



RAHUL 2.0

P6



PM HAS ALREADY SCORED A CENTURY IN LS POLLS: SHAH

P10



BHAGWAT SAYS RSS SUPPORTS RESERVATIONS

P5



MEN'S RECURVE TEAM WINS GOLD, DEEPIKA BAGS SILVER

P12

WEATHER

Partly cloudy sky. Heat wave conditions very likely to prevail. Maximum and minimum temperatures likely to be around 41 °C and 29 °C respectively.

RAINFALL: NIL
RELATIVE HUMIDITY
Max. 85% Min. 28%
TEMPERATURE
Max: 41.3°C (+6) Min: 29.5°C (+3)
SUN RISES
05:06 hrs 18:2 hrs
MOON RISES
22:18 hrs 08:0 hrs
Full Moon on 08 May

THUMBNAILED



Bats hang on tree branches amidst a scorching summer at the Tata Steel Zoological Park in the steel city of Jamshedpur on Sunday. ANI

Actor Sahil Khan detained in Mahadev Betting app case: Actor Sahil Khan was brought to Mumbai from Chhattisgarh on Sunday after being detained by the Mumbai Crime Branch's Special Investigative Team (SIT) in connection with the Mahadev Betting app case. "I believe in the judiciary of the country," Khan told reporters as he was escorted by security officials. He was presented before a court on Sunday, which has sent him to police custody till 1 May. Mumbai Police has also seized Sahil Khan's passport as part of ongoing legal proceedings.

Don't divide your votes, Mamata urges in Malda

Only the Trinamul Congress can take on the BJP in Bengal, says CM Banerjee

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
SILIGURI, 28 APRIL

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee today urged the people of Malda to ensure the BJP lost in Bengal by supporting only Trinamul Congress candidates. Addressing a public meeting at Sujapur in Malda (Dakshin) Lok Sabha constituency, Miss Banerjee said: "Only you can stop the victory of the BJP. Don't divide the anti-BJP vote by supporting the Congress candidate here. TMC has not yet won a Lok Sabha seat in Malda. But the people of Malda and Murshidabad gave me huge support in 2021. As a result we stopped the BJP from coming to power."

Miss Banerjee said: "Please don't divide the vote by supporting Congress. Congress will not win a single seat in Bengal. If you vote for Congress it would only help the BJP. Please vote only for the TMC. Congress is contesting the elections in association with the CPI-M, though I was willing to give up two seats in Malda for the Congress. Do you want me to surrender before the CPI-M?"

"If BJP wins, you will suffer. I have been protect-



ing you. BJP will implement NRC forcibly, if it comes to power, and will send you to detention camps. We are fighting on our own in Bengal. We are helping Congress in other states. We need to form a government in Delhi this time. If you really want us to form a government in Delhi, don't divide votes, because only TMC can take on the BJP in Bengal and we need a decent number of Lok Sabha seats from Bengal to prevent the BJP from returning to power. I will lead INDIA to form the government in Delhi. People will vote where there is a strong political party," Miss Banerjee said.

Coming down heavily on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, following his statements made in a public meeting in Malda, Miss Banerjee said: "Modi Babu

is trying to create divisions between Hindu and Muslim. I will maintain the unity of all religions unto my death." Mangoes from Malda and Murshidabad are famous. Do mango lovers ask who produced the fruit, Hindu or Muslim, she asked. Miss Banerjee said: "The outgoing MP didn't speak a single word in Parliament for Bengal. Why will people vote for him? You have been supporting ABA Ghani Khan Choudhury, I didn't have problems because I still respect him. As a family member of Ghani Khan, Mousam Noor is now Rajya Sabha member. But the Congress candidate does not deserve support as a family member of Barkat Da. TMC candidate Sehnaj Ali Rehan is more competent to raise your voices in the Parliament."

Miss Banerjee attended another public meeting at Habibpur in Malda (Uttar) Parliamentary Constituency today and campaigned for her party candidate Prasan Banerjee.

is with those who lost their jobs and will meet its responsibility to them. We have started a legal battle against the cancellation of appointments," Miss Banerjee said. "BJP has taken away these people's jobs with the help of lawyers backed by CPI-M and Congress. Bengal will not surrender before them," she said. "If BJP comes to power and implements Uniform Civil Code, you will face problems to maintain your culture and religion," she added.

Miss Banerjee said: "The outgoing MP didn't speak a single word in Parliament for Bengal. Why will people vote for him? You have been supporting ABA Ghani Khan Choudhury, I didn't have problems because I still respect him. As a family member of Ghani Khan, Mousam Noor is now Rajya Sabha member. But the Congress candidate does not deserve support as a family member of Barkat Da. TMC candidate Sehnaj Ali Rehan is more competent to raise your voices in the Parliament."

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Modi rips into Rahul over 'Raja, Maharaja' remark

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi hit back at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday over his "rajas and maharajas" remarks, saying the "shehzada" did not utter a word on the atrocities committed by "nawabs, sultans, badshahs like (Mughal emperor) Aurangzeb". "The statements of the Congress 'shehzada' are being made thoughtfully to pursue vote bank politics and appeasement. While the 'shehzada' criticise the rajas and maharajas, he remains silent on the atrocities perpetrated by nawabs, nizams, sultans, and emperors throughout India's history," he contended.

The prime minister said Congress seemed to have forgotten the atrocities committed by Aurangzeb, who destroyed and desecrated hundreds of mandirs (temples). "The party gladly forms alliances with groups that praise Aurangzeb. Congress overlooks those who devastated the nation's holy sites, looted them, and committed acts such as cow slaughter," he added.

Mr Modi made these remarks while addressing an election rally in Congress-ruled Karnataka. He addressed public meetings in Belagavi, Uttara



Kannada, and Davangere in the state. He criticised Rahul Gandhi and Congress for "the party's divisive mindset and use of disrespectful language towards historical figures".

Mr Modi further alleged that the Congress has written the history of the country and the struggle for independence from a perspective of vote-bank politics and appeasement. "Today, the Congress 'shehzade' continued down the same path," he said.

"The Congress 'shehzade' claims that India's rajas and maharajas were oppressive and would seize lands from the poor at their will. They have disrespected great figures like Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaja and Rani Chennamma, whose governance and patriotism continue to inspire many to date. Congress 'Shehzade' seems to overlook the contributions of the Mysore royal family, which the entire country takes pride in," the prime minister said.

"Meanwhile," he said, "they lack the courage to speak against nawabs, sultans, and badshahs. Congress' appeasement mentality is becoming apparent to the nation and is reflected in their manifesto," Mr Modi said.

Hitting back at the Prime Minister over his attack on Rahul Gandhi, the Congress party said Mr Modi "maliciously twists" every statement of the former Congress chief to inflame communal prejudices and passions.

Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said Modi has gone beyond being pathetic. "He maliciously and mischievously twists every statement of Rahul Gandhi to inflame, incite and ignite communal prejudices and passions," Ramesh said in a post on X. "His (Modi's) exit is inevitable and his realisation of that is making him more and more desperate. His campaign speeches are shameful really," Mr Ramesh said.

SC to hear Bengal plea against Cal HC order axing 25,753 school jobs today

AGENCIES
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

The Supreme Court is slated to hear on Monday the plea filed by the West Bengal government against the Calcutta High Court's order cancelling 25,753 appointments in teaching and non-teaching posts made by the WBSSC in 2016.

As per the details published on the website of the apex court, a bench headed by CJI D.Y. Chandrachud and Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra will take up the matter for hearing on 29 March.

In an order passed last week, Calcutta High Court nullified the appointment of all the 25,753 persons empanelled in 2016 for various categories of jobs in secondary and higher secondary schools in the state.

A division bench of Justices



Debangsu Basak and Shabar Rashidi of the high court ordered that the candidates selected from the expired panels will have to return the entire salary drawn by them, along with an annualised interest of 12 per cent, within the next four weeks.

Besides directing the West Bengal School Service Commission (WBSSC) to start the recruitment process afresh, it also directed the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to carry on with its investigation into the matter.

Further, taking cognisance of the state cabinet's decision for the creation of super-numeric posts, the high court

said that the CBI, if necessary, can question the masterminds behind the creation of the seats in excess of the vacant posts. These super-numeric posts, which have remained under a cloud since the beginning, are perceived to provide room for ineligible candidates recruited illegally.

In July last year, the apex court had set aside the interim direction passed by Calcutta High Court terminating services of 32,000 primary teachers and asking the West Bengal authorities to complete the recruitment process for the newly created vacancies within three months.

Asking the high court to decide the appeal pertaining to the school-jobs-for-cash scam at the earliest, the Supreme Court had stressed that the opportunity for a hearing has to be given to all concerned.

Big blow to Cong, Lovely resigns as DPCC president



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

In a major setback to the Congress in Delhi ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) president Arvind Singh Lovely resigned from his post citing various issues including, alliance with Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and selection of party candidates for North West Delhi and North East Delhi parliamentary seats.

Mr Lovely through a letter to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge announced his resignation from the post of party's Delhi unit chief. However, he has not resigned from the party.

FESTIVE MOOD



A state-level spring festival known as Peepal Jatar begins at Kullu with the worship of deities on Sunday. ANI

Talks with China going smoothly: Rajnath Singh

AHMEDABAD, 28 APRIL

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday said talks between India and China are going smoothly and in a good environment, and India will never bow down.

Mr. Singh, who is in Ahmedabad to campaign for the Lok Sabha elections, said India has become a powerful country from a military standpoint and wants to maintain good relations with its neighbours.

"India is no longer a weak India. India has also become a powerful country from a military point of view. We want to maintain good relations with our neighbouring countries," the Defence Minister said when asked about Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's accusation against the Narendra Modi government over Chinese aggression.

Talks between India and China are going on smoothly and in a good environment over whatever issues there are, he said.

"I understand that we should wait for the outcome of the talks. But I want to assure the countrymen that India has not bowed down anywhere, nor will it ever bow down," he said.

Mr. Singh also expressed confidence that India's defence exports, which crossed the Rs 21,000 crore mark in the financial year 2023-24, will increase going forward.

"In 2014, we exported Rs 600 crore defence items, but now the figure has crossed Rs 21,000 crore, and I can say that it is going to increase," he said. The minister said the Modi government is committed to ensuring that defence items, whether missiles and other weapons, bombs or tanks, should be made in India and by Indians.

"Today, we have achieved defence production worth more than Rs 1 lakh crore," the Defence Minister said.

Atishi: ECI has banned AAP's campaign song

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Delhi Cabinet Minister Atishi on Sunday alleged that the Election Commission of India (ECI), "which has become a political weapon of the BJP", has banned the party's campaign song 'Jail Ka Jawab, Vote Se Denge'.

The ECI has asked the AAP to modify the content of its election campaign songs as per the Advertising Codes prescribed under the Cable Television Network Rules, 1994 and ECI guidelines and resubmit after modification, for the certification.

Addressing a press conference here, Atishi said according to the ECI, the song 'Jail Ka Jawab Vote Se Denge' shows the ruling party (BJP) and investigation agencies in a bad light.

448 infra projects hit by cost overrun of over ₹5.55 trillion in Oct-Dec: Report

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

According to a recent report, as many as 448 Central sector infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of Rs 150 crore or above, were hit by a cost overrun of more than Rs 5.55 trillion during December quarter 2023.

The Quarterly Project Implementation Status Report (QPISR) on Central Sector Projects highlighted that out of 1,897 projects, 448 projects had cost overrun of Rs 5,55,352.41 crore, which is 65.2 per cent of their sanctioned cost. The report discussed the Central Sector Projects costing Rs 150 crore and above for the third quarter of 2023-24 containing detailed information on 1,897 projects.

Prepared by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, the QPISR stated that about the latest



approved cost, 292 projects had reported a cost overrun of Rs 2,89,699.46 crore.

Out of 1,897 projects, 56 projects were ahead of schedule, 632 projects were on schedule, and 902 projects were delayed concerning the original schedule of completion.

Further, 276 projects are having both time and cost overruns. It stated that for 307 projects, either the original or the anticipated date of completion was not reported or

had lapsed. The anticipated completion cost of these 1,897 projects is Rs 31,74,489.91 crore. The total expenditure as of 31 December 2023, was Rs 16,89,400.92 crore which works out to 53.22 per cent of the total anticipated completion cost and 63.9 per cent of the original cost. For these 1,897 projects, a total outlay of Rs 3,70,983.54 crore has been allocated for 2023-24, it stated. Also, the report highlighted that the percentage of delayed projects changed

from 56.70 per cent in the quarter that ended December 2022 to 47.55 per cent in the third quarter of FY24. The percentage of cost overrun reduced from 21.42 per cent to 20.1 per cent. As reported by various project implementing agencies, the reasons for time overrun include delays in land acquisition, obtaining forest and environment clearances, and law and order problems.

The report also cited state-wide lockdowns due to Covid-19 as a reason for the delay in the implementation of these projects.

Earlier in November, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) said in a report that as many as 421 infrastructure projects, each entailing an investment of Rs 150 crore or more, were hit by cost overrun of more than Rs 4.40 trillion.

ICG apprehends Pak boat with narcotics worth ₹600 cr

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

In an overnight operation, the Indian Coast Guard undertook an intelligence-based anti-narcotics operation at sea on Sunday, apprehending 86 kg of narcotics worth Rs 600 crore along with 14 crew from a Pakistani boat.

The operation was the epitome of inter-agency coordination wherein the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) and the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) collaborated seamlessly which culminated in the successful operation.

The ships and aircraft of the Indian Coast Guard were deployed on concurrent missions to effect the operation. ICG ship *Rajratan*, which had NCB and ATS officials embarked, positively identified the suspect boat. "No amount of evasive manoeuvring tactics



employed by the drug-laden boat could save it from the swift and strong ICG ship *Rajratan*.

Ship's specialist team embarked the suspect boat and after thorough checks confirmed the presence of the sizeable amount of narcotics," a press note said. The Pakistani boat and crew are being brought to Portbandar for further investigations.

"The jointness of ICG and ATS, which has led to eleven such successful law enforcement operations in the last three years itself reaffirms the synergy for national objectives," the press note added.



Mamata wants govt that is soft on terrorism: Nadda

The BJP national president was addressing a Lok Sabha election rally at Berhampur in Murshidabad

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE KOLKATA, 28 APRIL

BJP national president JP Nadda today alleged that the Mamata Banerjee-led West Bengal government is a "terrorist sympathiser" and wants a central government that is "soft on terrorism". Addressing a Lok Sabha election rally at Berhampur in Murshidabad, Mr Nadda said: "We talk about a 'Majboot Sarkar' but Mamata Banerjee wants a 'Majboor Sarkar'". She wants a government in Delhi that believes in appeasement, corruption and

discrimination and has a soft corner for terrorists."

"We are opposed to her politics of appeasement which favours infiltrators and opposes CAA... her government has sympathy for terrorists," he alleged.

Mr Nadda, referring to the turmoil in Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas, alleged that women are not safe under Mamata Banerjee's rule.

"The way women were tortured in Sandeshkhali and the way Mamata Banerjee tried to protect Shajahan Sheikh, who played with the honour and dignity of women, is very unfortunate," he said. "What can be more shame-

Mr Nadda, in a video statement, conveyed BJP's solidarity with the Sandeshkhali women who were allegedly sexually assaulted by former TMC strongman Shahjahan Sheikh and his associates

ful than harassment of women in a state ruled by her? Mamata Banerjee had given the slogan 'Maa Mati and Manush' but neither mothers nor sisters are safe in the state. What happened in

Sandeshkhali is heart-wrenching, where TMC goons played with the dignity of our sisters," he said.

Earlier today, Mr Nadda hit out at Mamata asking if she wants to win the 2024 Lok Sabha polls by scaring and threatening people.

Mr Nadda's statement came after Mamata said there was "no evidence" of recovery of arms and ammunition in Sandeshkhali and claimed that CBI teams conducted searches without keeping the state police in the loop.

