate Harsh Malhotra and Mr Lovely will be declared by the BJP party as its candidate from the constituency.

At a press conference later, Mr Lovely made it clear that he has only resigned from the party post and is not joining any political party.

Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said that Mr Lovely has responded to the voice of his conscience and the implosion within the Congress started the moment the party announced its Lok Sabha candidates.

Former Delhi minister Rajkumar Chauhan, who resigned from the party on Wednesday, said Mr Babaria should be removed as the AICC in-charge of Delhi.

"Lovely has resigned. I have also resigned. The Delhi in-charge told me to get out of a meeting. Remove Mr Babaria from

Delhi and save Congress." Mr Chauhan said.

Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit, the son of former chief minister Sheila Dikshit, said, "He is pained. There is a personal pain as a Congress worker and as Delhi Congress chief. I think attention needs to be paid to what he said."

Former Congress MLA Neeraj Basoya said, "Mr Lovely has resigned after seeing the sentiments of the Congress workers. Mr Babaria's style of functioning has created problems everywhere, be it Delhi or Haryana, and all the workers are angry."

AAP senior leader Saurabh Bharadwaj said it was an internal matter of their senior ally Congress.

"It won't be appropriate for me to comment on the matter. AAP is fighting on the four seats. It is contesting with full strength and we are hopeful that people will vote for the INDIA bloc candidates on all the seven seats in Delhi," the AAP leader said.

Senior BJP leader and former Union minister Harsh Vardhan said it was inevitable as the grass-roots workers had not accepted the AAP-Congress alliance.

SC to hear Kejriwal's petition against arrest in excise case today

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 28

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea by Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal challenging his arrest in a money laundering case linked to the excise policy "scam".

A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta is likely to hear the matter. In a rejoinder affidavit filed before the apex court on Saturday in response to the counter affidavit of Enforcement filed on plea challenging his arrest in case, Mr Kejriwal told the apex court that his "illegal arrest" in the case constitutes an unprecedented assault on the tenets of democracy based on "free and fair elections" and "federalism".

Mr Kejriwal said a level playing field, which is a prerequisite for "free and fair elections", has clearly been compromised with his illegal arrest. Through the affidavit, Mr Kejriwal said the mode, manner and timing of his arrest just before the Lok Sabha elections when the Model Code of Conduct had come into play, speaks volumes about the "arbitrariness" of the agency.



Arvind Kejriwal

It is a "classical case" of how the Centre has misused the ED and its wide powers under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act to "crush" the AAP and its leaders, the arrested CM claimed.

In a 55-page affidavit, Mr Kejriwal said that the ED has acted in a "most high-handed manner" and that he has always cooperated with the investigation.

Under the title "ED's style of functioning—sage counsel by this Court (Supreme Court)", Mr Kejriwal's affidavit said, "That recently in Pankaj Bansal vs Union of India & Ors. Criminal Appeal No. 3051-3052 of 2023, this Hon'ble Court sounded a word of caution to the ED in resounding words having far-reaching ramifications as under: This chronology of events speaks volumes and reflects rather poorly, if not negatively, on the ED's style of functioning."

Didi soft on terrorists: Nadda

■ Continued From Page 1 It is an example of a *majboor sarkar*. But we have seen a *mazboot sarkar* led by Modi Ji, which abolished Article 370 from J&K."

Taking a dig at the TMC slogan "Maa, Mati, Manush", Mr Nadda said, "Atrocities on women happened in Sandeshkhali. Their dignity was trampled, but Mamata Ji went all out trying to save Shahjahan Sheikh (the TMC strongman and main accused in the case). It is most unfortunate that women are not safe in Bengal under a woman CM."

On the Citizenship Amendment Act, the BJP president added, "Hindu

migrants came here from Bangladesh. Modi Ji gave them citizenship. But Mamata Ji opposes it. What is her relationship with the infiltrators towards whom she remains soft? This is appeasement politics, which we oppose."

Mr Nadda, however, raised Ms Banerjee's favourite slogan "Joy Bangla" to woo the voters at the end of his speech.

Later, at Ranaghat in Nadia, Mr Nadda attacked the Bengal CM over the corruption in the implementation of the Central housing scheme in the state.

The BJP chief argued: "Under the project, Modi Ji built homes for 52-lakh

people in Bengal. He sent funds from Delhi. But Mamata Ji used her seal on it and tried to pass it off as the Banglar Awas Yojana to mislead you. The funds were diverted somewhere else and utilisation certificates were not sent either. This type of theft happens here."

The TMC hit back at him for the violence against women. It alleged on X, "In @BJP4India's 'New India', full immunity is granted to those who sexually assault women & record videos. Today, the Centre allowed its ally & JD(S) MP @iPrajwalRevanna to flee the country after committing heinous crimes against women."

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STUDENTS IN TOP 1000
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AADITYA KUMAR
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SHORT TAKES

6 dead, over 20 hurt in accident in Unnao

Unnao, UP: Six people were killed and over 20 others were injured here on Sunday afternoon when a speeding truck collided head-on with a bus, ripping through one of its side, police said. The bus driver fled the spot after the accident, while the truck driver has been arrested, they said. The accident took place near Jamalpur village on the Hardoi-Unnao road in the Safipur police station area, they said. Doctors at the community health centre in Safipur referred the injured persons to the district hospital in Unnao and in Kanpur. Circle officer Safipur Rishikant Shukla said six people have died in the accident, while over 20 were injured. Mr Shukla also said the bus was carrying 35 passengers. Of the 20 injured persons, 11 have been sent to Kanpur, while 9 have been taken to the district hospital in Unnao. — PTI

Frieffight between 2 groups in Manipur

Imphal: A gunbattle broke out between village volunteers of the two warring communities in ethnic-strife torn Manipur's Imphal West district on Sunday morning, the police said. The incident took place as several dozens of armed men opened indiscriminate fire on Koutruk village in the periphery of Imphal Valley from the adjoining hills in Kangpokpi district, a police officer said. Some of the bullets reportedly pieced walls of the homes of the villagers, he said, adding women, children and the elderly are being evacuated to safe areas nearby. Locally made mortar shells known as "pumpi" are also being fired on the village, creating panic among its residents, he said. The village volunteers in Koutruk also retaliated, leading to a gunfight, he said, adding security personnel

2 cops killed, many hurt in Bihar mishap

Gopalganj: Two policemen were killed and over a dozen injured when the van in which they were travelling was hit by a speeding container truck from behind in Bihar's Gopalganj district on Sunday, police said. The incident took place near Barhima Bazar around noon when the police team was going to Supaul for the third phase of the LS poll duty. "The van carrying policemen on election duty had halted near Barhima Bazar when a speeding container truck rammed into it from behind. Two policemen died on the spot and over a dozen sustained injuries. "All injured have been admitted to the nearest government hospital and their condition is reported to be stable. The container has been seized by the local police," a statement issued by the office of the SP said. The deceased have been identified as Ashok Kumar Uraon (resident of Punea) and Pawan Mahto (resident of Bettiah) both constables of Bihar police. — PTI

■ Sent to police custody by special court till May 1

Mumbai cops arrest actor Sahil Khan over Mahadev betting app

BHAGWAN PARAB, with agency inputs
MUMBAI, APRIL 28

The Mumbai police has arrested actor Sahil Khan for his alleged involvement in the Mahadev betting app case. The Style and Xcuse Me actor was sent to police custody by the Mumbai special court till May 1.

Mr Khan was arrested by the Special Investigating Team (SIT) of the Mumbai police's cyber cell from Chhattisgarh's Jagdalpur district. The action comes after the Bombay high court rejected his petition for interim bail.

The Mumbai crime branch on Sunday produced Mr Khan before metropolitan magistrate court in Dadar following his arrest from Chhattisgarh. The



Sahil Khan

■ SAHIL was arrested by the Special Investigating Team (SIT) of the Mumbai police's cyber cell from Chhattisgarh's Jagdalpur district. The action comes after the Bombay high court rejected the actor's petition for interim bail.

Mumbai cyber cell's SIT sought his remand saying he was not cooperating in the investigation.

Mr Khan, who has worked in several films, is now a fitness expert and also popular as an influencer on social media.

The SIT has been conducting a probe into the alleged illegal transactions between certain financial and real estate firms in Chhattisgarh and

Maharashtra cyber cell for allegedly promoting the Indian Premier League (IPL) matches on the Fairplay betting app.

While the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is investigating the money laundering angle in the Mahadev betting app case, Mumbai police has registered a separate case against Sahil Khan and 31 others.

The ED has arrested nine persons so far as part of its probe in the money laundering case.

Notably, Chhattisgarh's Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB)/Economic Offence Wing (EOW) on April 24 said it has arrested two persons from New Delhi and Goa in connection with the alleged illegal operations of the Mahadev online gaming and betting application.