"Will Mamata Banerjee win the polls by scaring and threatening people? It is a grave mistake if she thinks she

can win elections by this. People will teach her a lesson," Mr Nadda said.

Mr Nadda, in a video statement, conveyed BJP's solidarity with the Sandeshkhali women who were allegedly sexually assaulted by former TMC strongman Shahjahan Sheikh and his associates.

He said Sandeshkhali victims are not alone and the entire country stands with them.

The CBI on Friday seized arms and ammunition, including a police service revolver and foreign-made firearms, during searches at two premises of an associate of Sheikh Shahjahan.



Man thrashed for protesting against loud music



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE HOOGHLY, 28 APRIL

A resident of Bora Kamlapur area in Singur was attacked by members of the local club after he complained to police about loud music played over a public address system during a Kali Puja function yesterday evening.

Shushoban Das, the victim, complained: "My house is barely few feet away from the local temple and the local club."

The local club organises Durga puja and other pujas in the temple. On any such occasion the club members for their merry making put up giant size DJ sound system and play music at full volume, defying all the prohibitory directives issued by the state and central authorities.

My repeated request to the local club to lower the sound volume is always turned down. I have aged parents at my home, small children and myself.

The intensity of the sound is so high that even after closing all the doors and windows we get no respite.

On the occasion of Kali puja on Saturday evening, blaring sound system were put up. I informed the police. The police came on a round but instead of taking steps against the sound pollution law breakers, they asked me to bear with the situation.

Soon after the police left the club members barged into my house, mercilessly thrashed me, inflicting serious injuries.

They also torn all my clothes and left me in an unconscious state. Later I was taken to Singur gramin hospital. Previously on another occasion they attacked my aged parents when I was not at home. Today I lodged a FIR with the Singur police station."

The secretary of Baji O DJ Box Birodhi Manch Mr Goutam Sarkar, who is carrying on a protest movement against sound pollution caused by high intensity fire works and sound systems condemned the attack on Shushoban Das by the local club members.

"Meanwhile, Hooghly rural police SP Mr kamanaish Sen have assured to take stern steps against sound pollution law breakers and their act of hooliganism," said Mr Sarkar.

Banners of TMC candidate wearing saffron party icons confuse voters



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE BURDWAN, 28 APRIL

Voters in Bishnupur Lok Sabha constituency in Bankura district are a confused lot after posters and banners appeared featuring the Trinamul Congress candidate Sujata Mondal wearing a what appears to be a lotus brooch and a saffron 'Uttorio' (scarf).

The banners and flexes bearing photographs of Sujata Mondal - the Trinamul Congress candidate for Bish-



nupur were seen hanging on the walls, tree branches beside the roads in Khandagosh of East Burdwan that falls under Bishnupur constituency, Indas, Patrasay today which perturbed

both the Trinamul Congress and voters as well.

Sujata has been fielded by the TMC against Soumitra Khan, the BJP candidate and her ex-husband.

Sujata was Soumitra's first wife and they legally separated last year. The banners that appeared today bore Sujata's name with Soumitra's surname. The TMC has denied the responsibility for putting the banners, which also carries images of Trinamul Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee and the party's youth icon Abhishek Banerjee.

TMC district leader in Bankura Subhashis Batabyal said: "It's a conspiracy by the BJP to confuse the voters."

The BJP, however, denied the responsibility. The party's district general secretary Mrityunjay Chandra said: "Only fools like them can believe that BJP would spend money to print their banners!"

POST-POLL VIOLENCE



Post poll violence broke out at Kalai Busti in Matigara Naxalbari Assembly area near Siliguri on Sunday. Several BJP workers were injured following alleged attacks by TMC activists. In the wake of the incidents Siliguri BJP organisational district president Arun Mandal and party workers staged a demonstration in front of Matigara Police Station protesting against alleged inaction of the police despite several reminders. ■ SNS

STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE



LPG delivery men carrying cylinders walk uphill in a high-altitude area to supply to the residence at Kurseong in Darjeeling district, West Bengal on Sunday. ■ ANI

232 booths critical, 231 booths vulnerable in W Burdwan, 1,384 firearms deposited to police

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE DURGAPUR, 28 APRIL

The Election Commission of India has identified 232 booths as critical and 231 booths as vulnerable in West Burdwan district for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, while so far 1,384 licensed firearms have been deposited throughout the district.

The latest revised figures updated by the Election Commission of India identify 232 booths as critical and 231 booths as vulnerable out of the total 2,498 booths in West Burdwan district.

There are a total of nine assembly segments in West Burdwan district - Kulti, Barabani, Asansol North, Asansol South, Jamuria, Raniganj, Pandaveswar which falls under Asansol Lok Sabha seat and Durgapur East and Durgapur West which falls under Burdwan-Durgapur Lok Sabha seat.

The police observer and the general observer appointed by the ECI have been meeting the people from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. everyday at the meeting hall of the Circuit House.

Against the total 1,600 arms licenses issued for the district, 1,384 licensed firearms have already been deposited with the Asansol Durgapur Police Commissionerate (ADPC).

A total of 158 licensed arms are with security guards which are not required to be deposited with police.

A list of 248 people have



also been prepared by police throughout the district as possible trouble-makers on election day. All these 248 people will be under the surveillance of the Election Commission, sources said.

After the model code of conduct was enforced a total of 31,785 litres of liquor were seized jointly by the excise department and the police. So far thirteen numbers of illegal firearms and 56 rounds of cartridges have been seized. Notorious criminals who have warrants against them are also being arrested.

The ECI observers have already visited the police nakabandi camp for vehicle frisking at Chowringhee More in Kulti at the Bengal-Jharkhand inter state border.

On the day of polling on 13 May, the Bengal-Jharkhand border will remain sealed.

ECI sources said that even at the last moment before the polls next month, the secu-

city classification of polling booths can be changed depending on the situation.

The CP of Asansol Durgapur Police Commissionerate (ADPC), Sunil Kumar Choudhury and DM of West Burdwan district, S. Ponnamballam have already taken part in route marches in sensitive areas along with the central armed forces to restore confidence amongst the voters.

In the next seven to ten days, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, home minister Amit Shah, UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath are scheduled to campaign in West Burdwan district.

TMC chairperson Mamata Banerjee has already campaigned in two meetings for Shatrughan Sinha and is also likely to campaign for Kirti Azad. Actor Mithun Chakraborty has already participated in roadshows for the BJP in Asansol. (representational image)

Underdogs like AISF, SUCI determining factors in five-cornered contest at Bengal's Jaynagar

AGENCIES KOLKATA, 28 APRIL

Jaynagar Lok Sabha constituency in South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal is poised for a five-cornered contest in the Lok Sabha elections, with representatives from two smaller parties emerging as potential game-changers for the three heavy-weight candidates.

Two-time Trinamul Congress (TMC) MP Pratima Mondal, BJP candidate Ashok Kandari, and Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) candidate Samarendra Nath Mandal are the key contenders in the race.

However, the spotlight is also on Socialist Unity Centre of India (Communist) candidate Niranjan Naskar and All India Secular Front (AISF) candidate Meghnath Halder, who could disrupt the electoral dynamics and will be successful in being the 'mood-spoiler' for the three heavy-weight candidates from this constituency.

Jaynagar stands out among the 42 Lok Sabha constituencies as the one where SUCI(C) has considerable influence, particularly in Kulti and Jaynagar Assembly constituencies.

In the 2009 Lok Sabha polls, SUCI(C) leader Tarun

Mondal was able to bag victory in this erstwhile RSP stronghold for the first time, though it was achieved because of the seat-sharing agreement with TMC.

Similarly, AISF's presence could also challenge TMC in Assembly constituencies under this Lok Sabha seat, including Canning-Paschim, Canning-Purba, and Magrahat-Purba, which have significant minority populations.

Political analysts suggest that SUCI(C) and AISF might erode the traditional vote banks of TMC and RSP, more than doing the same with the devoted BJP voters.



First, RSP and SUCI(C), there is always a possibility of a split among the left-inclined

voters in the constituency between these two forces.

Secondly, the common factor between TMC and AISF is that minority voters are assets for both, and in that case, any division in the vote bank can prove to be advantageous for BJP.

Meanwhile, this time, BJP's Ashok Kandari is banking upon the combination of two factors, the first being consolidation of Hindu votes and the second being division in the anti-incumbency and the Opposition's support base.

Going by past poll statistics, Jaynagar is supposedly a safe bastion for the ruling TMC. In 2019, even amid a

strong BJP wave in West Bengal, TMC's Pratima Mondal won by a margin of around 2.2 lakh votes.

Again, in the 2021 West Bengal Assembly polls, TMC candidate got elected from all seven Assembly constituencies under the Jaynagar Lok Sabha constituency.

This constituency had been a traditional stronghold for RSP, with the party candidate Santa Kumar Mondal getting elected for eight consecutive terms from 1980 to 2004.

The pattern changed for the first time in 2009, with SUCI(C) candidate Tarun Mondal, with the backing of TMC, getting

elected from Jaynagar. Thereafter, Pratima Mondal was elected for two consecutive terms in 2014 and 2019.

Jaynagar is nationally acclaimed as the production hub of 'Moa', a typical Bengali sweetmeat prepared out of a mixture of toasted rice, jaggery and condensed milk.

'Jaynagar-er Moa' was given a Geographical Indication Tag in 2015, which enables the product to be protected from unauthorised uses and piracy.

Jaynagar's cultural significance is matched by its political importance, with over 15.40 lakh eligible voters shaping the fate of the candidates.

THUMBNAILS



Congress leader and party Lok Sabha candidate from Kolkata North, Pradip Bhatlacharya with CPI(M) leader Biman Bose (L) during an election campaign at Patuata Lane in Kolkata on Sunday. ■ SNS



DRM/Sealdah inspected ongoing bridge maintenance works. Mr Deepak Nigam, divisional railway manager of Sealdah, along with divisional officers, inspected the all important ongoing Stringer Replacement Work at Bridge number 2 on the Up CCR line in between Dumdum - Dankuni Section. The crucial bridge maintenance work involves replacing bridge stringers - the horizontal beams that support the Railway tracks along with rail bearers. The critical work strengthens the bridge structure, ensuring smooth and safe movement of trains, according to the divisional railway. ■ SNS

ERs Installs Automatic Ticket Vending Machines across its networks: In a bid to enhance passenger convenience and streamline ticketing processes, the Eastern Railway has installed Automatic Ticket Vending Machines (ATVM) across its network. According to the ER, 285 ATVMs have been installed by the zonal railway at 109 stations across Sealdah Division while 173 such kiosks have been set up at 64 stations in Howrah Division. As informed by the ER, the self-service kiosks empower passengers to purchase rail tickets without the hassle of waiting in long queues. ■ SNS

BJP woman leader attacked



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE KOLKATA, 28 APRIL
The Kasba mandal president of BJP's South Kolkata organisational district, Saraswati Sarkar, was allegedly attacked and hit on her head by some miscreants on Saturday night. As per sources, the incident occurred in the course of a dispute over wall graffiti ahead of the Lok Sabha elections in the area. Former Union minister and BJP Lok Sabha MP candidate Debashree Chowdhury staged a dharna in front of Kasba Police station demanding the arrest of the criminals involved in the attack. Meanwhile Union minister Smriti Irani spoke to Saraswati and the latter expressed her concern over law and order in the locality. Saraswati Sarkar, the president of the Kolkata organisational district of the BJP, alleged that she and other party supporters were assaulted by Trinamul Congress workers. In protest, BJP supporters rallied vigorously at Anandapur Police Station. Debashree Chowdhury, the BJP candidate for South Kolkata Lok Sabha constituency, participated in the protest. She wanted to meet with the officer-in-charge but found he was not present.

Abhishek: Vote for TMC for continued development

He slams BJP for taking more than one and a half months to field a candidate

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE KOLKATA, 28 APRIL

Trinamul Congress national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee said he would not be surprised if he wins the election by 5 lakh votes from Diamond Harbour Lok Sabha seat. "I had won by 3.21 lakh votes in 2019 and thought that I would win by 4 lakh votes. But now I find that I will not be surprised if I win the seat by 5 lakh votes," he said.



Mr Banerjee addressed a mammoth rally at Muchisa High School football ground at Budge Budge which falls under his Diamond Harbour Lok Sabha constituency. He said on 13 May 2011, Mamata Banerjee had brought an end to 34 years of Left Front misrule and this year the vote will be held on 13 May and urged people to put an end to the autocratic, corrupt BJP government. Coming down heavily on the BJP, he said the saffron party took more than one and a half months to field a candidate. "Ask the CPI-M and BJP candidates how many times they had visited Diamond Harbour. They said Diamond Harbour model would be uprooted but they have no idea how deep is the root of development work that has taken place in the area," he said. He said in the past 10 years Rs 5,580 crore have been spent in Diamond Harbour. "Assure you that in the next 10 years we will spend Rs 10,000 crore and the Diamond Harbour model will be replicated in the 41 Lok Sabha constituencies in Bengal." He said during the Covid-19 pandemic, through 21 community kitchens, 10,000 party volunteers had sent food to 14 lakh people. He said 76,000 senior citizens in Diamond Harbour are now getting Rs 1,000 per month. "From infrastructure development to the supply of drinking water in the past 10

years sea change has taken place in the area," he said. Coming down heavily on the BJP for the statement by a party leader that Lakshmir Bhandar will come to an end within three months if BJJP comes to power, Mr Banerjee said: "Rest assured that it will be implemented for as long as the Maa, Mati Manush government is in power in Bengal. 2.12 crore women in the state are getting Lakshmir Bhandar and the money has been enhanced to Rs 1,000 and Rs 1,200 per month. The state government is spending Rs 25,000 crore annually to pay Lakshmir Bhandar. We stand by the people and this is our commitment." Mr Banerjee urged people to vote for Trinamul Congress to continue the development projects in the state. "In times of need, remember we are always there beside you and will continue to do so in future. Keep faith in us and we will ensure your all-round development," he said.

Sandeshkhali cases: SC to hear on Monday

govt plea against court-monitored CBI probe

AGENCIES NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL



The Supreme Court is slated to hear on Monday the plea filed by the West Bengal government challenging the court-monitored CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) probe into land grabbing and extortion cases in Sandeshkhali. As per the details published on the website of the apex court, a bench of Justices BR Gavai and Sandeep Mehta will take up the special leave petition for hearing on April 29. In an order passed in the second week of April, the Calcutta High Court directed the CBI to commence its probe in the matter after creating a special investigation team (SIT) for that purpose. A division bench of Chief Justice T.S. Sivagnanam and Justice Hiranmay Bhatlacharya asked the investigative agency to submit a detailed report to the high court following which the latter will decide on the next course of action. It directed the CBI to open a separate portal and email through which the victims in Sandeshkhali can register their complaints relating to illegal land grabbing and extortion, adding that the Central agency will maintain absolute secrecy with regard to the identity of the complainants. It ordered the district administration in North 24 Parganas including the district magistrate and the district police superintendent to identify the sensitive pockets at Sandeshkhali and install CCTVs. The district administration was also directed by the high court to properly illuminate the streets at Sandeshkhali. Several public interest litigations (PILs) were filed before the Calcutta High Court in connection with illegal land grabbing and extortion at Sandeshkhali, where the main accused was a section of the local Trinamul Congress leaders led by the now-suspended ruling party leader Sheikh Shahjahan. Earlier in March, the Supreme Court had dismissed the plea filed by the state government challenging the CBI probe into the attack on ED and CAPF teams at Sandeshkhali in North 24 Parganas District on January 5. However, it had ordered to expunge the adverse observations made against the West Bengal Police and the state government in the impugned judgment of the Calcutta High Court.

KMC sets up Manpower Evaluation Committee

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE KOLKATA, 28 APRIL



The employees of Kolkata Municipal Corporation will now be rated according to their performance. The civic body has decided to evaluate its employees according to their efficiency for which a 16-member 'Manpower Evaluation Committee' has been formed by the KMC. The committee headed by the municipal commissioner comprises the additional municipal commissioner, joint municipal commissioner, municipal secretary, director general of various departments including those of water supply, Building, Civil, Electrical, chief manager of Personnel Department, controlling officer of the IT department among others. The KMC has issued a circular announcing the decision.

The committee would examine, evaluate and streamline the manpower of the civic body working in various departments across, contractual and permanent staff. The measure, according to sources, is aimed at enhancing the operational efficiency and enabling optimal utilization of human resources. According to sources, the KMC is taking the step considering that with the evolving needs, the demand for continuous improvement in delivering quality service also arises. The civic body, therefore, is putting in efforts to introduce the system of evaluating the efficiency of its employees. Meanwhile, considering the prevailing heat and the summer season, the KMC has increased water supply in the city. The water consumption in the summer is three times more than usual. According to sources in the civic body, the KMC is able to meet the increased water demand during summer. Even the pockets getting water through tankers are being supplied with increased volume of water in the prevailing heat wave.

ELECTION OUTREACH



Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) candidate from the Jadavpur constituency Srijan Bhattacharya interacts with people during an election campaign ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, at Patuli in Kolkata on Sunday. ■ SNS

Glen Industries starts its second factory

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE KOLKATA, 28 APRIL



Glen Industries Private Limited has set up its second factory at Jaugram in East Burdwan. It is coming up on four acres of land and the estimated investment would be Rs 500 crore in the next 4 to 5 years. Glen Industries is a leading manufacturer of biodegradable and compostable products. The Bhumi Pujan at the new site in east Burdwan was held recently. The new facility will specialize in the manufacturing of thermoformed food containers, injection moulded food containers, paper cups catering primarily to the export market. Glen Industries is one of the leaders in paper straw market in India, supplying top FMCG companies across the country. With its existing plant at Poly Park, Dhulagarh, equipped with state-of-the-art machinery, the company has been able to compete effectively in the global market including the USA, Europe and Australia amidst tough competition from Chinese and Malaysian producers. Mr Lalit Agarwal, chairman of Glen Industries Private Limited said: "The demand for plastic products is fast increasing in West Bengal and we are working to meet this demand. This substantial investment not only signifies our commitment to sustainable development but demonstrates our dedication to contributing to the local economy by creating employment opportunities in the state." He said after the first phase of investment there will be direct employment of 1,000-1,200 people and once the factory is full operational 3,000 people will get work.

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TMC worker beaten to death in Baguiati

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE KOLKATA, 28 APRIL

Last night, Sanjeev Das was sitting in a tea stall when suddenly members of the opposing faction attacked him. He was brutally assaulted with rods and bricks. Locals rushed him to the nearby hospital where doctors declared him dead. The daughter of the deceased said: "My father has been attacked several times before. Cases have been filed multiple times, but no action has been taken. We went to Debraj Chakraborty for help, but nothing was done. No one helped us. The police came only after my father died. We demand strict punishment for the accused." On the other hand, Debraj Chakraborty stated: "The police are investigating. I have known the family for many years. Whether this is a factional conflict or something else will be understood through investigation. Let the police conclude their investigation." According to police, the victim, Sanjeev Das, was a history-sheeter with several cases against him.

A Trinamul Congress party worker was beaten to death in the Baguiati area last night, sparking clashes in the area. At least 13 persons were detained in this connection. Tension prevailed in Baguiati after the death of the TMC worker as his relatives and local residents took to the streets demanding the immediate arrest of the assailants. The situation escalated into violence. The incident occurred in the Baguiati Arjunpur Paschimpara area. Local residents claimed that the conflict arose between two factions, one of them by the area's councillor Debraj Chakraborty. Last night, Sanjeev Das, also known as Potla, was sitting in a tea stall when suddenly members of the opposing faction attacked him. He was brutally assaulted with rods and bricks. Local residents rushed him to the nearby hospital where doctors declared him dead. This sparked further chaos. The clash intensified between the two factions. At midnight, the police arrived to calm the situation. The disruption of electricity supply in the area led to renewed conflict. Later, police reinforcements were called to the scene.

SECURITY CHECK



Candidates being checked as they arrive for Joint entrance exam at Jadavpur Vidyapith in Kolkata on Sunday. ■ SNS

Looking out for the birds and bees in heat wave season

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE KOLKATA, 28 APRIL



In a bid to ensure that birds, squirrels, butterflies and bees get adequate access to drinking water amidst heat wave conditions, the Noapara Mahila Kalyan Samity in Birbhum has taken up a unique initiative to put up earthen pots filled with water on trees. The samity is located in Mayureswar II block under Gulkuntha Gram Panchayat. The samity has engaged the students of Gulutia Noapara Dr Kaligati Smriti Higher Secondary School who are helping to put up the earthen pots on the trees in areas surrounded by forest. Every day the pots are filled with water. The samity has requested the householders to keep water in pots so that birds can quench their thirst. Mr Chandan Banerjee, one of the spokespersons for the samity said: "At a time when the average temperature in Birbhum is varying anything between 40 degrees and 43 degrees, the worst hit are the birds, bees, butterflies and squirrels. They often die because of thirst. The water bodies surrounding the forests where they live have become dry because of excessive heat leading to the shrinking of the sources of drinking water. We are putting up the earthen pots on the trees so that the birds can quench their thirst and everyday we are refilling the pots. We have requested the householders to keep pots filled with water outside their houses to help the birds to quench their thirst." He said as the schools are closed the students are enjoying the exercise and are helping put up the pots on trees. "We can save the birds if the community comes forward and there is participation of all sections of people," Mr Banerjee said. (representational image)

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The battle would continue to get the fair share of drought relief for the state... the legal battle will continue for sure. We are not begging. This is our right, we are asking for it

D.K. SHIVAKUMAR KARNATAKA DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

'Entire nation worried about law and order in Karnataka'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attacks Congress over the Hubballi murder case

AGENCIES UTTARA KANNADA, 28 APRIL

Attacking the Siddaramaiah government over the Hubballi murder incident, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that the whole nation is worried about the law and order situation in Karnataka, adding that the Congress party is desperate to destroy the state.

Addressing an election rally in Uttara Kannada, Prime Minister Modi said, "The entire nation is worried about what happened to one of the daughters in the state. They are worried about law and order situation in Karnataka. Parents are worried about their daughters residing in Karnataka. This is due to the sins committed by Congress. How can someone get the guts to murder someone on a college campus? They who committed crime know that those hungry for vote bank will



save them in a few days."

"The Congress government is busy destroying Karnataka. Instead of controlling crime, Congress is promoting an anti-social and anti-national mindset," the Prime

Minister said.

Neha (23), the daughter of Congress councillor of Hubballi-Dharwad Municipal Corporation, Niranjani Hiremath, was stabbed to death on the campus of BVB

College on April 18.

The accused, Fayaz Khondanaik, who fled the scene after the stabbing attack, was subsequently arrested. Neha was a first-year MCA student and the assailant, Fayaz,

was her former classmate.

The Prime Minister further slammed the Congress party for rejecting an invitation to the Ayodhya Ram Temple inauguration ceremony earlier in January this year.

"On one side there are those in hunger of vote bank rejected the invitation to the Ram temple and on the other side, there is an Ansari family, Iqbal Ansari whose entire family fought the case against Ram Temple for three generations but when the Supreme Court's verdict came, he accepted it. The trustees of Ram Temple when invited the Ansari, he attended the 'Pran Pratistha,'" he said.

Polling was conducted on Friday in 14 parliamentary constituencies of Karnataka during the second phase of the Lok Sabha election. The remaining seats will go to the polls on May 7. The counting of votes will take place on June 4.

Karnataka govt stages protest against Centre over drought relief

AGENCIES BENGALURU, 28 APRIL

Karnataka's Congress government staged a protest on Sunday in front of Mahatma Gandhi's statue on the premises of the Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru, against the Central government over drought relief.

The protest was led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Dy CM and Karnataka Congress President D.K. Shivakumar. AICC General Secretary and Karnataka in-charge Randeep Singh Surjewala, Cabinet Ministers and prominent leaders also took part in the protest.

Shivakumar stated that the "struggle will not end here." The state had given a memorandum over drought in September 2023. From September till date, the state has incurred a further Rs 50,000 crore worth of damages. "No one has got work and the Centre has not given funds under NAREGA. This has to be released," he said.

"The Central government had released over Rs 3,000 crore after being slammed by



Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah with AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala, ministers and other Congress leaders protest against the central government demanding the immediate release of the drought relief amount, at Vidhana Soudha premises in Bengaluru on Sunday. ■ ANI

the Supreme Court. The money should have been released during the crisis. Now, in some time, rains will pour. If guarantees were not there life would have been difficult for people. We have saved them. More than four crore families have been benefited," he maintained.

"We were forced to approach the court as they did not respect the federal structure. We are not begging. We had managed to provide Rs

2,000 for farmers and managed the drinking water crisis. We are asking for our rights," Shivakumar stated.

The Centre released Rs 3,454 crore drought compensation on Saturday. The Karnataka BJP welcomed the gesture of the Central government while the Congress has stated that the amount is meagre compared to the demand of more than Rs 18,000 crores toward crop loss during the drought period.

Actor Sahil Khan sent to two-day police custody in Mahadev Betting App case

MUMBAI, 28 APRIL

A court in Mumbai sent actor Sahil Khan to two-day police custody starting from April 29 in connection with the Mahadev Betting App case which involves irregularities to tune of Rs 15,000 crore.

In the day, the actor was brought to Mumbai from Chhattisgarh on Sunday after being detained by the Mumbai Crime Branch's Special Investigative Team (SIT) in connection with the same case. He was produced before the Shindewadi-Dadar court today.

"I believe in the judiciary of the country," Khan told reporters as he was escorted by security officials.

Actor Sahil Khan's lawyer Mujahid Ansari told ANI that he has been framed in the matter.

"They wanted a remand to investigate. They had produced their ground in the Session Court and the High Court that there are 2000 SIM cards and 1700 bank accounts..." "The court has sent him (Sahil Khan) to a two-day-police custody, April 29 and 30. He will be produced again on May 1..." he said.

Replying to a query, he said, "No SIM card or bank account is in Sahil Khan's name. We have cooperated and submitted the bank statement... There is nothing. He has been framed in the matter and been accused of promoting the app..."

Mumbai Police has also seized actor Sahil Khan's passport as part of ongoing legal proceedings.

Khan was apprehended on Saturday from Chhattisgarh, where he had reportedly been evading authorities for nearly 40 hours. His attempts to secure a pre-arrest bail failed as the Bombay High Court rejected his plea. Khan had fled Mumbai, constantly changing his location to evade authorities.

Jagan behind adding YSR's name to CBI cases: Sharmila

AGENCIES AMARAVATI, 28 APRIL

Continuing attack on her brother and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y. S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee chief Y. S. Sharmila Reddy on Sunday reiterated that he was behind adding the name of their father and late Chief Minister Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy (YSR) in the disproportionate assets cases filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

Denying Jagan's allegation that Congress party was behind adding YSR's name in the FIRs, Sharmila claimed that it was Jagan who got a petition filed by Ponnawolu Sudhakar Reddy in the court to add YSR's name and later rewarded him with the post



of Additional Advocate General.

Sharmila also claimed that Sudhakar Reddy was appointed to the post six days after Jagan took oath as the chief minister.

"This was the return gift given by Jagan to Sudhakar Reddy. No one knew Sudhakar

Reddy but six days after assuming office, Jagan made him the Additional Advocate General.

"For Jagan, Sudhakar Reddy filed a petition and got YSR's name added to the charge sheet. In return, Jagan rewarded him with the post of Additional Advocate General. Will someone give a post to a person who has added the father's name to cases," she asked.

She asserted that the CBI had not added YSR's name to the FIR. It was felt that if YSR's name is not added to the charge sheet, Jagan can't come out on bail.

"Sudhakar Reddy filed petitions in CBI Court, High Court and Supreme Court to add YSR's name to the cases," she said.

The Congress leader said

that while the CBI court and High Court dismissed Sudhakar Reddy's petition, the Supreme Court stated that let the investigation be carried on.

Sharmila said that there is no truth in Sudhakar Reddy's statement that he had lot of respect for YSR. She reiterated that he filed the petition in the court at the instance of Jagan.

"For once check with Vundavalli Arun Kumar if this was not a fact," she said and mentioned that the former MP had once stated that Jagan got YSR's name included in the cases.

Earlier, taking strong exception to Sharmila's allegation, Sudhakar Reddy had stated that she was using her father's name for political gains.

COSTUME PARTY



Participants wearing costumes participate in the TCS World 10K Bengaluru marathon, in Bengaluru on Sunday. ■ ANI

JD(S) welcomes SIT probe into video case against MP Prajwal Revanna

AGENCIES BENGALURU, 28 APRIL

A day after the Karnataka government formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the alleged obscene video case involving Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, the Janata Dal (Secular) welcomed the decision on Sunday.

Welcoming the SIT probe, JD(S) core committee chairman and senior leader GT Deve Gowda said that the party will call a meeting to discuss action on the issue. "I don't blame the government for announcing the SIT investigation. We will sit and decide what action needs to be taken over the issue of Prajwal Revanna. For now, I will just say that I welcome the SIT investigation," Deve Gowda said.

Former Chief Minister and JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy distanced himself from the issue. "Whether it is me or HD Deve Gowda, we always respect women and whenever they come with complaints, we have tried to resolve their problems. The CM has already ordered an SIT investigation and the SIT investigation has



started. The SIT team will bring him back from abroad. That's not my concern," Kumaraswamy said.

"If he has gone to another country, then the government will bring him back. I have nothing to do with it," the former CM said.

JD(S) leader TA Saravana said, "We are welcoming the SIT investigation. Our supremo HD Deve Gowda and our leader HD Kumaraswamy and all office bearers will sit and decide on this." Amid the controversy, the BJP, which is an ally of JD(S) in Karnataka, also distanced itself from the issue. While Revanna is seeking a fresh term in the Lower House from Hassan as a candidate of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and is pitted against Congress'

Shreyas Patel.

"We, as a party, have nothing to do with the videos and neither do we have any comments to make on the SIT probe announced by the state government into the alleged sex scandal involving Prajwal Revanna," S Prakash, the chief spokesperson of BJP's state unit said.

The three-member SIT formed by the state government will be headed by IPS officer Vijay Kumar Singh. DG CID Suman D Pennekar and IPS officer Seema Latkar will be members of the team.

This case has been registered at Holenarasipur police station under sections 354 A, 354 D, 506, and 509 of the IPC. On Saturday, announcing his decision to set up an SIT to probe the issue, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah in a post on X stated, "The government has decided to form a special investigation team in connection with Prajwal Revanna's obscene video case. Obscene video clips are circulating in Hassan district, where it appears that women have been sexually assaulted."

CPM secretariat to discuss Jayarajan's meeting with Javadekar on Monday

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 28 APRIL

The CPM leadership in Kerala will take up the E P Jayarajan issue for discussion on Monday, 29 April.

The CPI-M secretariat will take up the issue related to senior party leader and LDF convenor E P Jayarajan's open admission that he had met BJP's Kerala in-charge Prakash Javadekar in the presence of controversial middleman T G Nandakumar and the allegation that they held discussions on his joining the BJP, for discussion on Monday.

Mr Jayarajan's statement on the polling day on Friday that he had met the BJP's Kerala prabhar Prakash Javadekar was a rude shock for the CPI-M, which has been branding the Congress as the recruiting ground for the BJP throughout the election campaign.