SC set to hear today Bengal govt's plea on Sandeshkhali

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 28

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a plea by the West Bengal government, challenging the Calcutta high court order that directed a CBI probe into allegations of crimes against women and land grabbing in Sandeshkhali.

A bench of Justices B.R. Gavai and Sandeep Mehta is likely to hear the matter. The HC's April 10, 2024 order demoralised the entire state machinery, including the police force, the state government said in its plea before the top court.

"The high court in a very generic order directed the state to provide the required support to the CBI without any guidelines that amounts to usurping the powers of the state police to investigate any cognisable offence in the Sandeshkhali area, even if the same is not related to the allegations levelled by the PIL petitioners," the plea said.

The CBI is already investigating the case of attack on Enforcement Directorate officials in Sandeshkhali, and has registered three FIRs in connection with the incidents on January 5 — the day on which ED officials were attacked by a mob when they went there to search the premises of now-suspended TMC leader Shahjahan Sheikh in connection with a ration distribution scam case.



Participants wearing different costumes take part in "majja" run during a marathon in Bengaluru on Sunday.

■ Protest over 'extortion' by political groups

People rush to Assam for goods as Nagaland stir hits normal life

Kohima, April 28: People made a beeline to neighbouring Assam to buy essential commodities as the indefinite shutdown of businesses to protest "extortion" by Naga political groups threw normal life out of gear in Nagaland, with the stir entering the third day on Sunday. The shutdown was called by the Dimapur Chamber of Commerce and Industries (DCCI) on Friday also to protest alleged government inaction to protect businesses, commercial hub of state.

The Confederation of Nagaland Chamber of Commerce and Industries (CNCCI) supported the call, following which shutdowns were imposed in other districts from Saturday. Markets remained shut across the state, as a result of which

■ THE CNCCI declared that indefinite statewide shutdown would be relaxed only for six hours on Monday to allow the public to procure essential items

people from Nagaland, especially those living along the inter-state boundary with Assam, reportedly went to the neighbouring state to buy essential commodities.

No restriction on the movement of people and traffic has been imposed. The CNCCI announced that the indefinite statewide shutdown would continue but would be relaxed only for six hours from noon to 6 pm on Monday to allow the public to procure essential items.

CNCCI president Khengkha Muru said the

decision was taken in consideration of the fact that the shutdown was imposed in many districts without giving prior notice to the people. The CNCCI urged the government to take steps to stop "unabated" extortion, and intimidation by underground groups.

State home commissioner Vikeyie Kenya has directed the police to take stringent measures as "such activities reflect adversely on the law enforcing agency as well as on the state". He instructed the district administrations and the police to report any violation of ceasefire ground rules to the ceasefire monitoring group for appropriate action and also continue arresting "underground cadres", found extorting, under the National Security Act. — PTI

Navy assists oil tanker as it comes under Houthi attack

30 members, including 22 Indians, reported to be safe

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 28

The Indian Navy said on Sunday that its Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team had boarded the Panama-flagged crude oil tanker Andromeda Star with Indian crew for risk assessment after it was hit by an anti-ship ballistic missile launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels in the Red Sea.

A total of 30 crew members, including 22 Indian nationals, are reported to be safe and the vessel is continuing its scheduled transit to the next port, said the Indian Navy.

The tanker is reported to be engaged in Russia-linked trade and is said to be en route from Primorsk, Russia, to Vadinar, India.

"A mission-deployed Indian Naval destroyer

INS Kochi responded to a maritime security incident involving an attack on Panama-flagged crude oil tanker MV Andromeda Star on April 26," said the Indian Navy in a statement.

The oil tanker was intercepted by the Indian Navy ship, and an aerial reconnaissance by helicopter was undertaken to assess the situation. The EOD team was deployed onboard the merchant vessel for residual risk assessment, said the Indian Navy.

The swift action of the Indian Navy ship reiterates the commitment and resolve of the Indian Navy in safeguarding the seafarers plying through the region, it said.

The US Central Command (CENTCOM) had on Saturday also confirmed a hit by the Houthi

rebels. In a statement, CENTCOM said that Iranian-backed Houthi terrorists launched anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs) from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen into the Red Sea towards MV Andromeda Star, a UK-owned and Panamanian-flagged Seychelles-operated vessel. "MV Andromeda Star reports minor damage but is continuing its voyage," said CENTCOM.

The Houthi rebels had also claimed responsibility for the attack.

The attack is among the latest strikes by the Iran-aligned Houthis, which have escalated since November. The Houthis have said they are targeting commercial ships from Israel, the US, and the UK in a show of solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.

Village guard killed in firing by militants

Search ops launched in J&K district

YUSUF JAMEEL
SRINAGAR, APRIL 28

A Village Defence Guard (VDG) was killed in a brief exchange of fire between the separatist militants and the security forces in a remote village of Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur district on Sunday.

Following the incident, the militants are learned to have moved into a dense forest prompting the security forces to launch a massive search operation to capture them alive or dead, the police sources in Jammu said.

Jammu's additional director-general of police (ADGP) Anand Jain while confirming the death of the VDG Muhammad Sharif said that he had sustained critical bullet injuries in the militant

firing after he joined the police and other security forces to take on them in the Basant Garh area of Udhampur.

"The police had received specific inputs about the movement of suspicious individuals in an area of Basant Garh and accordingly activated the security grid in the local police station limits," Mr Jain told reporters.

The exchange of fire took place when a joint party of the security forces and VDGs challenged the suspected militants around 7.45 am on Sunday, the police sources said, adding that in the brief encounter between the two sides Sharif, a resident of Udhampur's Khaned village, was injured and succumbed at a medical facility soon thereafter.

4 killed in J&K as tourist cab plunges into mountain stream

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, APRIL 28

Amid heavy downpour in the Kashmir Valley's northern Ganderbal district on Sunday evening, a SUV vehicle carrying a group of tourists skidded off the road and plunged into a mountain stream.

The police sources said four bodies have been retrieved whereas, at least, one person is still missing and is feared dead too. "All the passengers on board except the driver were reported to be tourists. The vehicle met

with the accident at Gagangir near the Sonamarg resort, about 90-km north of capital Srinagar," a police official said.

He added that soon after receiving information about the incident, a large-scale rescue operation was launched by the J&K police, Army's 34 Assam Rifles, traffic rural police, civil administration, locals, SDRF and NDRF. "The driver of the vehicle and another passenger have been rescued and evacuated to a safer place," police officer said.

₹600cr drugs seized from Pak boat, 14 crew arrested

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, AHMEDABAD, APRIL 28

The Narcotics Control Bureau along with Gujarat ATS and Indian Coast Guard on Sunday seized 86 kg of drugs worth ₹600 crore from a Pakistani boat and arrested 14 persons on board the vessel off the Gujarat coast.

This was the 11th such successful joint overnight operation in the past three years in the Arabian Sea, involving the three agencies - Indian Coast Guard and the Gujarat ATS and the NCB. Coast Guard ships and aircraft were deployed for the operation, the NCB said, adding that ICG ship Rajratna was used to identify the suspect boat with the help of central anti-drug agency and ATS officials on board.

No amount of evasive manoeuvring tactics employed by the drug-laden boat could save it from the swift and strong ICG ship Rajratna. The ship's specialist team embarked on the suspect boat and, after thorough checks, confirmed the presence of a sizable amount of narcotics, the Indian Coast Guard said. The Pakistani boat along with its 14-member crew were being brought to Porbandar for further investigations, it added.

A total of 78 packets weighing 86 kg were recovered from the Pakistani fishing boat, Gujarat DGP Vikas Sahay said.

Cong jolt as chief Lovely quits

■ Continued from Page 1
stepped down from the post. Earlier, he had resigned in 2015, when the AAP swept the Assembly polls, winning 67 out of 70 seats.

Mr Lovely's resignation comes on the heels of former city minister Rajkumar Chauhan's resignation, with insiders saying that more leaders will follow suit. Like Mr Chauhan, Mr Lovely also cited issues related to the functioning of Mr Babaria and made allegations against his conduct.

In his resignation letter sent to the Congress president, Mr Lovely said, "It is with a heavy heart that I write the present letter to you, finding myself handicapped and unable to continue as the president of the Delhi party unit."

Mr Lovely said: "The Delhi Congress was against an alliance with a party that was formed on the sole basis of levelling false, fabricated and malafide corruption charges against the Congress party... Half of the Cabinet ministers (of the party) are presently in jail on corruption charges."

"Despite that, the party (the Congress) made a decision to ally with the AAP in Delhi. We respected the party's final decision... I even went to the extent of visiting Mr Kejriwal's residence on the night of his arrest along with Subash Chopra and Sandeep Dikshit, despite the same being against my position on the matter."