The CPI-M state and central leaderships are unhappy with Mr Jayarajan's statement. Chief Minister Pinarayi



Vijayan has expressed his displeasure over the embarrassing turn of events. Mr Vijayan said there was lack of vigil on the part of Mr Jayarajan. "Everyone knows the nature of Jayarajan who does not exercise discretion while establishing friendship. If Lord Shiva joins hands with a sinner, Shiva himself will become a sinner," he said, quoting an adage.

At the party secretariat meeting on Monday, Mr Jayarajan is expected to offer primary explanation on the controversy. It is not known at present whether the state secretariat will recommend

disciplinary action against Mr Jayarajan. If disciplinary action is recommended, the central committee might decide to publicly reprimand the senior leader or might even ask him to step down from the post of LDF convenor.

Many senior CPI-M leaders have expressed dissatisfaction over Mr Jayarajan's timing in confirming his meeting with the BJP leader.

Party central committee member and former state finance minister Thomas Isaac has stated that the issue will be discussed in the appropriate party forum. "Jayarajan should not have gone to a place just because he got an invitation from someone. I will express my opinion in the party forum," Thomas Isaac said.

KPCC president Sudhakaran had stirred up a storm on Thursday, accusing Mr Jayarajan of secretly plotting to defect to the BJP by opening a secret communication channel with the party's leadership.

The CPI-M suddenly found itself in a quandary after

BJP leader Sobha Surendran endorsed Mr Sudhakaran's accusation.

BJP leader Shobha Surendran revealed that EP Jayarajan held discussions with her and other party leaders on joining the BJP.

Negotiations regarding Mr Jayarajan's entry into the BJP had been almost completed, she said and added that chief minister Vijayan is aware why Mr Jayarajan has withdrawn from his attempt to join the saffron party.

She said Mr Jayarajan withdrew from the move following threats from the CPM leadership in Kerala.

The CPI-M's allegation against Congress was that today's Congress is tomorrow's BJP. Now, it has been revealed that a senior leader of the left party, the convenor of the LDF had held talks with the BJP leaders. The revelation has put the CPI-M in an embarrassing situation. The CPI-M is also apprehending whether more revelations will come out in the coming days.

Both BJP, Cong feel 'good' voter turnout in Karnataka favourable

AGENCIES BENGALURU, 28 APRIL

Both, the BJP and Congress, are confident that the "good" voter turnout in Karnataka's 14 Lok Sabha seats, which went to the polls on April 26, is favourable for them.

Karnataka has recorded 69.56 per cent turnout on April 26, according to the Election Commission. Barring Bengaluru's three parliamentary seats, all constituencies in the state witnessed over 70 per cent voting.

While state BJP President B.Y. Vijayendra is claiming that the voting has been done in the favour of the BJP-JD(S) alliance, the Congress is saying that ground reports are sug-

gesting that its seat tally will be greater than that of the BJP. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah after the polling said that he had spoken to the candidates and district in-charges and all of them had given him a positive feedback.

Deputy Chief Minister and state Congress President D.K. Shivakumar thanked the voters and said that his party would surely win seats in double digits.

Shivakumar also claimed that JD-S is saying that the BJP leaders have "not cooperated in Mandya and Hassan Lok Sabha constituencies and dhrama of alliance was not followed. In the Bengaluru Rural seat as well, BJP leaders have not supported the JD(S)". Both BJP and Congress

are confident about winning the Hassan Lok Sabha seat, where the contest was primarily between former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda's grandson Prajwal Revanna and Congress' Shreyas M Patel. The constituency witnessed a 77.68 per cent voter turnout.

The strengthen their claims, BJP and JD(S) sources claim that the Vokkaligas won't desert their "unquestionable" leader Deve Gowda. In addition to this, they are sure that a large chunk of Lingayat votes in Kadur, Sakleshpur, Belur and Arasikere assembly constituencies have come in support of the NDA candidate following the MCA student Neha Hiremath murder case. On the other hand, the



Congress says that Prajwal Revanna had lost his chance after a scandalous pen drive against him surfaced before



the election. In Dakshina Kannada Lok Sabha seat, the BJP is confident of retaining the seat

while the Congress is hopeful that the caste card will divide votes and its candidate Padmaraj will create history. The parliamentary seat saw 77.56 per cent turnout.

The Udupi-Chikkamagaluru Lok Sabha seat has registered a 77.15 per cent voter turnout and both the national parties are claiming to win the seat.

For the Chitradurga (reserved) Lok Sabha seat that registered 73.3 per cent polling, the Congress sources say their party will win the seat because of the overwhelming support of Dalits, backward and minorities, who have a significant presence in the constituency. Also, they claim that the party is benefitted by the internal strife within the BJP.

The BJP, on the other hand, is relying on the Lingayat vote bank and is hopeful that it will emerge victorious.

For the Tumakuru Lok Sabha seat, BJP sources say that the charisma of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and reputation of BJP candidate V. Somanna as a person who delivers will help the party to win. The Congress, on the other hand, is claiming that oppressed classes, minorities and Vokkaligas have voted for the party. The constituency witnessed a 78.05 per cent voter turnout.

With the high-profile Mandya seat seeing a turnout of 81.67 per cent, both NDA and Congress are claiming that the trend showed support for them.

Supporters of JD(S) leader H.D. Kumaraswamy say that the trend showed absolute support for him while the Congress claims that the Vokkaliga vote bank, which is decisive in the segment, is standing behind Deputy CM D.K. Shivakumar, and thus its candidate will win from the seat.

BJP and Congress insiders agree that there is a tough fight between the two parties in Chikkaballapur and Kolar Parliamentary seats, and the margin of victories will be low.

For Bengaluru, the BJP claims that its dominance in three seats of the IT city will continue while the Congress says that results will surprise the rival party.



PM Modi and BJP are now in the hearts of the people of the country and Congress is now on the roads.

ASSAM MINISTER **RANJEET KUMAR BASS**
AT A PRESS BRIEF

Cong has record of toppling maximum state governments: Rajnath Singh

Singh attacked Rahul Gandhi for his remark that 'Rajas and Maharajas used to take away lands'

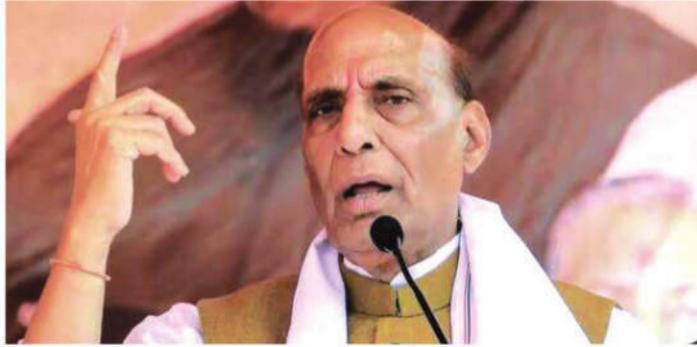
AGENCIES
AHMEDABAD, 28 APRIL

Congress party "murdered" democracy by imposing emergency and has the highest record of toppling the elected state governments in the country, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Sunday.

Singh was addressing a press conference at BJP state media centre in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

"Congress party has highest record of toppling the elected state governments in the country. So far, the President's rule has been imposed 132 times in the country under Article 356, and out of that 90 times, it was imposed by Congress. Indira Gandhi alone has a record of toppling half a century (50) governments. Can anyone name a single elected government toppled by PM Modi? Not even one," he said.

Singh attacked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his remark that "Rajas and



Maharajas used to take away lands" and said the Wayanad MP remains silent on Muslim rulers.

"Rahul has no knowledge of history. After independence, when princely estates were being merged with India, Raja Maharajas agreed to it and got merged.

It was only Junagarh, Bhopal, and Hyderabad whose merger into India happened only after intervention of Sardar Vallab

Bhai," he added.

Accusing the party of indulging in "corruption in every sphere", the Defence Minister said that during 10-year UPA rule, the "Olympics of corruption was being played" and Congress was its organiser.

"It was the Congress party that murdered democracy by imposing emergency.

If the fundamental rights of common citizens have been suspended, it was dur-

ing the rule of Congress," he stated.

On being asked about Congress' criticism of BJP candidate Mukesh Dalal winning from Surat unopposed, the Defence Minister pointed out that it had happened in the past as well, and majority of time, it was under Congress.

"28 MPs have been elected unopposed in Lok Sabha in the past, out of which 20 are from Congress. Two each

from SP and NC and one independent MP have been elected unopposed to Lok Sabha. The rest were from other parties. Was democracy safe then?" he said.

Further, he added that the BJP's Sankalp Patra is a guarantee of building a new, strong, and developed India, whereas Congress's manifesto is "divisive and inspired by appeasement."

He also exuded confidence that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be sworn in as the PM for the third time and that the election will be a strong proof of the strength and credibility of Indian democracy.

Referring to PM Modi, Singh said, "A person born in a poor family, who had nothing, with his immense ability and talent, he will soon be the Prime Minister of the country for the third time. This is the strength of Indian democracy...this election is going to be an irrefutable proof of the strength and credibility of Indian democracy."

'Modi-Patnaik partnership in Odisha to serve the interest of billionaires'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR, 28 APRIL



Dubbing the government at Centre and Odisha as billionaire-friendly, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday hit out at PM Narendra Modi and Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, alleging that both have entered into a partnership.

Mr Gandhi, who was addressing an election rally in Salipur under Kendrapara Parliamentary constituency, said the BRS government in Telangana was in partnership with BJP. It was wiped out in the Assembly polls and Congress stormed back to power.

Here, BJD and BJP have entered into 'matrimonial' partnership. Both have formed an unholy nexus.

"Narendra Modi government is run by 20 billionaires, while the Naveen Patnaik government in Odisha is run by Pandian (Mr Patnaik's most trusted aide) and a handful of people. All benefits are going to these few people much to the detriment of the common people," he said, alleging corrupt practices on the part of both governments.

Mr Gandhi, citing corruption charges against the Naveen Patnaik government said a mining scam to the tune of 9 lakh crore, Rs 20,000 crore scam relating to the grabbing of agriculture land, and a plantation scam worth Rs 15,000 crore have been perpetrated by the state government.

If Congress is voted to power in the State and Centre, the looted money will be routed back to the poor people of Odisha, he said. The Congress has historic and revolutionary plans - the poor will be registered and each such family will get Rs 1 lakh per year in the name of the woman head of the family. Unemployed youth will get a job guarantee for one year (apprenticeship with Rs 8500

stipend per month). Modi has created 22 billionaires, Congress will create millions of lakhpati youth, he said. They waived crores of loan of the corporates, we will waive farm loan and set up a commission to examine such farm loan waiver every time it is required.

Promising a change in governance, Mr Gandhi outlined Congress's plans, including financial assistance of Rs 1 lakh per year to impoverished families, job guarantees for unemployed youth through apprenticeships with a monthly stipend of Rs 8500, and the creation of millions of "lakhpati" youth as opposed to Modi's creation of 20 to 25 billionaires.

Additionally, Mr Gandhi pledged to waive farm loans, ensure a minimum support price for agricultural produce, and provide 200 units of free electricity to domestic consumers, along with subsidizing LPG cylinders at Rs 500 per cylinder. By calling adivasis as janjati, Mr Modi has insulted the tribals, alleged Rahul Gandhi. They are adivasi, the first citizens and they have a right over forest, land and water, he said.

Bhagwat trashes viral clip, says RSS supports reservations guaranteed under Constitution

AGENCIES
HYDERABAD, 28 APRIL

Trashing a video claiming that it was against reservation, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday said that it has always stood for quotas as are guaranteed and sanctioned under the Constitution.

Addressing an event organised to mark the inauguration of Vidya Bharati Vignana Kendra (VBVK) in Hyderabad on Sunday, the Sangh chief said, "A video is being circulated on social media platforms claiming that the Sangh is against reservation. Behind this patently false and misleading video are people, who preach reservation when outside, among the people, but work against the idea



behind the scenes. Such claims are totally baseless."

"The Sangh has always stood for reservation, as sanctioned and guaranteed under the Constitution, from the very beginning. We believe that reservation should continue as long as it is necessary for those who need it, as they are provided for reasons of backwardness and lack of parity in terms of their living or social standing. The quotas should remain in place as

long as discriminations aren't eliminated," Bhagwat added.

His statement, clarifying the Sangh's stand on reservations, came in response to a video that was shared widely across social media platforms, claiming that the BJP's ideological parent was opposed to the idea of reservation.

The Vidya Bharati Vignana Kendra (VBVK) is an international school, which follows the curriculum of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and is run by Sri Saraswathi Vidyapeetham in Nadergul, Telangana.

The inauguration event was attended by several dignitaries, including Padmabhushan Sri Tridandi Chinna Srimannarayana Ramanuja Jeeyar Swamiji.

Modi govt did nothing to check graft, poverty and inflation: Mayawati

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BHOPAL, 28 APRIL

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) supremo Mayawati said the Lok Sabha polls would prove difficult for the ruling BJP if free and fair elections were ensured and the electronic voting machines (EVM) were not tampered with.

Addressing an election rally at Morena in Madhya Pradesh on Sunday, Mayawati accused the Narendra Modi Government of doing nothing to stop corruption, poverty, and rising prices in the country, while unemployment was extremely high.

"The BJP has politicised the investigation agencies and the government has failed to check poverty, unemployment, and price rise in the



country," the BSP leader said. "Corruption has not gone down and the borders of the country are not completely safe till now," she added.

Mayawati said that the BJP promised 'achche din' (good times) to the people, especially the poor, weaker section, middle class, and hard workers, made alluring promises and hollow guarantees to them.

"But even one-fourth of it

has not been accomplished on the ground. Instead, they have put most of their time and strength to abundantly profit their loved ones - capitalists and the rich and given them relief and saved them," she alleged.

"The BJP's gimmicks and guarantees won't work this time around as the people of the country have largely understood them," the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister asserted.

The present BJP government is pursuing a casteist, communal, and capitalist agenda with faulty policies, she alleged, adding, "They are applying every trick to come to power at the Centre."

Mayawati also alleged that under the garb of religion, the Muslims were being persecuted. "The problems of the county can be solved by generating employment for everyone," she said.

Polling at Morena Lok Sabha seat will be held in the third phase on 7 May. Ramesh Chandra Garg is the BSP candidate for the seat while that of the BJP is Shivmangal Singh Tomar and the Congress candidate is Satyapal Singh Sikarwar.

Snatched by BJP in 2019, NCP bastion Madha may play truant

AGENCIES
SOLAPUR, 28 APRIL

The 15-year-old Madha Lok Sabha constituency in Solapur has been a (undivided) Nationalist Congress Party stronghold which was among the few in the country that overcame the first Bharatiya Janata Party wave in 2014.

However, in the 2019 elections spearheaded by PM Modi, even Madha crumbled under the BJP tsunami when its candidate Ranjeetsingh Naik-Nimbalkar sailed through, opening the party's account here. In 2024, there's again a question mark on the BJP's prospects here -- owing to several factors -- though the party has given a ticket from Madha again to Naik-Nimbalkar -- a descendant of the erstwhile royal family of the Phaltan Kingdom.

Dhairiyasheel Mohite-Patil hopped over to the NCP (SP) in the run-up to the 2024 general elections and was promptly rewarded with a Lok Sabha ticket for Madha. Another big jolt to BJP was when Vijaysinh Mohite-Patil suddenly walked over for a 'ghar-wapas' with his old party NCP (SP) and he warmly hugged his old senior friends Sharad Pawar and Sushilkumar Shinde, in mid-April 2024.

It was in 2019 -- when Vijaysinh Mohite-Patil had quit the (undivided) NCP -- that the party (NCP-SP) had also forfeited Madha to the BJP in the second 'Modi wave'. Nevertheless, this time Vijaysinh Mohite-Patil, along with Sharad Pawar and other important Solapur leaders have publicly vowed to vanquish the BJP here and ensure the victory of INDIA-Maha Vikas Aghadi-NCP (SP) combined candidate Dhairiyasheel Mohite-Patil's victory, putting a poser on the chances of BJP's Naik-Nimbalkar.

CRPF IG assures justice after personnel attacked by militants in Manipur

AGENCIES
IMPHAL, 28 APRIL

A day after two Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel were killed at their outpost in Bishnupur area of Manipur in an attack by militants, Akhilesh Prasad Singh, Inspector General, CRPF, on Sunday said that the assailants will be identified and punished for their actions very soon.

"It was very sad for all of us, a large number of CRPF personnel have been deployed here and we have been performing various duties during the last year. This was the first time that our remote camp was attacked. The location of the camp was such that it helped them to enter and cause harm to us. We will find out who they were and very soon they will be punished for their actions," the CRPF IG said.

The personnel who lost their lives were from the CRPF 128 Battalion deployed at the



Naransena area in Bishnupur district in the state.

Birendra Kumar Sharma, IG, CRPF West Bengal said that deceased CRPF personnel have been identified as sub inspector N Sarkar and head constable Arup Saini. The injured personnel were identified as inspector Jadab Das (Post Commander) and constable Aftab Ul Hussain.

CRPF IG Akhilesh Prasad Singh said that the deployment of the CRPF in Manipur dates back to the 1980s.

"We have also been doing anti-insurgent operations, law and order duties and security of vital installations. This was before May 3, 2023. Since then, when ethnic clashes took place, many companies of CRPF were

inducted and our first responsibility was to control these clashes.

We controlled it and tried to restore law and order that includes flag march, patrolling, barricading, crowd control, and instilling confidence in the minds of people," Singh said.

He pointed out that CRPF personnel had gone for duty as part of the ongoing general elections and the attackers took advantage of it.

"There was a huge deployment of CRPF in the elections and at that time, our force had gone from a few areas for election duty.

These anti-social elements got the opportunity. They felt that our strength was less in numbers and took advantage of it," the CRPF IG said.

"There are very few people who have anti-national thinking. There are many good people but there are a few people, it is a small

group that is successful. By small group I mean they have less percentage, they are armed, and they have some locally made weapons. They do not understand what will be the result of this," he said.

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh condemned the "act of cowardice" against the committed security forces who are working relentlessly to maintain peace and stability in the state. He also assured that their sacrifice will not be forgotten.

"Strongly condemn the assault carried out against the Indian security forces, resulting in the tragic loss of two CRPF personnel in the Naransena area of Bishnupur district. Such actions demonstrate cowardice against dedicated security personnel who work tirelessly day and night to uphold peace and stability in the state.

Their sacrifice will not go in vain," wrote Biren Singh on his X handle.

President Murmu will visit Ram Lalla on 1 May

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
AYODHYA, 28 APRIL

President Draupadi Murmu is likely to visit Ayodhya and have darshan of Ram Lalla on May 1.

She will be the third president to visit Ayodhya and the second President to pay obeisance to Ram Lalla. Earlier, former president Ram Nath Kovind had offered prayers to Ram Lalla in 2021. Late Gianni Zail Singh as president had also visited Ayodhya in 1983. Then, he prayed at Hanumanagarhi and Kanak Bhawan.

According to the programme, President Murmu will reach Ayodhya airport on May 1 at 4 pm.

Sources here on Sunday said from the airport here, she will leave for Hanumanagarhi and have darshan of Hanuman Lalla at 4.50 pm. At 5.45



pm, she will participate in the Sarayu Maha Aarti. After aarti, the President will reach Shri Ram Janmabhoomi and will take part in the Aarti after having darshan of Ram Lalla at 6.45 pm.

She will visit Kuber Tila at 7.15 pm and thereafter she will leave for Delhi.

During the entire programme, Governor Anandi Ben Patel and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath are likely to accompany the President.

Come home & vote for us: Political parties in Bihar lure voters living in Nepal

AGENCIES
PATNA, 28 APRIL

Political parties very well recognise the worth of each single vote; thus, they try to reach every voter to seek support in elections. In Bihar, this outreach programme by political parties is not just limited to the constituencies they are contesting but a way beyond.

Bihar has 10 Lok Sabha constituencies located near the India-Nepal border and a significant chunk of voters live in the neighbouring country. Thus in every election -- from Panchayat to Lok Sabha polls, political parties try to lure these voters to return home and vote for their candidates.

It is estimated that around three lakh people of Bihar origin live in Nepal and a majority of them still enjoy Indian citizenship, and are eligible to cast their vote here.



The state has 40 Lok Sabha constituencies and the 10 seats that share borders with Nepal are -- Valmiki Nagar, Paschim Champaran, Purvi Champaran, Sheohar, Supaul, Sitamarhi, Jhansarpur, Madhubani, Araria and Kishanganj.

Of these 10 constituencies, polling in Kishanganj was held during the second phase on April 26 while voting in Supaul, Jhansarpur and Araria is slated for May 7.

Elections in Madhubani and Sitamarhi are scheduled in the fifth phase on May 20; and in Valmiki Nagar, Paschim Champaran, Purvi Champaran, and Sheohar in the sixth phase on May 25.

For several voters living abroad, elections are like a festival during which they get an opportunity to visit their hometown and meet relatives and friends.

"We have a business in Kathmandu, and elections

give us an opportunity to visit our native place. We used to come here four to five days before the polling day to exercise our voting rights... this time too, we will do the same. During elections, the international border witnesses a fair-like atmosphere due to the gathering of people in large numbers," said Chandeshwar Shah, a Kathmandu-based trader who is a native of Inarwa block in West Champaran district.

His brother Mukteshwar Shah said: "Election is an excuse for us to meet our relatives and friends. It is a festival for us just like Holi, Diwali, and Chhath."

Some voters living in Nepal, on condition of anonymity, told IANS that local representatives of candidates contesting from their native constituency "lure them to come home and vote for their candidates. Such practices are frequent

in Panchayat and urban local body elections as well as the Lok Sabha polls."

"Representatives of candidates generally contact the family members and their relatives to obtain phone numbers of voters living in Nepal.

They contact them over the phone and ask them to return home to vote. Now why would anyone leave work and come here unless they have their own personal or financial interest?" said Sudhir Singh (name changed), who is associated with a political party and a native of Raxaul in East Champaran district.

Jitendra Singh Gangwar, the Bihar Police's ADG (Headquarters), said that the international border is temporarily sealed 72 hours before the polling as per the directions of the Election Commission and thus, those willing to cast their votes must come before the border is sealed.

VDG member killed in gunfight with terrorists in Udhampur district

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
JAMMU, 28 APRIL

Avillage defence group (VDG) member was on Sunday killed in a gunfight with terrorists in the Udhampur district of Jammu.

Police identified the killed VDG as Mohammad Sharief (48 years) who was critically injured during exchange of fire with terrorists and later succumbed.

This is the second such terror attack in the Jammu region within a week.

ADGP Jammu Range Anand Jain wrote on X that the J&K Police sprang into action after intelligence inputs on terrorists near Basantgarh police station of Udhampur district.

Clash erupted as Police confronted hiding terrorists. One VDC member was injured. Joint operation is



underway with Army and CRPF.

A joint team of security forces has cordoned the area and a search operation has been launched to flush out the terrorists.

Earlier, after receipt of inputs regarding movement of suspicious individuals late last evening, J&K Police activated the security grid in Basantgarh police station limits.

Early this morning, police

along with them VDG members proceeded towards Chochru Gala heights where at around 7.45 am a face off ensued between the police party and a group of hiding terrorists. One VDG member was injured in the initial exchange of fire.

Around 26,000 residents of terrorism-affected hamlets have been trained by the Army in handling firearms to protect their respective areas.

The VDGs were established in all ten districts of Jammu division during the peak of terrorism in 1995.

The terrorist attack in the Jammu region that has so far remained mostly peaceful came within days of the targeted killing of a government employee by terrorists in the Kunda Top village of the Rajouri district last week.



Beyond the first meeting

Expectations are mounting for the first-ever official face-to-face meeting between President Yoon Suk Yeol and the Democratic Party of Korea's leader Lee Jae-myung, which could take place as early as this week. The meeting would be a crucial political event that could shed light on how the country's key agenda items will be prioritized after the April 10 general election.

On Friday, Yoon proposed the meeting in a call to Lee. Since then, the two sides have been coordinating the details of the meeting, which is widely expected to offer a rare chance to improve frosty relations between the two leaders in a way that encourages them to seek much-needed legislative compromise and cooperation. It is certainly a positive development that Yoon has finally changed his mind and decided to meet with Lee in person, apparently under pressure from the crushing defeat of his conservative People Power Party in the election.

However, there are concerns about whether the two former presidential rivals will produce any tangible results from the meeting. In the worst-case scenario, the two could just agree to disagree because their views on key issues remain poles apart. On Monday, Yoon expressed his willingness to listen to Lee's opinions. "The invitation (to the presidential office) was made as I want to listen to Chair Lee Jae-myung's opinions as much as possible," Yoon said. "There have been many differences in views between the ruling and opposition parties. ... But we

The Korea Herald

can explore agendas related to people's livelihoods, where we can narrow our differences and agree on and talk about at least a few things that we can do to stabilize people's livelihoods."

Meanwhile, Lee on Monday said he would drive home the public sentiment revealed by the general election to Yoon in the upcoming meeting. "The presidential office, the government and the National Assembly should change together," Lee said. "I hope the meeting will be a turning point to restore politics dedicated to the people."

Their latest public comments, however, do not provide a clear hint at how the meeting would likely pan out, especially concerning thorny issues such as the controversial proposal by Lee to dole out 250,000 won (\$181) to every South Korean, the protracted standoff between the government and doctors over the medical school enrollment quota hike and the appointment of a new prime minister. Lee is widely expected to talk about his proposal for the cash handout that will require a fresh supplementary budget and cost around 13 trillion won. The Democratic Party floated the cash handout plan, supposedly aimed at helping people's livelihoods, as one of its election pledges. Predictably, Yoon and the conservative People Power Party are strongly opposed to the plan, slamming it as "populism" in the form of giving out cash that would undermine the country's fiscal soundness. The two leaders are also likely to clash over a "windfall tax" on banks that have profited from recent interest rate hikes if Lee raises the issue during the meeting with Yoon. On Monday, Lee said the Democratic Party unveiled plans to introduce the windfall tax to manage volatile economic situations in a stable way, saying that "more active measures are needed to lessen the burdens on people when oil prices stay high." The government's plan to hike medical school admissions is also likely to be a major issue for the two leaders. About 12,000 trainee doctors have left their workites since Feb. 20 in protest against the plan to increase the annual enrollment quota of medical students by 2,000.

India and NATO ~ II

In the 21st century however, Asia is like it was never before. The Chinese Empire is a modern nation united, or shall we say unified, by a central Communist tyranny. India meanwhile is a united, powerful nation. The existing order dictates a replication of the 'balance of power' in Asia, something that is proving to be anathema to Chinese communists. After decades of economic rivalry, democratic India has outpaced the 'command' economy of a Communist state



No doubt, India has not been sitting idle all this while. Besides QUAD, which is a formal strategic 'partnership', India has been forging strategic bilateral 'partnerships' with littoral democracies that are similarly under threat by an openly aggressive China, such as Philippines, Vietnam, Singapore, Mauritius, Seychelles, Malaysia etc.

But none of these bilateral defence partnerships is a formal military alliance. In the event of a war with China, it is anybody's guess if they will actively support India or merely support resolutions backing 'poor' India in the UN. And join the loud chorus condemning Big Brother China and whole-heartedly extending strong "moral" support to "peaceful, democratic India".

Historically, China has always been the dominant power in Asia, or so it perceives itself to be. European major powers are different. When not at war, they have maintained peace through a 'balance of power'.

For centuries, these powers ~ Great Britain, Prussia, France, Spain, Italy, Russia etc. have learnt to live with one another after prolonged armed conflicts had exhausted them, both materially and emotionally. This went on for centuries, till the end of World War II.

In the 20th century, the rise of the trans-Atlantic USA and the appearance of small and medium powers in Europe, and the spread of democracy induced European powers to unite and protect themselves against autocracy. The destructive power of modern technology, especially atomic and nuclear power, acted as a great catalyst for peace. NATO was born.

China was an altogether different story in Asia. For two thousand years, it was the Middle Kingdom ruled by Emperors and independent warlords in the outlying provinces.

Since the dominant Yellow Race comprised the biggest Empire in Asia, it was surrounded by small kingdoms and races that bought their survival and existence through tributes to the Asian overlord. Largely unchallenged, and aided by geography, the Chinese Empire did not force their hegemony on their

neighbours, including maritime countries.

As India was hardly a unified nation till the advent of the British in the 19th century, the concept of 'balance of power' in Asia amongst various nations has been somewhat alien to Indian strategic thinking.

In the 21st century however, Asia is like it was never before. The Chinese Empire is a modern nation united, or shall we say unified, by a central Communist tyranny.

India meanwhile is a united, powerful nation through the magic of its modern Constitution and the marvelous British legacy of strategic dimension in its foreign policy.

The existing order dictates a replication of the 'balance of power' in Asia, something that is proving to be anathema to Chinese communists. After decades of economic rivalry, democratic India has outpaced the 'command' economy of a Communist state. It is a modern marvel, something that our giant neighbour finds hard to stomach.

History repeats itself, the European story now repeating in Asia. It is to maintain peace ~ a 'balance of power' in Asia between the two major powers. But the concept is not acceptable to the Chinese, used as they are historically to receive tributes from its small Asian neighbours.

The concept is missing from the Chinese political lexicon. As a consequence, India is at the receiving end, facing an existential threat. Lenin, the founder of the Communist movement when confronted with a similar insurmountable challenge famously asked: What is to be done? A time has come when India needs to ask itself the same question. Looking to the current geo-political scenario, apply for NATO membership, so to say. Or, more accurately, re-apply.

By definition, India is not eligible. It is not an Atlantic pow-

er. Believe it or not, it first applied, so to say, for admission in 1962, as revealed recently in declassified official documents made public by the then Indian Ambassador to US, B.K. Nehru.

The Chinese had suddenly attacked India without provocation and rapidly advanced right up to the Assam valley. There was panic in New Delhi and Prime Minister Nehru sent an SOS to the US President for immediate air cover. He offered to the Americans to let US pilots fly Indian aircraft and bomb the advancing Chinese troops all along the border in the Eastern sector.

But equally suddenly, the Chinese announced a ceasefire and halted its advance. Incidentally, the US was the military leader of NATO then as it is now.

Though India is vastly superior today in terms of military strength and capability, the question survives if India can take on the Chinese on its own. The border dispute remains unresolved.

The two opposing armies remain in eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation in the disputed Northern land border for three years plus. There is an altogether new dimension to Chinese expansionism, and that is extending its maritime boundaries in the South China Sea.

It has laid claim to almost the entire South China Sea. This is happening for the first time in the 21st century, after it has developed the world's largest Naval force. It has started laying claims to numerous uninhabited islands. It is developing AI (artificial intelligence) faster than the other AI (artificial intelligence) for the PLA to own these.

All credit to Indian diplomacy to organize QUAD to counter the growing maritime Chinese threat. With the US as the senior 'partner', the other two are friendly Asian democracies under similar threat - Japan and Australia. But India is the only QUAD nation sharing a long land border with China, the

other three are under maritime threat.

The next question arises, what is the nature of the long-term threat? As of now, the Chinese are a continuing threat to our Eastern border. The concern should be about the Chinese long-term strategy in the Eastern sector, coveting a mountainous terrain where, in the famous (or infamous) words of late Krishna Menon, former Defence Minister, "not a blade of grass grows".

It could be just feigning, looking at the current overall Chinese behaviour. They are currently focusing their attention on Taiwan, with their unprovoked brinkmanship in the Taiwan Strait.