Mr Lovely also criticised Mr Kumar for heaping praise on Mr Kejriwal, who is behind bars in a money laundering case. He said: "The candidate from North-East Delhi has also been giving media bytes falsely praising the Delhi CM, in direct contravention of the party line and the local party workers' beliefs... In direct contradiction to the true factual position and the mis-

ery of Delhi citizens, he endorsed the false propaganda of the AAP in regard to the supposed works done by them in the education, health, road and electricity sectors."

Mr Lovely also pointed fingers at the conduct of Mr Babbria. He said: "Since my appointment as DPCC president, the AICC general secretary incharge of Delhi has not allowed me to make any senior appointments in the DPCC. My request for the appointment of a veteran leader as media head of the DPCC was blatantly rejected. To date, he has not allowed the DPCC to appoint all block presidents in the city. Resultantly, more than 150 blocks in Delhi do not presently have a block president."

Latching on to the opportunity to attack the Opposition, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said that Mr Lovely has responded to the voice of his conscience and the implosion within the Congress started the moment the party announced its Lok Sabha candidates.

"No patriot can stand with a person who talks about dividing the country and who stands with the enemies of the nation. I think this line will be drawn further as many others are raising their voices against the way the Congress has distributed its tickets," he said.

Mr Lovely was first elected as an MLA in 1998 from Gandhi Nagar. He served as the minister of transport, education, urban development and revenue in the Congress government in Delhi.

The Congress had fielded Mr Lovely against the BJP's Gautam Gambhir and the AAP's Atishi from the East Delhi constituency in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

BJP and Cong 'conspired' to weaken BSP, says Mayawati

■ Continued from Page 1
would not be smooth sailing in the general election this time for the BJP.

Ms Mayawati accused the BJP of politicising the Central agencies such as the CBI, Enforcement Directorate and the income-tax department to target its adversaries. She said that politicisation of the Central agencies was also done under the Congress regime at the Centre.

She attacked the BJP for relying on freebies to come to power at the Centre and said that young people needed jobs, not free rations.

She also demanded reservation of jobs in the private sector for the SC, ST and OBC people.

The BSP has fielded candidates in half a dozen Lok Sabha constituencies in Madhya Pradesh in the coming polls. This was the second visit to the state by Ms Mayawati.

She had earlier visited Rewa in Madhya Pradesh on April 19 to campaign for the party.

‘Cong-led Opp. wants weak govt to make easy profit’

■ Continued from Page 1
Shivaji Maharaj and Kitter Rani Channamma, whose administration and patriotism inspire us even today," the Prime Minister said.

Recalling the contribution of the erstwhile Mysuru royal family, the PM said, "The Congress' shehzada statements were intentional, aimed at votebank politics and appeasement."

"Shahzada spoke ill about rajas and maharajas, but his mouth was locked regarding the 'atyachar' that nawabs, Nizams, sultans and badshas committed," he said, adding that Mr Gandhi cannot remember Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's oppressions, who desecrated a number of our temples and destroyed them.

Tearing into the Opposition bloc, Mr Modi said, "The Congress is happily making alliances with parties that praise Aurangzeb... They don't remember people who destroyed our religious places and indulged in the killing of cows. They don't remember the nawabs, who played a role in the partition of India."

He said that the Congress' appeasement mindset has come out in the open before the country and the same reflects in their manifesto.

On the issue of inheritance tax, Mr Modi said, "The BJP is working on increasing the assets of the people, but Congress's shehzada (referring to Mr Gandhi) and his sis-

ter (Priyanka Gandhi Vadra), both are announcing that if they come to power, they will do an 'X-ray' of the country."

"They will X-ray your property, bank lockers, lands, vehicles, also 'streedhan' and ornaments of women, gold, and 'mangalsutra'. These people will raid every house and capture your assets. After capturing it, they are talking about redistributing it. They want it to be given to their loved vote-bank... will you allow this loot to happen?" he asked.

"I want to warn the Congress," Mr Modi said. "Let go of this intention. Until Modi is alive, I will not allow it..." Former chief ministers B.S. Yediyurappa and Jagadish Shettar, the BJP's candidates from Belgaum (Belagavi) and Chikkodi, were among those present.

Attacking the Congress over the deteriorating law and order situation since Mr Siddaramaiah became the chief minister of Karnataka, Mr Modi pointed at the atrocities against an adivasi woman in Belagavi and the killing of a Jain monk in Chikkodi.

Citing the recent murder of Hubballi student Neha Hiremath at her college premises, he said the family sought action, but the Congress government gave priority to appeasement. "For them, the lives of daughters like Neha have no value. They think only about their vote bank... Even when there was a bomb blast

in a Bengaluru cafe, the Congress government did not take it seriously initially; they even termed it a cylinder blast."

Stepping up his attack, Mr Modi alleged that the Congress is taking support from the banned PFI. "To win one seat in Wayanad, are you surrendering to them? The BJP has banned PFI and has put its leaders behind bars," Mr Modi said.

In Uttara Kannada, Mr Modi raked up the Ram temple issue to target the Congress. He said that those who turned down the invitation for the consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya will be rejected by the people in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

Mr Modi said a decision on building the Ram temple should have been taken the very next day of the country's independence.

Targeting the Congress on the issue, he alleged that the "same forces" tried till the last minute to ensure that the Ram temple was not built and had approached the court on the last day as well.

"The Congress and its coterie tried for 70 years that the Ram temple in Ayodhya is not built," Mr Modi said, adding, "While the Congress and its coterie rejected the invitation by the Ram temple trustees to attend the consecration event, the Ansari family, which fought against Ram temple, attended the consecration of

the temple and were present throughout the event." In Devanagare, Mr Modi claimed that the INDIA bloc has come up with a "formula" under which the parties in the opposition alliance will get the PM's post for one year each, in case they come to power.

He claimed: "The INDIA bloc has come up with a formula to make everyone happy. If they get the opportunity to govern for five years, they have told their alliance partners that each will get one year of prime ministership. This means one year, one PM, next year, second, then third, fourth and fifth..."

Wondering aloud what will happen to the country and the people if this becomes the situation, the Prime Minister said, "Do you see the good of the country happening in such a situation? Do you see anything good in it for you and your children? Will you waste your vote for such an arrangement?"

In Ballari, Mr Modi said that when India is moving forward, some countries and organisations do not like it, as they want India and its government to remain weak so they can take advantage of it.

When the country is moving fast, some countries and some institutions don't like it. There are many people who don't like a strong India. They want the country and its government to be weak so that they can make profits easily," Mr Modi said, addressing a public meeting.

SHORT TAKES

BJP C'garh pick gets EC notice over poster

Raipur: The BJP candidate from Korba Lok Sabha constituency in Chhattisgarh Saroj Pandey — also a sitting Rajya Sabha member — has been served a notice by the Election Commission for violation of model code of conduct (MCC), after her photograph allegedly appeared on the posters and banners at a religious event. Sources in the CEO office said here on Sunday that Ms Pandey who is pitted against her principal rival and Congress candidate Jyotsna Mahant — the incumbent MP — by the BJP in Korba seat, has been asked by the EC to reply to the notice by Monday. The notice was served based on the complaint lodged with the commission by the Congress. The Congress alleged that BJP had put up banners and posters of Ms Pandey and ministers of the Vishnu Deo Sai government for a religious programme of Dharendra Shastri in Chirmiri town under Mahendragarh Assembly constituency.

Amid row, Bhagwat backs reservations

Hyderabad: Amid the BJP and RSS coming under attack from the Opposition that they are against reservations, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday said the organisation has always supported reservations as per the Constitution. Addressing a programme at an educational institution here, he referred to a video in circulation and said it falsely claims that the RSS is opposed to reservation. Ever since the reservation came into existence, the Sangh has completely supported reservation as per the Constitution, he said. Mr Bhagwat's reiteration came in the wake of a war of words taking place between the BJP and Congress over reservations. He had said in Nagpur last year that reservations should continue as long as there is discrimination in society. Telangana CM A. Revanth Reddy had on Saturday alleged that RSS-BJP are opposed to reservation. — PTI

TMC worker killed over internal feud

Kolkata: A Trinamul Congress (TMC) worker was beaten to death in an internal party feud at Baguihati in the city on Saturday night. The victim, Sanjib Das alias Potla, was a resident of ward no 8 under the Bidhannagar Municipal Corporation. His family members alleged that he was called out by his rivals in the TMC and was attacked on the road with bricks first. Later the youth was beaten with rods leaving him dead. The body was sent for post mortem. The cops however suspect that Sanjib had a syndicate dispute which perhaps cost his life. The deceased had 11 cases against him at the Baguihati police station.

BJP TO SUPPORT 'FRIENDS' IN FRAY FOR 3 J&K SEATS

AGE CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR, APRIL 28

The BJP on Sunday said that it would extend its support to its "friends" in the three Lok Sabha constituencies of the Kashmir Valley. It also, once again, appealed to the electorate in the predominantly Muslim Valley "not to trust" the Congress party and its allies and "stay away from them" in the ongoing elections. "The BJP has a good relationship with the other like-minded parties in the Kashmir Valley. We have some good and trusted friends here, and we will extend our support to them," the BJP's J&K unit president Ravinder Raina told reporters. The BJP has fielded candidates only for the Udhampur and Jammu seats in Jammu and Kashmir, the polling was held in the first and second phases of the election on April 19 and 26, respectively. Union home minister Amit Shah, while speaking at an election rally at Paloura in Jammu, hinted at the BJP's not fielding its candidates for the three Lok Sabha seats in Kashmir when he said that the saffron party was not in a hurry to see "lotus bloom" in the scenic valley. He had said, "We are not going to conquer Kashmir as is being projected by our adversaries."

Modi spreading fear after Ph-2 'washout', says Cong

'PM supporting JD-S candidate accused of sexually abusing woman'

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, APRIL 28

The Congress targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday for his political comments and accused him of indulging in "fear mongering" as a "desperate" measure as it faces "washout" in the second phase of the Lok Sabha elections.

The party also criticised the Prime Minister for his political support to the JD(S) candidate from Hassan Lok Sabha seat, Prajwal Revanna, accused of sexually abusing women after several videos surfaced purportedly involving him. Using the opportunity to pin down the Bharatiya



Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah, his deputy D.K. Shivakumar and others protest against the Centre over release of drought relief in Bengaluru on Sunday. — PTI

Janata Party, the Congress has questioned the Prime Minister's policies of "Mahila Samman."

The Congress also accused the BJP of giving

clean chit to accused persons in various scams and scandals.

"Why did the PM campaign for the Hassan video perpetrator? Is the BJP

washing machine at full spin for Janardhan Reddy? Why has the BJP stopped the extra 5kg of rice from reaching poor families? Instead of lying and fear mongering, these are the questions the PM should answer," the Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said.

"Prajwal Revanna, a sitting JD(S) MP and the NDA candidate from Hassan seat, has been accused of creating thousands of sexually explicit videos of women. The MP has now fled the country. Why has the PM, so often delivering platitudes on 'Mahila Samman and Nari Shakti', endorsed Prajwal Revanna," Mr Ramesh asked.

Modi to hold 6 back-to-back rallies in next 2 days in Maha

BHAGWAN PARAB
MUMBAI, APRIL 28

The Lok Sabha election fever is at its peak in Maharashtra, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi set to hold as many as six rallies in the state in the next two days. While the Opposition claimed it was a sign that the BJP was in panic mode, the saffron party said PM's rallies are part of its strategy to reach out to the voters.

Mr Modi will address rallies in Solapur, Satara, Pune, Madha, Dharashiv and Latur Lok Sabha constituencies in the next couple of days. The six rallies come on the backdrop of him holding a big rally in Kolhapur on Saturday.

Maharashtra BJP chief Chandra Shekhar Bawankule said Mr Modi would address rallies in Solapur, Satara and Pune



Narendra Modi

on April 29, followed by rallies in Madha, Dharashiv and Latur on April 30.

Voting for the 48 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra is being held in five phases from April 19 to May 20. The PM has already held five rallies for the first two phases of the polling in the state. In the first phase, he held three rallies for five seats and in the second phase, he addressed two rallies

for eight seats.

According to political observers, the increased number of PM's rallies shows that the BJP and its allies are anxious about their winning chances and are relying only on Mr Modi's charisma to win the polls in the face of a stiff challenge posed by the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance comprising Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP (SP) and Congress.

Maharashtra is one of the most important states in the Lok Sabha polls as it has the second highest number of seats (48) after Uttar Pradesh. In the 2019 polls, the BJP had won 41 seats along with the then undivided Shiv Sena.

The BJP won 23 seats and Shiv Sena won 18. The saffron party was hopeful that the split in the Shiv Sena and NCP would further strengthen its position in Maharashtra.

Shah: BJP backs quota, won't let it be scrapped

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA
with agency inputs
NEW DELHI/MAINPURI/
ETAWAH, APRIL 28

Assuring reservations as a "Modi guarantee", the Union home minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the BJP would neither remove quota for SCs, STs and OBCs nor would it allow anyone to do so.

Addressing a rally in support of Rajveer Singh — the BJP candidate from Etah-Kasganj — he alleged that the Opposition parties ignored people from backward communities that have been granted their rights by Narendra Modi after he became Prime Minister.

Taking a dig at the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, he said, "Rahul Gandhi says that if the BJP gets 400 seats, it will remove reservation. I want to say that we had a full majority for two terms but Narendra Modi



Union home minister Amit Shah during a public meeting in Uttar Pradesh's Mainpuri district on Sunday. — PTI

is a supporter of reservation."

"I want to say that it is a Modi guarantee that neither will the BJP remove reservations for SCs, STs and OBCs nor will it allow anyone to do so," Mr Shah said.

The home minister also hit out at the Opposition for keeping the Ram tem-

ple issue "hanging" and said the public has to choose between "those who opened fire at Karsevaks and those who built the Ram temple".

"The people who did not go to the consecration ceremony, they know that they are the people who shot at karsevaks," he added.

Both working 'hand-in-glove' with BJP, says Bengal CM Advised Cong not to ally with CPM: Didi

RAJIB CHOWDHURI
KOLKATA, APRIL 28

West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee revealed on Sunday that she had sought to convince the Congress not to ally with the CPI(M) and share seats among themselves in the Lok Sabha elections. Ms Banerjee, however, claimed that the grand old party ignored her suggestion.

Addressing a rally at Sujapur in Malda, the

Trinamul Congress supreme said, "Congress does not have even a seat in the Assembly here. I always wanted to help them. I told them not to forge alliance with the CPI(M) and offered them two seats."

Ms Banerjee also alleged, "But they didn't listen to me, went with the CPI(M) and shared the seats. Do you want me to surrender to CPI(M)?"

She once again took the credit of creating and naming the Opposition

parties' forum, INDIA.

Ms Banerjee, however, appealed to the voters not to cast their ballots for either the Congress or the Left, which are partners of INDIA bloc. "Don't get into the politics of splitting votes, if you want to tackle the BJP in Delhi."

She added, "This is not the election to determine the next Bengal government but to topple Modi Babu's gaddi in Delhi. But for this, votes must be consolidated. The Congress

has fielded candidates because the BJP has two eyes here — Congress and CPI(M). Same is the case with Raiganj and Murshidabad."

Ms Banerjee added, "If the BJP wins due to a split in votes, it is the people who will suffer. No matter what they say, do not fall for their trap. CPI(M) leaders are becoming BJP MPs and friends. They have tortured our workers here in Malda too. I do not forgive the torturers."

SP has advantage in Ph-3, BJP won't win single seat: Akhilesh

Sambhal (UP), April 28: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday claimed the BJP will not win any seat in the third phase of the Lok Sabha polls and that the ruling party misunderstood the "direction of the wind" when it made its slogan of "400 paar".

Addressing a rally in Sambhal, Yadav also said the Samajwadi Party had an advantage in the third phase, saying that elections on May 7 will be held between Sambhal and "his home" in Etawah and Mainpuri.

"BJP people did not know the direction of the wind, so they kept saying '400 paar' (winning over 400 seats) and when they realised the public sentiment after the two phases of the election, BJP forgot its slogan," the former UP chief minister said.

"The wind that came from the west (western UP) in the first phase will change the BJP government. The similar trend was seen in the second phase also. People are not accepting the BJP," the SP chief said.

"It is now your responsibility in the third phase,"



Akhilesh Yadav

he said in the rally in support of party candidate Zia ur Rahman Barq.

"These elections are being held from this part till our home. Netaji (SP founder Mulayam Singh Yadav) has also been an MP from this area (Sambhal). Voting is going to take place from here to Mainpuri. I can say that the BJP is not going to open its account in any Lok Sabha seat here," Mr Yadav said.

Mulayam Singh, Mr Yadav's father, had served Sambhal as an MP twice in 1998 and 1999.

"Next to you, Samajwadi Party is winning in Rampur and Moradabad and if all the Lok Sabha seats nearby are winning, then will the people of Sambhal be left behind," he said. — PTI

BJP banks on 'Modi guarantee' to boost MP polling in final 2 rounds

RABINDRA NATH
CHOUDHURY
BHOPAL, APRIL 28

With the first two phases of the Lok Sabha elections in Madhya Pradesh ending in low polling, the BJP on Sunday launched a drive to enrol the prospective beneficiaries of the new health scheme, pledged in its "Sankalp Patra," to boost voting in the "crucial" final two rounds of polling in the state, scheduled to be held on May 7 and May 13.