As the Chinese, somewhat uncharacteristically, are openly threatening to use force to take over Taiwan, the Strait will become a Chinese lake, affecting India's growing trade with its East Asian friends. According to India's former Foreign Secretary, Vijay Gokhale, the loss of the Taiwan Strait will severely affect half of India's trade flow to the East. It will disrupt supply chains in India's key export sectors such as pharma and electronics. Disruption in submarine cables will affect the flow of data between India and the Silicon Valley.

Unfortunately, Taiwan is in a very unenviable position. A vibrant democracy, the Chinese have relentlessly pressurized an overwhelming number of UN members to de-recognize it in terms of its self-proclaimed 'One China' policy, i.e. Beijing.

The only major power half-recognizing it is the US. In the event of an attack on Taiwan, US policy is strategically ambiguous. India appears to have no policy in such an eventuality.

This is disturbing for a nation that will be most adversely impacted. In the memorable words of Mr Gokhale, India's "hope" that the Chinese will not use force is akin to the policy of the ostrich in burying its head deep in the sand. As Galbraith put it memorably, the tragedy of India in 1962 was that some Indian ruling politicians had raised "hope" to the level of strategy.

(To be Concluded)



ASHOK KAPUR

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Welcome move

SIR, Please refer to today's report "Poll panel takes note of alleged MCC violations by Modi, Rahul Gandhi". The decision of the Election Commission of India to issue notices to the presidents of the BJP and the Congress seeking their replies on the complaints it had received alleging violation of its model code of conduct (MCC) in the speeches delivered by the leaders of the two parties, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is a welcome measure and would bolster the faith people have traditionally vested with the poll regulator.

This is for the first time the panel has issued a notice, holding the parties responsible for the violation of the code by their star campaigners. It does not normally require a rejoinder by the Election Commission for a party chief to realise that the party's most important campaigners ought to set high standards of political dis-

course and observe provisions of the MCC in letter and spirit.

They are expected to contribute to a higher quality of discourse by way of providing an all-India perspective and hence their speeches necessarily need to be judged at a higher threshold of compliance. Nonetheless, the EC decision may hopefully act as a leash on them for the time being. However, there is only so much that the law, rules, regulations and even regulators can do to foster the spirit of democracy, for it is up to the people and their leaders to punish wrongdoers.

Yours, etc., Khokan Das, Kolkata, 27 April.

KERALA STAKES

SIR, This refers to your editorial 'Battle in Kerala' (25 April). Albeit BJP is a dominant force in the North and North West India, its presence in South India is limited, and in Kerala is almost insignificant. The electoral clash is mainly between the Congress led UDF and the Left controlled LDF.

The Left is confident of its local governance, especially in the education and health sectors. The state's performance specially during natural calamities and during the Covid period deserves praise. As a stalwart like Rahul Gandhi is contesting from Wayanad, it would boost up the Congress to regain lost ground. That the Left did not receive a farthing from the electoral bond scam, despite being in power in the state, should boost its image.

Yours, etc., Dilip Kumar Sengupta, Birati, 25 April.

UNJUSTIFIED

SIR, Apropos the news report "ED opposes Kejriwal's plea, claims evidence of his role" (April 26), I would like to comment that the ED is contradicting its own story.

When the ED claims to have recovered evidence of Kejriwal's alleged role in the excise scam, was there any necessity of calling him repeatedly? The ED officials could have gone to his office for an in-depth inquiry into the

DISSERVICE

SIR, The remarks of renowned Congress party leader abroad, Sam Pitroda on inheritance tax are ill timed and uncalled for. They have given a chance to his party's rival, PM Modi, to criticise the grand old party on its ideas on taxation. He twisted the remarks to suit his own message causing Congress to distance itself from them. If the real concern is the widening of the economic divide between haves and have nots in India, the rival camps on the national stage are busy making off the cuff remarks. Rahul Gandhi and his party are talking about socio-economic surveys and redistribution of wealth in an informal manner, whereas Modi and his party are trying to colour them with religious themes. Both parties are doing disservice to the real issues faced by the commoner.

Yours, etc., Dr DVG Sankara Rao (ex MP) Vizianagaram, 25 April.

matter. Without holding a brief for Kejriwal, I would like to say that the modus operandi of the ED behind summoning him repeatedly was more for stopping him from participating in the election campaign than unravelling the mystery of the scam.

Since the scam is entirely based on documentary evidence,

which are claimed to be in the possession of the ED, the detention of Kejriwal becomes meaningless. The ED has to prove how Kejriwal tampered with evidence and had it been so why did it not arrest Kejriwal at the first instance?

Yours, etc., Arun Gupta, Kolkata, 26 April.

OCCASIONAL NOTE

FOR some obscure reason Hoshiarpur in the Punjab has always been the centre of a considerable trade in hemp drugs, imported chiefly from Yarkand. As a consequence of this trade, a small class of Indian merchants in Hoshiarpur have been able to act as agents for Yarkandi traders who have dealings with Russian Turkestan. Prior to the War, therefore, a certain amount of Russian money would come down to Hoshiarpur. But even in 1915 the rouble was at a fifty per cent, discount in India. After the Revolution it fell lower still, and when, in 1919, the un concealed hostility of the Soviet to the British Government required all traffic in Russian money to be prohibited, hundred-rouble notes were being hawked about for a few pice. The Indian Government then directed the owners of Russian money to deposit it in the local treasuries, but now that Russia is seeking a treaty with us, the restriction against the circulation of this money has been withdrawn and the rouble notes deposited in the treasuries have been returned to the owners. The latter, however, think they ought to be paid the value of these notes in Indian money at pre-War rate of exchange. Few people will agree with them.

NEWS ITEMS

NADIA FIRE RELIEF

TO THE EDITOR OF THE 'STATESMAN'. SIR, -May I be allowed to give a second list of amounts received up to date. Since coming to Shikarpur I find Mr. S. M. Maitra and his High School Social Service League are doing most useful work and so we have combined forces to save any overlapping. The local people here, as further south, have given in kind out of their poverty to those in greater need. I should explain that the Rs. 5,000 I appealed for does not represent their loss, it is the very lowest amount which would be of any help to those who have each lost from Rs. 100 to Rs. 1,000 worth of houses and stores, by giving sums of from Rs. 10 to Rs. 30 in money or kind to as many of the poorest of these as possible. In this way I know we have, by your readers' assistance, been able to help, roughly, 60 households at Shikarpur, 40 at Jogindi, 60 at Ratanpur with Dholmari, 85 at Jaguanathpur and a few each at 6 other places. Owing to misconception in Calcutta may I add that of this approximate total of, say, 280 very poor families, only 45 are Indian Christians and the remaining 235 are Hindus and Mahomedans. I must commend the work of the Nadia Christian Association with their Sankirtan parties in connection with the parishes of Christ Church and Trinity, whose young men have sung themselves hoarse in a good cause; and also the Shikarpur High School staff and scholars and the "volunteers" around Ratanpur who have all done yeoman service and are a credit to their country. -Yours, etc.,

Asean needs longer-term approach to Myanmar

ANDREW ONG, LINA ALEXANDRA AND MIN ZIN

About three years ago, Asean leaders gathered in Jakarta for an emergency summit on Myanmar at which the Five-Point Consensus (5PC) - entailing the cessation of violence in the country, constructive dialogue among parties to the conflict, the appointment of a special Myanmar envoy and the provision of humanitarian assistance - was agreed upon with the State Administration Council's (SAC) senior general Min Aung Hlaing.



While Indonesia created a new precedent of meeting with various stakeholders across Myanmar, the Asean chair's one-year tenure remains too short for significant breakthroughs. Hitherto, observers have described Asean's 5PC as "failed", "toothless", "not appropriate", and a "dead pact" and have said Asean centrality is "in tatters". Nonetheless, there are three useful features of the 5PC. It is deliberately capacious: its points (except naming the AHA Centre) remain broad with room for interpretation. It is not a peace plan and was crafted to avoid binding the actions of any successive chair.

Indonesia's proposal of a troika mechanism is a nod towards the need for a sustainable, more permanent mechanism. In this respect, the creation of an Asean office on Myanmar follows sensibly. The office should focus on three main areas of the 5PC mandate - cessation of violence, delivery of humanitarian assistance and facilitation of stakeholder dialogues - to create the spaces and conditions for a nation-building process. A troika-plus mechanism (one that includes key Asean countries that have the competence, leverage and persistence to engage) could see its members share a rotating coordinator role of the office, dividing up labour by issue, stakeholders or time periods. Importantly, the office must continue engagement with all stakeholders in Myanmar, not only with the Myanmar military, as its main modus operandi.

Finally, domestic engagement will have to be balanced with efforts on the external front, where the office could coordinate international envoys and rally support for Asean's approach. A new United Nations special envoy has been appointed, and fresh coordination of envoys is needed.

While the international community has given verbal support to Asean centrality, it must also be rallied to provide support through policy options, technical assistance, resources and political leverage. With a more permanent Asean office on Myanmar, a medium-term 5PC strategy can be built. This helps to avoid short-term, individual actions, such as elections organized by the junta or through the existing Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, that might derail medium-term objectives. The Asean strategy would ideally turn into a framework that coherently guides and shapes the chair's efforts for the year and allows each chair to make piecemeal, sustainable progress on the crisis. This framework should outline how Asean, with the full support of the UN Security Council, can help to achieve three key objectives: (1) a humanitarian cease-fire, (2) a negotiated transition and (3) the establishment of an inclusive federal democracy in Myanmar. These objectives cover short, medium and long-term goals. New procedures for implementation and milestones to measure progress toward the objectives must be developed. As recently as December 2023, the 17th Asean Defense Ministers' Meeting acknowledged the "need to develop concrete, practical and measurable indicators in support of the implementation of the Five-Point Consensus". Thankfully, the 5PC is sufficiently broadly worded to allow flexibility in activities and implementation. The establishment of a permanent office in Myanmar, initiated by the current chair Laos, could be formalized by Malaysia and effected by the Philippines. The time to start is now.

(The writers are, respectively, director of research at the Surin Pitsuwan Foundation, Thailand; head of the Department of International Relations and coordinator for the Myanmar Initiative Program at the Jakarta-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and executive director of the Institute for Strategy and Policy, Myanmar.)

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

To travel and stay in the same place



I have just traveled through seven cities, pretty close to going around the globe. Given my itinerant life, it is not greatly different from trips I have made before. Yet I felt a little concerned. Let me tell you why. I have affluent friends who have all visited six to eight countries. Most American friends I know have visited France and Italy, some more than once. You can't mention the Louvre or Colosseum without their ardent response that they are familiar with. They go on to mention their enjoyable stay at Waldorf-Astoria and dining experience at La Pergola or Tour d'Argent (given the latter's skyhigh prices, I cynically translate the name as 'Turn of Money').



who prefer to change their lifestyle as little as possible in another country. They are averse to altering their food, dress or habits in a foreign land and wish to live abroad broadly the way they live in the US. Macon's target was American businessmen who have to visit other countries for work, but I seem to be seeing a lot of accidental tourists who travel for pleasure as much as for business and are not necessarily businesspeople. After the temporary blip of Covid, foreign travel is soaring. As people live longer and enjoy great affluence, they are taking advantage of flexible travel financing to visit more countries in larger numbers.

But are they getting any of the vaunted advantages of international travel? Are they truly experiencing new things, developing broader views, creating new relationships? The more I see of such travel, the more I talk to people who undertake such travel, the greater are my doubts. They are simply people who have notched another country or two to their proud list of countries visited (I nearly wrote 'conquered') and returned mostly pristine, their ideas and assumptions intact, their prejudices undiminished, their ingrained beliefs about religion, society, races, culture and human worth unaltered by the slightest change. All they have gathered is that other people are different, occasionally bizarre, frequently incomprehensible, sometimes rather inferior. I saw droves of Chinese tourists in Russia, who stay in Chinese hotels and speak Chinese all day and eat fish-and-tofu soup instead of Borscht. Tech-rich Indian tourists visit Bhutan and Nepal, even Switzerland, but often look for Indian-run hotels where they can eat Indian food and talk to other Indians. Americans, hardy and hard-travelling tourists, live in familiar American hotel chains, eat their familiar hot dogs and hamburgers, and, guided by smart, experience-weary guides, take quick peeps in some

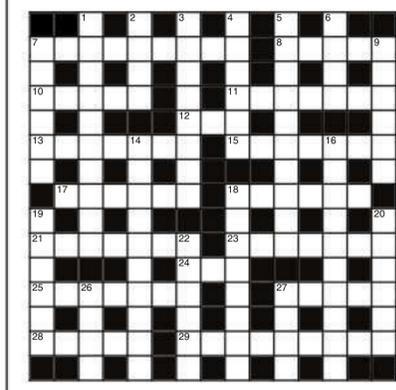
museums or a gander at some historic ruins before returning to familiar western food in some touristy western restaurant. The vast number of such travelers scrupulously avoid what philosopher Emily Thomas calls the very essence of travel: the experience of otherness. Why go to another country if all you see there is the way you see a tiger in a zoo, as something interesting, at best intriguing, only to be fleetingly seen and quickly forgotten, and nothing to be absorbed, imbibed or, Heaven forbid, learned? We keep the otherness of others at arm's length, something curious to be noted, something exotic to be photographed, then quickly cast aside as something strange that can become the subject of bar room palaver but never living room practice. That is why the sensible practices of a country, in business, healthcare or even entertainment, take so long to travel to another country and become a legitimate part of its native practice. I see it in myself too. I don't want to travel in Economy class like most people do and sit up bleary-eyed at night, but would rather use Business class and sleep on the plane as I do at home. I want to stay in a five-star hotel where the bed and desk and shower will all be about the same as in my home. When I go to the dining hall

I can munch much the same cereal as I gobble at home. I am tempted to replicate abroad all the comforts of living in my hometown and shun the novelty and discomfort of newness. It is an overwhelming temptation to seek, habitually, sameness rather than otherness. Because of my work, I used to travel mostly to the capital cities of different countries. It took me a long time to cross the barrier of naivete and realize why Rousseau said all the capitals of the world are really the same. He saw no worthwhile difference between London and Paris. In his own oblique way, Rousseau was making an important point. The world is a wonderful place, precisely because there is such a wondrous variety of food and fun, music and magic, character a culture. International travel opens a welcome window of opportunity to experience it all. We shut that window when we travel to far-away places but our minds are armored with a mulish refusal to accept the unfamiliar. In essence, we choose to persist in what we have always thought and believed, cherished and distrusted.

(The writer is a US-based international development advisor and had worked with the World Bank. He can be reached at mnandy@gmail.com)

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- ACROSS
7 Characters in male drama dancing like some queens? (9)
8 Capital agency produces statistics (5)
10 Painter's adult representation of sex acquired by religious scholar (5)
11 Quiet land occupied by new Welsh community (7)
12 Member of Parliament exposed in a despicable manner (3)
13 University dons fabricated claims about output from instruments? (7)
15 Saw stuff stored in electronic memory (7)
17 Reference standard article about person from ... (6)
18 ... man engaged to earn right for current state (6)
21 Garden confines male prisoner (7)
23 I shout out loud and stare (7)
24 Lecturer's about to make careless mistake (3)
25 Dick Tracy's second in command gets tough (7)
27/20 Performer at theatre school introduces prop? (5,6)
28 Place to stay in Lesotho that's not so bad (5)
29 Teller managed closure of East European banking company (9)
4 Part of head office could be here (6)
5 Issue containing upside-down image is free (10)
6 13 creating frisson of fear just before 2 (4)
7 Nice woman prepared sandwiches before midday (6)
9 School starts to employ more educational programme (6)
11 Supplies argument for things of great beauty (10)
12 See 19
13 Piece to perform on 3/4-size string instrument (8)
16 Engineer enlarges core of junction boxes (10)
18 Cater for 20 responses to questionnaire? (8)
19/2 Burial ground's 4 wheeled cart (10)
20 See 27 Across
22 Last goal about to preserve United's lead (6)
26 13 statutes diminishing America's position (4)
27 13 characters appearing in parentheses (4)
14 Corresponding by telegram about politician involved in row (10)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

THUMBNAILS

Bandhan Life to raise headcount by 1000, rolls out new campaign: Bandhan Life, formerly known as Aegon Life Insurance, is on an expansion mode. The company is embarking on an aggressive growth strategy, underpinned by its commitment to recruit 1,000 new employees in its immediate phase. That's not all. The company has also rolled out its new logo and tagline, "Bharat Ki Udaan, Bandhan Se," reaffirming its promise to empower individuals and families across India to pursue their financial aspirations with confidence. All these are parts of its strategic vision for the next five years, marking a significant milestone in its journey towards becoming a leading multi-channel life insurance company in India. "The latest strategic initiative not only reinforces Bandhan Life's dedication to expanding its customer base but also underscores its relentless pursuit of service excellence," said Satishwar B., MD and CEO of Bandhan Life.

With April series having expired, expect markets to turn volatile

Markets have a mind of their own and the five trading sessions last week were of a different kind

AGENCIES NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Markets have a mind of their own and the five trading sessions last week were of a different kind. How markets change colour almost every day, just beats me.

On Monday and Tuesday, markets opened with an upside gap and closed upwards but the difference between the opening and the closing was very small.

Effectively, volatility saw intraday movement drop many notches. Wednesday was a quiet day. Thursday was April futures expiry day. It began like any other day of the previous week, on a quiet day and then saw very sharp upward movement in the last hour of the day. NIFTY on Thursday gained 168 points on a net basis and 265 points from the low of the day.

Friday was the complete opposite, where markets lost through the day and were



down 151 points on a net basis and were down 235 points from the high of the day to the close.

At the end of five different days of the week, BSESENSEX gained on four of the five trading sessions and lost on one. BSESENSEX was up 641.83 points or 0.88 per cent to close at 73,790.16 points, while NIFTY gained 272.95

points or 1.23 per cent to close at 22,419.95 points.

The broader markets saw BSE100, BSE200 and BSE500 gain 1.53 per cent, 1.85 per cent and 2.10 per cent respectively. BSEMICAP was up 3.96 per cent while BSESMALLCAP was up 3.97 per cent.

The India Rupee gained 13 paise or 0.016 per cent to close

at 83.34 to the US Dollar. Dow Jones gained on three of the five sessions and lost on two. At the end of the week, Dow was up 253.26 points or 0.67 per cent to close at 39,239.66 points.

The 18,000 crore follow-on offer from Vodafone Idea Limited was well received by investors and was oversubscribed. The QIB portion

was subscribed 19.31 times, the NII portion was subscribed 4.54 times and the Retail portion was subscribed 1.01 times.

Overall, the issue was subscribed 6.56 times. Shares issued through the FPO listed on Thursday, April 25. The previous day's close (Wednesday) was Rs 13.09. The discovered price was Rs 12 and the closing price was Rs 13.89 on listing day. The share gained Rs 2.89 from the issue price or 26.27 per cent. The share gained a tad on Friday and closed at Rs 14.01, up 3.01 or 27.36 per cent.

There is a roadshow of Indegene Limited which will tap the capital markets with its fresh issue for Rs 760 crore and an offer for sale of 3,62,91,497 shares as per DRHP. The price band, date of issue opening and closing and the size of the OFS will be announced through a newspaper advertisement. The roadshow will be held in Mumbai on Monday, April 29.

Market valuation of 6 most valued companies spikes to ₹1.30 lakh cr; SBI, ICICI lead

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

A collective surge in market valuation among six of the top-10 most valued companies was recorded last week amounting to a notable increase of Rs 1,30,734.57 crore.

Reliance Industries remained the most valued firm from the top-10 pack, followed by Tata Consultancy Services, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, LIC, Infosys, ITC and Hindustan Unilever.

SBI and ICICI Bank emerged as the principal beneficiaries, aligning with an overall optimistic trend in the equity market. The valuation of SBI rallied Rs 45,158.54 crore to Rs 7,15,218.40 crore. ICICI Bank's market valuation rose Rs 28,726.33 crore to Rs 7,77,750.22 crore.

Bharti Airtel added Rs 20,747.99 crore to Rs 7,51,406.35 crore, and that of ITC jumped Rs 18,914.35 crore to Rs 5,49,265.32 crore. The market capitalisa-

tion (mcap) of Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) advanced by Rs 9,487.5 crore to Rs 6,24,941.40 crore, and that of Infosys went up by Rs 7,699.86 crore to Rs 5,93,636.31 crore.

Last week, the mcap of Reliance Industries declined by Rs 26,115.56 crore to Rs 19,64,079.96 crore. The valuation of HDFC Bank dipped by Rs 16,371.34 crore to Rs 11,46,943.59 crore.

Further, the mcap of Tata Consultancy Services went lower by Rs 5,282.41 crore to Rs 13,79,522.50 crore, and that of Hindustan Unilever Limited diminished by Rs 2,525.81 crore to Rs 5,21,961.70 crore.

In a separate development, the data with the depositories showed that the foreign investors pulled out domestic equities worth Rs 6,300 crore in April on concerns over tweaks in India's tax treaty with Mauritius and sustained rise in US bond yields.

This came following a whopping net investment of Rs 35,098 crore in March and Rs 1,539 crore in February.

Mesmerising Myosutra: Taking 12 yards of rare creative brilliance on fabric to world

RITWIK MUKHERJEE KOLKATA, 28 APRIL

Recently she hogged the limelight, going to the House of Lords, wearing an elegant Baluchori-weaved blazer and pants, and there she talked about The Weave to the Lords and Baroness. A senior banker-turned-fashion entrepreneur, she is now the flagbearer of Indian ethnic fashion in the UK and many other parts of the world. With exports to almost 40 countries across five continents, her Indian clothing brand Myosutra is on its way to becoming the most prominent 'desi' brand in Europe. An alumnus of the British Academy of Fashion Design, the quintessentially Bengali woman, founded Myosutra in 2017 with the aim to present the brilliance of Indian arts and culture with improvisations to suit modern sensibilities. She is now working on lots of upcycling concepts.

Speaking to The Statesman exclusively from her London home, Roshni Mukherjee, Founder, Myosutra, attributes the economic success of Myosutra, the twelve yards of rare creative brilliance on fabric, to her sixteen years of experience as a banker and charts out her future roadmap to redefine Indian ethnic fashion in the West.

Q: What was the trigger behind floating Myosutra, leaving your decent investment banker's job?

Roshni: I didn't leave the job. I'm still a banker, and I love my nine to five. That gives me a different kind of satisfaction, interacting with the professional world, with my banking colleagues. The trigger for

Myosutra was only one. When I saw that fashion in the West, especially with the NRI Indians in the UK, was very, very static in the year 2017 or before. People used to get all their ethnic wear from India whenever they used to visit, and throughout the year, they used to carry on with the same styling, with whatever they had bought, maybe a year back or maybe two years back. Because it was not every year that people used to visit India. There were not too many places where one could actually buy decent Indian wear or Indo-Western wear. And hence, I saw a huge potential, a huge market, because not only this would become a platform for the weavers to do trade with the UK at an international scale, but it would also generate employment for lot of people. So when I started, it was just a passion, because I started it with my father, who is a retired banker, with just one thing in mind, that whatever I'm going to deliver to my clients, it has to be unique. It will be suited to their needs and their service will be professional. But over the years, I have seen humongous growth. I have seen that my followers, or the people who like my work, they also appreciate the fact that the core value of Myosutra is not about selling any kind of products, but it is about uplifting the heritage and the culture of India, whether it is in a form of women's attire, men's attire, kids attire, and making it accessible to any of the British occasions.

Q: How has been the journey so far, over the last six-seven years?

Roshni: I never started Myosutra with a business goal,



with a business agenda or a business plan. So, for me, it was more of interacting with the people, giving them the best. So I would say there were tough moments, but when the going gets tough, the tough gets going. So, for me, I have always seen this as my passion project. Everyday I wanted to learn something from it. Whether it is customers who are happy, whether customers who are not happy with new innovation of the designs, thinking outside of the box of how can I cater more products and services. So, it's always been a learning process for me, but I can only thank God that the response has been humongous. We started only with the UK. Now we ship globally to over 40 countries. We have a unit now in Kolkata that makes sure that the quality of each and every product is taken care of, before it's shipped to the UK, the US, or anywhere in the world. So I think, it has been a bumpy ride. But I have got no regrets, because all I can say is, I'm just starting and there are miles ahead.

Q: What was the market you had initially targeted?

Roshni: My initial target market was, of course, the UK and Indians, especially the second generation Indians. So I divided my attention, or the way I used to pitch with the products, in two different ways. One, I wanted to give a platform to the weavers of India. Most of the states have their own weavers group, where I got enrolled and I started interacting with them, and I started sourcing sarees from them. After that, I thought that, well, it is not going to be the people like me who can wear sarees. It has to be my colleague Christina, or it has to be my neighbor Gemma, who do not wear sarees. It is not easy to wear saree for them. I have to make sure that they start appreciating our Indian weaves. So, for example, I started creating the Ikkat jackets, I started creating Baluchori jackets, I started creating jackets made out of fabric, out of Madhubani paintings or Kalamkari paintings. So I had to start thinking outside of the box,

when I was sourcing. I'm still sourcing these materials from the weavers or the artisans, but I'm giving it a different shape and format, from which I'm not only benefiting the weavers, but also making a story out of the textile, a story that my colleague Paula will be able to appreciate and tell. That's why she's wearing a Baluchori jacket. And what's the story of Mahabharata is. So I started telling those stories through fabrics in different formats, whether it's stoles, whether it is with any kind of kids wear, whether it is through dhoti kurta. So our London skyline sari is extremely famous, which we launched in 2019, which has got a skyline embroidered through the border of the sari, and it has got a beautiful red border, which symbolizes the kind of the Bengali woman that we are. We are aware of that red and white sari means to us. I wanted a London skyline sari, and in a similar way, I created the London skyline doti. So I had to start innovating. I had to start thinking out of the box. It was just not a Benarasi sari. It was just not a Kanchipuram sari. It was just not a Pashmina kani silk sari. It is beyond that, where people will be able to narrate the stories, what they are wearing.

Q: Did you have to tweak your strategies in between?

Roshni: Yes, I did. From the conventional pattern of just not giving the customers or the clients only one sari, which is a handloom sari from the weavers, I started targeting the second generations or even the third generations of this country and worldwide, and trying to narrate through the different weaves, different things, different formats. I have done, like Ikkat blazers or Quad sets, which are very famous right now for teenagers. They don't prefer wearing a sari. They find it too cumbersome to wear. So for them, I have upcycled their mother's sarees into a blazer and a trouser. So it's much, much beyond. It's about upcycling, it's about thinking about the environment, and it's about repeat wearing as well. So there are certain culture, there are certain things that we were not doing in the fashion industry. We are now trying to get those done. So definitely, I had to tweak my strategies with the demand. And also I wanted to not only to target the people who wear sarees, I wanted to target the British Asians, I wanted to target the British people as well

as the people of the West.

Q: Do you work on the designs yourself?

Roshni: Yes, I do work on my designs myself. Of course, not the weavers' collection, because I believe in keeping our handlooms, our traditions, our traditional sarees. The way it is where I tried to design myself is, of course, if the customers wanted some basic things, number one. Number two, we always try to create two or three in-house products in a month. Like the London skyline was my brainchild. Where, you know, all the London Indians or the London Bengalis can wear a London skyline, lalpara saree on an Ashtomi anjali, or maybe on any of their puja days, depicting their love for London, as well as keeping their traditions alive of Lalpara saada saree. Similarly, we have created our Bengal weave saree, which is basically a saree that is cut, which is made out of five different Bengal weaves, like Dhakai, Baluchori, Taant, Gamcha and Kaatha. So that's an ensemble, that's in one saree, you get all the weaves displayed. Similarly, we created a South-weave sarees, which is, again, a mixture of different types of South-weaves. We have our Harry Potter saree, which was targeted more towards teenagers. Later on, we created jackets and other versions of it. We have our Tintin saari, which is also very famous. We have got Tintin blouses and the entire. We have an entire range of Kolkata series. We have an entire range of Sukumar Ray series. So there are so many things that I'm creating. And at times it can be as simple as making a dress out of a Dhanekali saree or making a jacket out of a Baluchori sari, which we are upcycling. So there are simple innovations. There are innovations, which has a story to say. And there are innovations, where I find deeply connected to my childhood. I'm a big Bollywood buff as well. So we have our Bollywood saree as well. Whatever I feel that I will be able to explain the story to my audience is the source of my creation.

Q: How many weavers do you work with? This number must be growing.

Roshni: Well, I'm working with more than twelve weavers right now, to be very honest with you, and two big manufacturers, because they are the bigger suppliers for materials and stuff, the numbers are definitely growing. But saying that, as I mentioned in my initial statement, that I am a full-time banker and I only try to do work which I can do justice to, so I have to try to balance everything. And as you know, in the West, it's not very easy. We have to manage our households as well. So definitely there is a big expansion plan in the pipeline, but I'm going to take slow steps.

Q: What are the types of Sarees you currently make? Are you thinking of introducing anything new?

Roshni: We try to include at least two different collections or two different designs every month, which is like around 24 new designs every

Critical Minerals Summit in Delhi from Monday



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

The Ministry of Mines will hold a Critical Minerals Summit from April 29 to April 30 at the India Habitat Centre in Lodhi Estate, New Delhi, the ministry said in a press note on Sunday.

The theme of the event would be "Critical Minerals Summit: Enhancing Beneficiation and Processing Capabilities". The ministry described it as a pivotal event designed to foster collaboration, share knowledge, and drive innovation in the field of critical mineral beneficiation and processing.

It is set against the backdrop of India's rapid economic growth and ambitious clean energy targets, which underscore the urgent need for securing a domestic supply of Critical Raw Materials (CRMs) essential for key technologies, including renewable energy systems and electric vehicles, it said.

Key features of the summit include technical sessions on eight key minerals: Glauconite (Potash), Lithium - Rare Earth Elements (Latterite), Chromium, Platinum Group, Graphite, Tungsten associated with Graphite, Rare Earth (RE), and Vanadium associated with Graphite.

These sessions will provide valuable opportunities for business-to-business collaboration and knowledge sharing.

Further, the ministry said that the goal of the Critical Minerals Summit is to equip government and industry stakeholders with the knowledge, connections, and tools necessary to accelerate the domestic production of CRMs, supporting India's economic growth and sustainability objectives.

At the summit, a diverse array of Indian and international stakeholders, including industry leaders, startups, government officials, scientists, academics, and policy experts will be present.

Participants will engage in active dialogue and interactive workshops focused on critical issues such as mineral auction progress, policy incentives for CRM ecosystem development, and the advancement of commercially viable and environmentally sustainable solutions.

The Ministry of Mines is organising the Summit in collaboration with the Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation (Shakti), the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), and the Indian Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD).

Classified

CHANGE OF NAME

I, NAR Bahadur Thapa, R/o. 40/5, LBS Road, Howrah-711202 shall henceforth be known as Naresh Kumar Thapa, vide affidavit sworn before the Notary Public at Howrah on 04-04-2024.

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AIR-SURCHARGE: Kathmandu - Rs. 2, Eastern Region - Re. 1 All other stations in India - Re. 1

TENDER

Indrakshi Co-operative Housing Society Ltd is seeking a HICO enlisted Architect/Consultant for technical supervision and certification of a G+4 building (to be constructed soon) at Plot No. AA-IIB, 648, Premises No.24-0544, A-Area-II, New Town. Interested parties are needed to submit competitive rates with breakup within 15days.