Chief minister Mohan Yadav launched the cam-

paign to generate awareness among the people about the proposed "Ayushman Bharat Vistar Yojana (extended scheme), envisaging free medical treatment up to ₹5 lakhs to the people aged above 70 years, by filling out forms for the four senior citizens in a colony here.

"The new health scheme for the elderly is one of Modi's guarantees to be fulfilled after Prime Minister Narendra Modi gets a third term as PM in the general elections. It is a historic decision by Mr Modi to provide health

benefits to people aged above 70 years," Mr Yadav said, while filling up the forms of the four prospective beneficiaries of the scheme in Shastri Nagar colony.

He said that people aged above 70 across the state would be enrolled in the proposed scheme in the coming days.

"The BJP always worked for the uplift of the poor. Modiji has launched various welfare schemes to provide houses, cooking gas, piped water, and free treatment up to ₹5 lakhs to the poor," he said.

Pawar: BJP wants 400+ seats to change Constitution

SONU SHRIVASTAVA
MUMBAI, APRIL 28

NCP founder Sharad Pawar on Sunday claimed that BJP wants to win 400 seats of Lok Sabha to change the Constitution of India. Mr Pawar also expressed his concern over the way the country is being run by Prime Minister Narendra and his colleagues. The NCP founder addressed a campaign rally in Pune's

Saswad tehsil, which is part of the Baramati Lok Sabha constituency where his daughter Supriya Sule is contesting against her sister-in-law and NDA candidate Sunetra Pawar.

The campaign rally was also attended by Shiv Sena (UBT) chief spokesperson Sanjay Raut along with other MVA leaders.

Attacking the Prime Minister, the veteran politician said that Mr Modi is behaving like a



Sharad Pawar

dictator. "Narendra Modi is following the path of dictatorship. He is going to ruin the democracy in the

country. The dictator will be removed like a stone," Mr Pawar said.

The 83-year-old leader said that this LS election is different from previous elections and will decide the fate and future recourse of the country.

"Have the elections of Panchayat Samitis, Zilla Parishads and municipal corporations been conducted? There have been no elected bodies in existence for a long time. They

(ruling parties) have not conducted the election for two years. This is just the beginning and in coming days, the rulers may start thinking not to hold elections of Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha as well," Mr Pawar said.

Referring to Mr Modi's earlier speeches where he had mentioned Mr Pawar as his mentor, the NCP founder said, "In Delhi, he (Modi) said Sharad Pawar had helped the farmers."

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	73,730.16	-0.82
Nifty 50	22,419.95	-0.67
S&P 500*	5,101.94	1.06
Dollar (₹)	83.35	-0.02
Pound Sterling (₹)	104.32	-0.05
Euro (₹)	89.48	-0.11
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	71,486▼14	0.02
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	89.13	0.13
IN 10-Yr bond yield	7.199	-0.005
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.686	-0.02

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Ircon JV secures new rail project worth ₹1,200 cr

State-owned Ircon on Sunday said it has secured a railway project worth about ₹1,200 crore in a joint venture. “Ircon under its joint venture with Dineshchandra R Agrawal Infracon has been awarded the letter of approval letter of acceptance for the construction of Kottavalasa-Koraput doubling project from Shivalingapuram Station to Borraguhalu Station,” the railway PSU said.



IMD forecast puts agri input cos. in fast lane

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, APRIL 28

Agri input stocks have rallied on above normal monsoon rain forecast by weather forecasting agencies IMD and Skymet in the month of April. The gainers included Coromandel International, Kaveri Seed, Shakti Pump, RCF, Deepak Fertilisers and Petrochemicals, Uniphos, Rallis India, V S Tillers Tractors, Tata Chemicals, GNFC and GSFC among others.

Last week some of these stocks made hefty gains of 4 to 6 per cent on strong investors' demand.

“Kaveri Seed share price zoomed recently due to IMD’s prediction of above-normal rainfall in the range of 106 per cent from June to September raising hopes of a good rabi season overall and as the company’s earnings depend on the rabi season significantly,” said Sandeep Abhange, research analyst at LKP Securities.

Kaveri Seed has gained 28.49 per cent rising from ₹684.65 to ₹879.75 since April 15, 2024.

“Kaveri Seeds stock price surged around 4 per cent on last Friday and hit an all time high of ₹888 per share,” Abhange said. Shakti Pumps has risen from ₹1,415.75 on April 15 to ₹1,791.10 as on April 26, 2024, a gain of 25.51 per cent.

Fertiliser and agro-chemicals stocks have also made good gains during the last fortnight on above normal monsoon rain forecast led by GNFC (5.1 per cent), GSFC (10.5



● THE SECOND STAGE forecast by IMD also provides quantitative and probabilistic forecasts for the country as a whole and the spatial distribution and probabilistic forecasts of rainfall to be above normal.

per cent), RCF (8.74 per cent), Coromandel International (4.56 per cent), Deepak Fertiliser (15.48 per cent) and National Fertilizers (8.59 per cent).

The second stage forecast issued by Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) around end of May which consists of update for the seasonal rainfall along with the probabilistic forecasts for the seasonal rainfall over the four homogeneous regions of India (north-west India, central India, south Peninsula and northeast India) are quite significant

The second stage forecast by IMD also provides quantitative and probabilistic forecasts for the country as a whole and the spatial distribution and probabilistic forecasts of rainfall to be above normal, normal, and below normal over the country during June.

EQUITY MARKETS GET IMPACTED ON EXPECTATIONS OF MONETARY POLICY

Mumbai, April 28: Equity markets are impacted more by the expectations of future monetary policy than the policy rate surprises on the day of announcement of the policy by the Reserve Bank of India, said an analysis.

According to a working paper prepared by RBI officials, the regulatory and development measures which are announced along with the monetary policy too impact the stock markets. “...equity markets are affected more by the changes in the market’s expectations of future monetary policy (path factor) than the policy rate surprise (target factor) which is in agreement with the conventional thinking that equity markets are forward-looking,” the paper said.

The volatility in equity markets on the day of policy announcement, it said, “is affected by both target and path factors, as markets digest the policy announcements and traders adjust their portfolios throughout the day”.

RBI Working Paper on ‘Equity Markets and Monetary Policy Surprises’ is prepared by department of economic and policy research of RBI.

The paper analyses the impact of monetary policy announcements on returns and volatility in the BSE Sensex by decomposing changes in overnight indexed swap rates on announcement days into target and path factors. — PTI

Many do informal work or take risks at entrepreneurship: Goyal

Indian youth spend time to acquire skills

New Delhi, April 28: Indian youths spend more time acquiring skills and trying hands at entrepreneurship, RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) member Ashima Goyal has said.

There is steady improvement in job creation in the country with the strong growth recovery, Goyal added.

“Youth unemployment is higher for the more qualified, but they also earn higher wages.

“Therefore, youths are spending more time acquiring skills and in job search,” she said.

Goyal was responding to a question on the International Labour Organization (ILO) report – which showed that in 2022, the share of unemployed youths in India’s total unemployed population was nearly 83 per cent.



● GOYAL POINTED out that the ILO report also shows that youth unemployment has been falling in the recent period, it was 17.5 per cent in 2019 and 10 per cent in 2023.

“Unemployment is highest for younger age brackets but it is transient...While they wait, they do informal work or take risks at entrepreneurship, where a few do very well,” she added.

Goyal pointed out that the ILO report also shows that youth unemployment has been falling in the recent period, it was 17.5 per cent in 2019 and 10 per cent in 2023.

She said that in 2022,

unemployment was highest for the age group 20-24 at 16.9 per cent but was at the aggregate average for the 30-34 age group.

Noting that this period (2022) includes the pandemic-related disruptions, Goyal said there is steady improvement with the strong growth recovery.

“Policy can contribute the most by increasing opportunities for youth through better health, infrastructure, insurance, education and skill acqui-

sition facilities,” she said. On foreign direct investment, Goyal said advanced economies are inducing capital to come back to home countries to enhance economic security. She said India has been correcting investment treaties that were biased in favour of foreign capital.

Goyal argued that while FDI has many benefits it also has costs. “So, rather than pay FDI to come here, or give it special favours, it is better to work on making it more attractive for all types of firms to produce in India,” she said.

Goyal added that these types of measures include further progress in ease of doing business, regulatory simplification, policy consistency, speeding up Indian courts, lowering logistics and other costs and so on.

Banks’ credit growth, profitability to remain robust

New Delhi, April 28: Indian banks’ credit growth, profitability and asset quality would remain robust in the current fiscal reflecting strong economic growth, but they may be compelled to slow down their loan growth as deposits are not growing at a similar pace, S&P Global Ratings has said.

In the Asia-Pacific 2Q 2024 Banking Update, S&P Global Ratings director SSEA Nikita Anand said the agency expects the sector’s strong credit growth to moderate to 14 per cent

in FY25, from 16 per cent in FY24, if deposit growth, especially retail deposits, remain tepid.

She said there is a deterioration in loan-to-deposit ratio is every bank, with loan growth being 2-3 percentage points higher than deposit growth.

“We expect banks to bring down their loan growth in FY25 and bring it in line with deposit growth. If banks do not do that, they would be paying higher to get wholesale funding, which will impact profitability,” she

● LOAN GROWTH has been led by private sector banks which see around 17-18% growth, public sector banks on the other hand see loan growth in the range of 12-14%.

said at a recent webinar of S&P Global Ratings.

Generally, loan growth has been led by private sector banks which see around 17-18 per cent growth, public sector banks on the other hand

see loan growth in the range of 12-14 per cent.

Anand said Indian banks can support loan growth of as high as 15-20 per cent over three years without need for raising capital.

“For India, we expect credit growth, profitability and asset quality to remain robust reflecting strong economic growth. Loan growth is 1.5 times of nominal gross domestic product growth, while deposit growth is in line with nominal gross domestic product growth,” Anand said. — PTI

WORLD

SHORT TAKES

UK BORDER FORCE STAFF HEATHROW STIR FROM TODAY

London, April 28: Border Force staff at Britain’s busiest airport, Heathrow, will go on strike for four days from Monday, in protest over changes to their working conditions.

The Public and Commercial Services union said more than 300 members of staff would stop working in terminals 2, 3, 4 and 5. A separate union, Unite, has said its workers will go on strike at Heathrow from May 7 to May 13 over plans to outsource hundreds of roles.

Surging inflation and a tough cost of living crisis has led to repeated bouts of strike.

IRELAND LOOKS TO SEND ASYLUM SEEKERS TO UK

Dublin, April 28: Ireland is looking to amend the law to allow the return of asylum seekers to the United Kingdom, broadcaster RTE said on Sunday after an influx over the border with Northern Ireland.

Dublin’s minister of justice Helen McEntee, who visits London on Monday, told a parliamentary committee this week that she estimates 80 per cent of those applying for asylum in the republic came over the land border with Northern Ireland.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak told Sky News it was evidence that London’s plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda is acting as a deterrent.

“What it shows, I think, is that the deterrent is... already having an impact because people are worried about coming here,” he said.

A spokesperson for Ireland’s PM Simon Harris said the leader “does not comment on the migration policies of any other country but he is very clear about the importance of protecting the integrity of the migration system in Ireland.”

“Ireland has a rules-based system that must always be applied firmly and fairly.”

He added that the Irish PM had asked his justice minister “to bring proposals to Cabinet next week to amend existing law regarding the designation of safe ‘third countries’.

Police clear pro-Palestinian camps at 3 US universities

About 100 people detained as forces in riot gear load tents onto trucks

Boston, April 28: Police detained nearly 200 people at three US universities on Saturday as they cleared pro-Palestinian encampments, in the latest campus clashes triggered by protests over Israel’s war against Hamas.

On the East Coast, police in Boston detained about 100 people while clearing a protest camp at Northeastern University, with social media posts showing security forces in riot gear and officers loading tents onto the back of a truck.

The action was taken after some protesters resorted to “virulent anti-Semitic slurs, including ‘Kill the Jews,’” Northeastern University said in a statement on X.

On the opposite side of the country, Arizona State University police arrested 69 people for trespassing after the group set up an “unauthorised encampment” on campus.

Arizona State officials said a protest group — “most of whom were not ASU students, faculty or staff” — had set up a camp on Friday and then ignored repeated orders to disperse. And in the US heartland, police at Indiana University arrested 23 people as they cleared a camp



Protesters unfurl huge Palestinian flag from Hilton Hotel outside of White House Correspondents Dinner, in Washington DC, on Saturday. — Agencies

pus protest camp, the *Indiana Daily Student* newspaper reported.

Police with shields, batons and other riot gear bro-

ke through a line of protesters who had linked arms, tackling those who did not move.

Push for truce on the fast track

Jerusalem, Cairo, Tel Aviv, Beirut, Washington, April 28: Diplomatic efforts increased on Sunday to reach a long sought-after truce and hostage-release deal in Gaza, as Israel carried out further air strikes and shelling on the war-battered territory.

A Hamas delegation will visit Cairo on Monday for talks aimed at securing a ceasefire. A senior Qatari official has urged both Israel and Hamas to show “more commitment and more seriousness” in cease-fire negotiations.

French foreign minister Stephane Sejourné on Sunday urged calm in Lebanon during his second visit to the country since cross-border tensions with Israel flared on the back of the war in Gaza.

US secretary of state Antony Blinken flew out Sunday to Saudi Arabia on a new bid to work with Arab leaders to reach a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas as public pressure grows. Global opposition to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza has also been growing, with world leaders and aid groups warning that a looming Israeli invasion of the southernmost city of Rafah would lead to civilian casualties. — Agencies

calling for a ceasefire in Israel’s war with Hamas, as well as for colleges to sever ties with the country. — AFP

Biden pokes fun at Trump’s age, ‘Stormy’ weather

Washington, April 28: US President Joe Biden roasted his predecessor and political rival, Donald Trump and poked fun at his age at the annual dinner for Washington’s political and media elites, saying “I am a grown man running against a six-year-old”.

The White House Correspondents’ Association (WHCA) dinner on Saturday night provided the platform for Biden, 81, to continue his criticism of Trump, 77, with cutting humour.

The high-profile event came against the backdrop of growing protests over Biden’s handling of the Israel-Hamas war.

“Of course, the 2024 election’s in full swing and, yes, age is an issue: I’m a grown man running against a 6-year-old, Biden said in a roughly 10-minute speech, referring to ex-president Trump, whom he called Sleepy Don.

Speaking to an audience



Joe Biden, Donald Trump

of 3,000 journalists, celebrities and politicians, Biden added, “Age is the only thing we have in common. My vice president actually endorses me.”

“Donald has had a few tough days lately. You might call it stormy weather,” Biden said, an oblique reference to Stormy Daniels, a porn actress who claims she had an affair and received a hush-money payment in the days before the 2016 election, a deal at the centre of his New York trial. He went on to draw a contrast between his reelection campaign, which has ramped up since his State of the Union address last month, and that of Trump. — PTI

After India no-show, Musk lands in China

Shanghai, Beijing, April 28: Tesla CEO Elon Musk arrived in Beijing on Sunday on an unannounced visit, where he is expected to meet senior officials to discuss the rollout of Full Self-Driving software and permission to transfer data overseas, according to a person with knowledge of the matter.

Chinese state media reported that he met Premier Li Qiang in Beijing, during which Li told Musk that Tesla’s development in China could be regarded as a successful example of US-China economic and trade cooperation.

Musk confirmed his meeting with the premier on Sunday with a post on social media platform X. “Honoured to meet with

Premier Li Qiang. We have known each other now for many years, since early Shanghai days,” Musk posted, with a picture with the premier.

Tesla reached an accord with Chinese authorities for a plant in Shanghai, its first outside the US, in 2018. The US electric vehicle maker rolled out Full Self-Driving, or FSD, the most autonomous version of its Autopilot software, four years ago but has yet to make it available in China, its second-largest market globally, despite customers urging it to do so.

Musk said this month Tesla may make FSD available to customers in China “very soon”, in response to a query on social media platform X. — Reuters

THE ASIAN AGE

29 APRIL 2024

Find ways to make voting foolproof & transparent

A fool-proof voting and counting mechanism forms the foundation of electoral democracy and hence it is natural for the people to raise a doubt or two about the existing one at any point in time. Rigging the elections by various means including capturing of booths was a constant threat that undermined elections in the past. India has addressed those issues to a greater level of satisfaction by various measures, including the introduction of voter ID cards and optimal deployment of the law enforcement machinery.

The possibility of tampering with the electronic voting machines (EVMs) is a matter of concern today, as is evidenced by petitions that keep coming up in courts at regular intervals pointing to the possibilities of mischief. Courts have not yet bought the theories petitioners brought to them doubting the performance of the machines, but have used them as occasions to suggest further improvements in the existing system. The Supreme Court has followed this pattern when it dismissed last week the petition that sought 100 per cent coverage by Voter Verified Paper Audit Trails (VVPATs) of the Lok Sabha election.

The court ruled out the possibility of the return of the paper ballot, which is still being used in various democratic countries. It also refused to accede to the demand to raise the limit of VVPAT verification to 100 per cent from the present five per cent. However, it has directed the Election Commission of India to add two more precautionary measures which leaves scope for verification at a later stage, should a party raise a doubt.

The first is to seal and store the symbol loading units for 45 days after declaration of results so that they can be verified should there be an election petition. The second is permission granted to candidates to seek verification of the burnt memory semi-controllers in five per cent of EVMs per Assembly segment of each parliamentary constituency. This verification will be carried out by a team of engineers of the EVM manufacturers. The twin measures will help a candidate, who suspects tampering cost them their victory, go back and check if indeed the fear had a basis.

The court had consistently taken the position that there should be no total distrust of technology and we, instead, use it to improve the system. In line with the thought, the court suggested to the EC to see if the VVPAT paper slips can have bar codes so that they can be counted electronically. Such a system, if implemented, would almost fully address the concerns people have for the EVMs, for the voter can verify the slip which has their choice of symbol and the electronic machine can count them at a much higher speed than manual counting. The EC must take the suggestion very seriously, and if found technically feasible, implement it in the very next election.

That the court repeatedly sought the response of the EC to each of the points raised by the petitioners before it came to its conclusions indicates that such information is not available in the public domain. It is important that the general public is also provided with every piece of information on the EVMs. The EC must now not only follow up on the suggestions of the court, but also make a similar effort to convince them of the genuineness of its case. It must also take the initiative to introduce greater transparency in its processes instead of waiting for the courts to suggest them.

Campus protests test for Biden

As a wave of pro-Palestinian protests are sweeping the campuses, the United States is watching a replay of yore that racked the country at the time of the Vietnam War. While police action with armed law enforcement officers in riot gear marching to encampment sites on campuses is a grisly reminder of the 1960s and early 1970s, some university administrations are going further this time in banning students from campus and taking other measures to quell the youth who are rebelling for a cause.

Students of diverse backgrounds like Palestinians, Arabs, Jews, Muslims and Indians have been seen to be united in their condemnation of the Gaza war in which Israel, in a disproportionate response to the Hamas strike of October 7, has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians while razing much of the Gaza Strip to uninhabitable rubble.

The problem for the universities, most of all the epicentre of the protests which is Columbia in New York City, is, they have to act towards restoring order on campus by stamping out encampments. Their dilemma lies in how to address the demonstrations while respecting students' right to express their views.

How far the youth can be allowed to go to demonstrate their opposition to the Gaza war, even as some of them are tending to slip into antisemitism, is a tricky proposition for the academic community that sees itself as a guardian of established values. The repression of free speech and of academic freedom is clearly an issue as students have been arrested.

It is déjà vu time for the Establishment which failed during the Vietnam war when it subdued protests and alienated a generation of youth who became disenchanted with their nation fighting someone else's war somewhere on the globe far removed from their home country.

It is also a test of democratic values for a nation that swears by the First Amendment of free speech and the "freedom to peacefully assemble or gather together or associate with a group of people for social, economic, political or religious purposes". When campuses seethe with anger and students break out in protest, it does indicate that US President Joe Biden's stand on the Gaza war is not universally popular.

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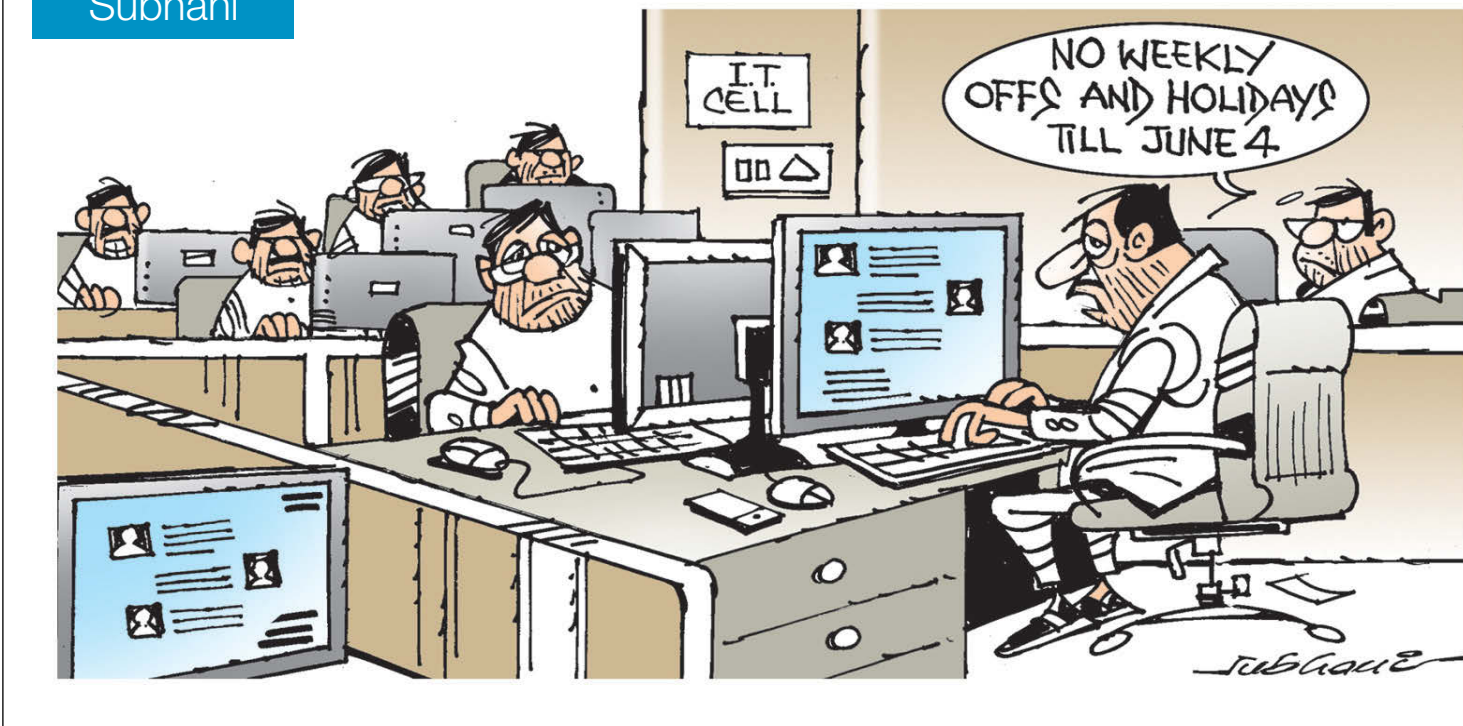
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Subhani



Who built Hyderabad? Secret of the city's rise



Sanjaya Baru

Sanjayovacha

At a recent dinner for the head of a multinational firm visiting India the conversation turned to Hyderabad. We were a mixed group of Indians with varied professional and corporate backgrounds. Everyone agreed that the best places to invest were in the southern part of India. I asked the visiting American CEO if he had been to Hyderabad. He hadn't. Must I, he enquired. You must, I replied. Hyderabad became the subject of an animated conversation over cocktails.

"So, who built Hyderabad?", the American CEO asked. Before I could respond, one gentleman said: "There was this guy, the chief minister, Chandrababu Naidu?" A lady chimed in: "I think more recently it was due to this young man, KTR."

Our American CEO asked his factotum if they had any investments in Hyderabad. Yes, said the factotum. The boss was pleased. I was afraid the conversation would drift towards some other topic as we nursed our drinks. It was time I declared my Hyderabad roots and tell the group the full story.

Hyderabad, as they say about Rome, was not built in a day. The roots of the city's development go far back into the period when the Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan, began establishing modern industrial units, a railway line that connected to British India, civic infrastructure, including public parks and green belts, and a university — Osmania — that matched the fame of the three big universities of early 20th century British India, namely, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. Unlike the three port cities that thrived due to European trade and commerce, Hyderabad was among the most prosperous landlocked cities of early 20th cen-

tury India.

From the 1960s, successive governments focused on the city's development. The turning point, however, was the mid-1970s when a development-oriented chief minister, J. Vengala Rao, took charge. He was followed by a varied set of political leaders that included M. Chenna Reddy, N.T. Rama Rao, N. Chandrababu Naidu, Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy and K. Chandrasekhar Rao. The secret of Hyderabad's rise is that each one of them built on an inherited foundation. The state's integration into the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh brought in enterprise and capital from the Krishna and Godavari delta regions. The political turmoil in the Calcutta of the 1960s and 1970s attracted many Marwari business families to move base to Hyderabad. The Birlas were among the first to arrive.

Even before private enterprise arrived and Vengala Rao took charge of the state's development, several public sector enterprises had been based in Hyderabad. They in turn spawned thousands of ancillary units, opening space for small scale private enterprise. If Hyderabad benefited in the era of public sector led industrialisation, it continued to benefit after the 1980s when industrial development began to be private sector led. In the late 1990s, *Business Today* magazine invited me to write about the emergence of Hyderabad as a business centre.

The information technology boom and the establishment of Infosys and Wipro in Bengaluru shifted the focus to Hyderabad's neighbour and competitor. That is when N. Chandrababu Naidu stepped in, established software parks and created Cyberabad. This was the post-industrial phase of Hyderabad's development. In 2006, the

It is to the credit of K.T. Rama Rao that after the division of the state into Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the new government in Hyderabad protected the city's development

Centre for Economic and Social Studies (Hyderabad) invited me to deliver the Waheeduddin Khan Memorial Lecture, in memory of the institute's first director. I chose to explore "the local and the global" factors that contributed to Hyderabad's development. (<https://www.epw.in/journal/2007/43/perspectives/local-and-global-hyderabad-development.html>)

If Vengala Rao promoted industrial development and Chandrababu Naidu established the IT and IT-enabled businesses, it was left to Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy and the then Union urban development minister S. Jaipal Reddy to create the public infrastructure needed to allow the city to become a metropolis. The Nehru Outer Ring Road was their joint project. By linking the ORR to the newly-built airport, two successive governments ensured that the newly developed extensions of Hyderabad would not get caught in the traffic snarls that bedevil Bengaluru. The construction of the new airport at Shamshabad by G.M. Rao was a far-sighted decision that has served the city and the region well.

It is to the credit of K.T. Rama Rao that after the division of the state into Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the new government in Hyderabad protected the city's development. In his initial and misplaced enthusiasm, chief minister K. Chandrasekhara Rao threatened to conduct a census and weed out the "Andhras" from Hyderabad. His son KTR had the sense to hold his father back and reassure investors that Hyderabad would continue to develop as India's "Second Capital", an idea first promot-

ed by Jawaharlal Nehru. Historically, Hyderabad has always been welcoming of the "outsider", given that the Nizam's kingdom spanned Telugu, Marathi and Kannada speaking regions. The city also attracted Kayasthas and Punjabis from the north, Marwaris and Gujaratis from the west and Tamils from the south. If Hyderabad is today emerging as a major and modern metropolis it is because successive governments have built on the legacy of predecessors.

There are, however, two major drawbacks to be addressed. First, the shrinking of the green cover. Hyderabad was known as a city of gardens. In fact, in the controversy around its name one interpretation has always been that the urban settlement around the river Musi was known as "Baghnagar" — the city of gardens. Hyderabad needs to protect its existing green spaces and create more. Second, Hyderabad has to protect, renovate and restore old buildings and preserve the beauty of its architecture. Time was when tourists from around the world visited the Arts College building on Osmania University campus to merely see it. With the decline of the university, its buildings too have declined. Osmania was once a great university. Today it is an apology for a centre of learning and research.

Both Chandrababu Naidu and KCR are said to have lost power because they focused too much attention on Hyderabad's development, eyeing the lucrative real estate opportunities, and neglected rural Telangana. The Revanth Reddy government seeks to restore balance to the state's development. However, in promoting rural development and farmers' welfare, the government should not neglect the further development of Hyderabad and other urban centres.

The writer is an author, a former newspaper editor and adviser to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He has recently edited *The Importance of Shinzo Abe: India, Japan and the Indo-Pacific*.

LETTERS

DUPLICITOUS BJP

The Congress Party has rejected the BJP's claims that the Congress' election manifesto resembles that of the Muslim League.

Addressing an election rally at Kayakuchi in Barpeta district of Assam, Mallikarjun Kharge said that unemployment is a big problem in the country and that 65 per cent of educated youths have no jobs. Once our government comes to power, we will control price rise. We will fill up 30 lakh vacancies in government departments, Mr Kharge said, while accusing the incumbents of lying about providing two crore jobs annually. With this the Congress president has exposed the duplicity and the manipulation of the ruling party.

Bhagwan Thadani
Mumbai

GAME THEORY

POLARISATION of society along religious lines as well as the storyline of many an action movie are actually a psychological game played by the subjects. A child has been taught from its childhood the game of finding a scapegoat. When it hits a wall and starts crying, its parents give a tight slap to the wall. The crying child then starts laughing. A childish mindset makes action movies popular and polarisation a successful diversionary tactic. Unfortunately, some people believe that all they need is a dictator who will punish the scapegoat. A voter needs to attain not only 18 years but also a mature mind.

Sujit De
Kolkata

VOTE FOR CHANGE

OUR BELOVED nation, India, is under critical threat of becoming a dictatorship. The media has been sold out, Manipur is still burning and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has done nothing to stop the violence. Our Olympic wrestlers were beaten up for protesting against a rapist. Leaders like Arvind Kejriwal and Hemant Soren have been jailed. Judges are under pressure. We are the world's largest democracy, and must preserve what our freedom fighters fought and died for. Vote for education, farmers, women's rights and change.

Jubel D'Cruz
Mumbai

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Amarjeet Kumar (April 26). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Kishwar Desai
London Diary



Booker 'sugar daddies' of lit; Liz's bestseller toast of town

In this brave new world where everyone is being politically correct, it is something of a conundrum to find that the prize that most authors vie for may also have a dark history. So can we still call the "Booker" Prize by its name despite the fact that the Booker brothers' family, which had originally supported it, had a history of enslavement? Though this has been known for a few years — the debate came up again after a radio host Richie Brave pointed out last week that the online information on the Booker website stated that the brothers Josias and George Booker had "managed" around 200 enslaved people. This, he said, was sanitisation of history, as his family had been enslaved by the Bookers, and not been "managed". And his original surname was Booker.

While the information on the Booker website was duly corrected — and of course the prize is now being managed by Crankstart, a charitable foundation — the links of the name to slavery continue to raise questions.

In fact it was eight years after the abolition of the slave trade, in 1815, that Josias Booker, from Liverpool, landed in Demerara and enslaved people in a cotton plantation in what was British Guiana. Sugar then became the primary crop in a number of other plan-

tations leading the original Booker Prize sponsors to be known as the "sugar daddies". Now we know where the term comes from — and it isn't a pleasant connection!

However, the organisers of the Prize website have said that they will get a Guyanese historian to recapitulate what was the actual history of the Booker brothers — who were also recompensed for their losses after slavery was abolished in 1834. Much of this makes one wonder if the Booker should have changed its name?

But then so many universities and other institutions have links to founders with dubious pasts that the process would be endless. Perhaps the best would be to do what the Booker organisers are doing — leave the name alone — but give more information about the original founders. Will this make the authors who have won the prize happy to have received it by simply saying that it was in the distant past? Or does it mean the name make them uncomfortable? The jury is out on that.

Well... books can definitely change the perception the world has about you, even if you don't win prizes for them! The shortest serving British Prime Minister we all know of — Liz Truss — has just written

a bestseller, *Ten Years to Save the West*.

She may have lasted only 50 odd days as Prime Minister, crashed the economy, spooked the markets and the Conservative Party — but she is unrepentant and resilient. No sooner were the first 1,500 copies released that the book was sold out. The lettuce has flowered. What next? Surely not Prime Minister once more — or maybe like Boris Johnson she will become a super successful columnist and author earning millions of pounds! To be fair the reviews of the book — which is partly memoir and partly a "call to action" (seriously?) — has been called both "unintentionally hilarious" and "insightful" depending on which side of the political spectrum the critics come from. And she will definitely be on the book festival circuit if not at the hustings.

This time it seems my diary is all about books, and authors. A most lovely story has surfaced by chance about an iconic British creative personality, Agatha Christie, who became famous as a writer of detective fiction with her Hercule Poirot character — as well as plays like *The Mousetrap* which is still running after decades. During the First World War, like many women from respectable families, she

volunteered to work in a hospital set up at the Town Hall in Torquay, Devon. Now aspects of this experience have been found in a "hand-made" magazine she and her fellow nurses put together. The magazine was called *What We Did In The Great War* — and covers her attempts at being an agony aunt, signing off as "your loving aunt Agatha" while she gave light hearted advice to her colleagues. She also worked in the medicines section where she is said to have learnt so much about chemicals and poisons.

To keep her group amused she became an agony aunt and developed her writing talent while serving the nation. But it was during the war that she finished and submitted her first piece of work which launched her on her life long career — *The Mysterious Affair of Styles* — this would finally be published three years later... after being rejected by six publishers.

Quite by accident — the magazine was found inside the papers of Sylvia Payne, a British psychoanalyst who was also at Torquay at the time. It will now be displayed at the Royal College of Nursing in London.

Kishwar Desai is an award-winning author and columnist. She is also the chair of the Partition Museums in Amritsar and Delhi.