Secretary
Indrakshi Co-operative Housing Society Ltd.
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The arrest of three Germans for suspected espionage once again makes it abundantly clear that we must not be naive in our dealings with China

GERMANY'S MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH, BETTINA STARK-WATZINGER URGING UNIVERSITIES TO WEIGH CHINA TIES AFTER SPY CASE

WEATHER

Table with 3 columns: CITY, MAX(°C), MIN(°C). Rows include SINGAPORE, HONG KONG, TOKYO, LONDON, DUBAI, SAN FRANCISCO, NEW YORK, MOSCOW.

S= sunny, CL= clear, H=hazy, R= rainy...

US: Campus anti-war protesters dig in as universities and police take action

Police said about 102 protesters were arrested and will be charged with trespassing

ASSOCIATED PRESS NEW YORK, 28 APRIL

From New York to California, students protesting the Israel-Hamas war slept in tents at college campuses...



Though the university repeatedly set and then pushed back deadlines for the removal of the encampment, the school sent an email to students saying that bringing back police 'at this time' would be counterproductive.

Decisions to call in law enforcement, leading to hundreds of arrests nationwide, have prompted school faculty members at universities in California, Georgia and Texas to initiate or pass votes of no confidence in their leadership.

Washington University in St. Louis locked some campus buildings and arrested

agers were among those arrested on the Washington University campus.

The University of Southern California said on Saturday it had temporarily closed its University Park Campus to nonresidents...

Joel Curran, senior vice president of communications, said in a statement that USC property was vandalized by members of a group 'that has continued to illegally camp on our campus'...

Students declined numerous attempts by university President Carol Folt to meet, and the administration hopes for 'a more reasonable response Sunday before we are forced to take further action'...

'While the university fully supports freedom of expression, these acts of vandalism and harassment are absolutely unacceptable and will not be tolerated,' Curran said.

In Boston, police in riot gear cleared an encampment on the campus of Northeastern University on Saturday. Massachusetts State

Police said about 102 protesters were arrested and will be charged with trespassing and disorderly conduct. Protesters said they were given about 15 minutes to disperse before being arrested.

As workers pulled down tents and bagged up the debris from the encampment, several dozen people across from the encampment chanted, 'Let the Kids Go,' and slogans against the war in Gaza.

Northeastern said in a statement that the demonstration, which began two days ago, had become 'infiltrated by professional organizers' with no affiliation to the university and antisemitic slurs...

'We cannot tolerate this kind of hate on our campus,' the statement posted on social media said.

The Huskies for a Free Palestine student group disputed the university's account, saying in a statement that counterprotesters were to blame for the slurs and no student protesters 'repeated the disgusting hate speech.'

Antony Blinken on Saudi visit from Monday, Gaza truce talks on table



AGENCIES TEL AVIV, 28 APRIL

The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will be on a two-day visit to Saudi Arabia from Monday.

Blinken's visit is aimed at giving impetus to the peace process in the Middle East and work on the release of Israeli hostages. Sources in Israel's defence ministry told IANS that while Blinken will not visit Israel during this trip, he will be engaging with Egyptian and Qatari leaders on the Israeli hostages' release issue.

American State Department spokesman Mathew Miller in a statement said, 'The Secretary will discuss ongoing efforts to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza that secures the release of hostages and it is Hamas that is standing between the Palestinian people and a ceasefire.'

It may be recalled that Israel has already sounded Hamas through Egyptian mediators that if at least 33 hostages are not released immediately the ground invasion of the Rafah region in the southern Gaza strip would commence.

Israel has also said that its elite Nahal brigade is already positioned to enter the Rafah region if the diplomatic talks fail.

Meanwhile, Israel's Foreign Minister Israel Katz has warned Hamas that Israel would not allow Hamas to drag its feet on the hostage release issue. The foreign ministry sources told IANS that the foreign minister has warned that Israel would enter the Rafah region if a minimum number of hostages are not released immediately.

Five killed as tornado hits China

Five people were killed in a tornado in the southern Chinese metropolis of Guangzhou. The Xinhua news agency reported on Sunday that a further 33 people were injured in the storm. According to official figures, the storm damaged 141 factory buildings, but no residential buildings collapsed. According to Xinhua, the rescue work has already been largely completed. In the wake of the tornado, a weather station in the Baiyun district of Guangzhou registered wind speeds of over 20 metres per second. Just a week ago, Guangzhou and the surrounding province of Guangdong were hit by torrential rainfall, killing at least four people and forcing the evacuation of over 100,000 residents. Guangzhou has a population of over 18 million. The provincial capital is one of the most important economic centres in the People's Republic.

Zelensky decries Russian attacks on gas infrastructure

AGENCIES KYIV, 28 APRIL

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has decried Russian attacks on the country's gas transit system.

Zelensky said in his evening video message broadcast in Kyiv on Saturday that the infrastructure through which gas is channelled through Ukraine to the European Union has been attacked.

Despite the Russian invasion, which has been going on for more than two years, Russian gas continues to flow through the country - albeit in much smaller quantities.

The state-owned gas company Naftogaz had also previously complained of Russian attacks on the pipeline network, without giving details.

The company recently announced that it would no



longer be transporting Russian gas to the West from 2025 onwards - the current contracts with the Russian state-owned company Gazprom expire at the end of the year.

The main recipients are countries without access to the sea that are unable to switch to liquefied natural gas (LNG).

Russia once again hit Ukraine with missile attacks

attacks, which was now making the work of Ukrainian air defence even more difficult. Ukraine needs more US Patriot air defence systems. Workers in Ukraine are in the process of repairing the damage caused by the new Russian attacks, said Zelensky.

Moscow had previously excused the massive new shelling of energy facilities in Ukraine by saying that Kyiv was also attacking Russian infrastructure with drones.

During one such attack, a fire broke out at an oil processing plant in the Krasnodar region on Saturday. However, the damage caused by Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory is minuscule compared to the massive destruction caused by Moscow's missile strikes against Ukrainian facilities.

Following the air strikes, Zelensky once again called on the West to provide more air defence support. In his video address, he explained that Russia had expanded the radius with its massive

Yemen's Houthi rebels claim downing US Reaper drone, release footage showing wreckage of aircraft

AGENCIES JERUSALEM, 28 APRIL

Yemen's Houthi rebels on Saturday claimed shooting down another of the U.S. military's MQ-9 Reaper drones, airing footage of parts that corresponded to known pieces of the unmanned aircraft.

The Houthis said they shot down the Reaper with a surface-to-air missile, part of a renewed series of assaults this week by the rebels after a relative lull in their pressure campaign over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Bryon J. McGarry, a Defense Department spokesperson, acknowledged to The Associated Press on Saturday that 'a U.S. Air Force MQ-9 drone crashed in Yemen.' He said

an investigation was underway, without elaborating.

The Houthis described the downing as happening Thursday over their stronghold in the country's Saada province.

Footage released by the Houthis included what they described as the missile launch targeting the drone, with a man off-camera reciting the Houthi's slogan after it was hit: 'God is the greatest; death to America; death to Israel; curse the Jews; victory to Islam.' The footage included several close-ups on parts of the drone that included the logo of General Atomics, which manufactures the drone, and serial numbers corresponding with known parts made by the company.

Since the Houthis seized

the country's north and its capital of Sanaa in 2014, the U.S. military has lost at least five drones to the rebels counting Thursday's shootdown - in 2017, 2019, 2023 and this year.

Reapers, which cost around \$30 million apiece, can fly at altitudes up to 50,000 feet and have an endurance of up to 24 hours before needing to land. The drone shootdown comes as the Houthis launch attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, demanding Israel ends the war in Gaza, which has killed more than 34,000 Palestinians there. The war began after Hamas-led militants attacked Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 others hostage.

Two Russian journalists jailed on 'extremism' charges for alleged work for Navalny group

AGENCIES LONDON, 28 APRIL

Two Russian journalists were arrested by their government on 'extremism' charges and ordered by courts there on Saturday to remain in custody pending investigation and trial on accusations of working for a group founded by the late Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny.

Konstantin Gabov and Sergey Karelin both denied the charges for which they will be detained for a minimum of two months before any trials begin. Each faces a minimum of two years in prison and a maximum of six years for alleged 'participation in an extremist organization,' according to Russian courts.

They are just the latest journalists arrested amid a Russian government crackdown on dissent and independent media that intensified after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine more than two years ago. The Russian government passed laws criminalizing what it deems false information about the military, or statements seen as discrediting the military, effectively outlawing any criticism of the war in Ukraine or speech that deviates from the official narrative.

A journalist for the Russian edition of Forbes magazine, Sergei Mingazov, was detained on charges of spreading false information about the Russian military, his lawyer said Friday.

Gabov and Karelin are accused of preparing materials for a YouTube channel run by Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption, which has been outlawed by Russian authorities. Navalny died in an Arctic penal colony in February.

20 Cambodian soldiers killed in arms depot blast

AGENCIES CAMBODIA, 28 APRIL

A funeral was held Sunday for 20 soldiers who died at an army base in southwestern Cambodia in a huge explosion of stored munitions that also wounded several others and damaged nearby houses.

There has been no public explanation of what caused the Saturday afternoon blast at the base in Kompong Speu province, though there were no suggestions it was triggered deliberately.

Defense Minister Tea Seiha, representing Prime Minister Hun Manet, presided over the Buddhist funeral ceremony, which was attended by relatives of the victims and fellow soldiers. Cambodian flags cov-

ered the wooden coffins. A villager living nearby told The Associated Press on Sunday that he trembled after hearing the blast because he had never before experienced such a loud explosion.

'When the explosion happened, I was fixing my house with some construction workers,' said Chim Sothea. 'Suddenly there was a loud explosion, causing my house to shake and breaking tiles on my roof. They fell down but luckily they didn't fall inside the house.'

Images showed several badly damaged buildings on the base, at least one with its roof blown off, and soldiers receiving treatment in a hospital.

Other photos showed nearby houses with holes in their roofs.

UK PM Sunak again refuses to rule out July general election

AGENCIES LONDON, 28 APRIL

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has again refused to rule out a July general election, amidst speculation that a disastrous set of local election results for the Tories could force his hand.

Sunak said he would not 'say anything more than I've already said', which is that the national poll is likely to be in the second half of the year.

Most Westminster analysts take this as meaning October or November, although it could technically also mean July.

However, a drubbing in mayoral and council elections on May 2 could either lead to a challenge to his leadership or persuade him that an earlier polling day could be a better solution than limping on with a divided party.

The defection of a Conservative ex-health minister to



Labour could further spook already restive Tory MPs and increase the pressure on the Prime Minister.

Dan Poulter on Saturday announced he was quitting the Tory Party, which he accused of no longer prioritising the overstretched NHS.

Sunak was asked on Sunday Morning with Trevor Phillips, recorded before Poulter's shock defection, whether the latter half of 2024 could

mean July.

The Prime Minister said: 'I'm not going to say anything more than I've already said, I've been very clear about that.'

Pressed repeatedly whether he was ruling out July, he said: 'I'm not going to do that.'

'You're going to try and draw whatever conclusion you want from what I say. I'm going to always try and say the same thing. You should just lis-

ten to what I said, same thing I've said all year.'

When presenter, Trevor said he wanted to know when to book his summer holidays, the Prime Minister replied: 'Actually, Trevor, it's more important than your holiday or anyone's holiday. I've got a job to do which is delivering for the country.'

'And as we've been talking about, we are delivering when it comes to tackling illegal migration. We're delivering when it comes to investing in our defence.'

The full interview will air on Sky News on Sunday morning.

In less than a week, the Tories are expected to lose about half of their council seats up for election, while their two most high-profile regional mayors face difficult contests.

Some analysts believe defeat for West Midlands Mayor Andy Street and Tees

A Hindu festival in southwestern Pakistan brings a mountainous region to life

AGENCIES HINGLAJ, 28 APRIL

The ascent of steep mud volcanoes marks the start of Hindu pilgrims' religious rituals in southwestern Pakistan. They climb hundreds of stairs or clamber over rocks to reach the summit, tossing coconuts and rose petals into the shallow crater while seeking divine permission to visit Hinglaj Mata, an ancient cave temple that is the focus of their three-day worship.

The dramatic surroundings of Hingol National Park in Baluchistan province are the setting for Pakistan's largest Hindu festival, Hinglaj Yatra, which started on Friday and ends on Sunday. Organizers



say more than 100,000 Hindus are expected to participate.

Muslim-majority Pakistan is home to 4.4 million Hindus, just 2.14% of the population, and Hinglaj Mata is one of the few Hindu sites that continues to draw large numbers of pilgrims every year from across the country.

Muslims and Hindus gen-

erally live peacefully in Pakistan, from where most of the Hindus migrated to India when it was divided by British colonialists in 1947. But there have been attacks on Hindu temples in recent years as relations between the rivals remain tense.

Hindus believe Hinglaj Mata is one of the places where the remains of Sati, the god-

dess of marital felicity and longevity, fell to earth after she ended her life.

Maharaj Gopal, the temple's most senior cleric, explains why people flock to it. 'It is the most sacred pilgrimage in the Hindu religion,' said Gopal. 'Whoever visits the temple and worships accordingly during these three days will have all of their sins forgiven.'

The journeys begin hundreds of kilometres (miles) away, mostly from neighbouring Sindh province. Hundreds of packed buses set off from cities like Hyderabad and Karachi, traveling along the Makran Coastal Highway that hugs Pakistan's south and southwest.

But there's scant parking and vehicular access to the holy sites, so many pilgrims disembark and complete their travel by walking over parched and rocky terrain, sometimes barefoot and carrying children or luggage.

It's a few kilometres (miles) from the main road to the mud volcano and then, from there, almost 45 kilometres (25 miles) to Hinglaj Mata.

Winds buffet the desert-like conditions, churning up dust that whips the eyes, nose and mouth. The pilgrims' festive cheer and brightly coloured apparel are a contrast to the arid landscape. Strong gusts distort people's celebratory cries of 'Jai mata di' and 'Jai shiv shankar.'

Harvey Weinstein hospitalised after his return to New York from upstate prison

AGENCIES NEW YORK, 28 APRIL

Harvey Weinstein's lawyer said Saturday that the one-time movie mogul has been hospitalized for a battery of tests after his return to New York City following an appeals court ruling nullifying his 2020 rape conviction.

Attorney Arthur Aidala said Weinstein was moved to Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan after his arrival on Friday to city jails.

'They examined him and sent him to Bellevue. It seems like he needs a lot of help, physically. He's got a lot of problems. He's getting all

Weinstein was moved to Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan after his arrival on Friday to city jails

Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, said Weinstein was turned over to the city's Department of Correction pursuant to the appeals ruling. Weinstein had been housed at the Mohawk Correctional Facility, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) north-west of Albany.

On Thursday, the New York Court of Appeals vacated his conviction after concluding that a trial judge permitted jurors to see and hear too much evidence not directly related to the charges he faced. It also erased his 23-year prison sentence and ordered a retrial.

A message left with the hospital was not immediately returned Saturday. Frank Dwyer, a spokesperson with the New York City Department of Correction, said only that Weinstein remains in custody at Bellevue. Thomas Mailey, a spokesperson for the state

Dealing with ethnic enigma

SHIBDAS BHATTACHARJEE

The issue of ethnic identity always bears greater significance in the context of the country's north-eastern region. However, the identity issue is a delicate one for the entire area. Taking a stand to address the identity issue for a section is always perceived as against the interests of others. The problem is not confined to the decades-old matters related to the indigenous communities living in different parts of the region. It also includes those people who are striving to establish distinctive identity to date in the north-east against the backdrop of the partition of India after the eclipse of British colonial rule. India began her journey as a sovereign democratic nation with a thousand wounds after independence. There is no justification, only putting the entire blame on the British. But the Indian academic pundits make the British responsible for all odds here, virtually for everything. If democracy demands accountability, such an approach is against the spirit of democratic order as it only conceals the failures of the successive regimes that ruled India after colonial rule had ended. The same approach tries to cover up the Indian leadership's lack of responsibility. The most deceptive aspect is the tendency to search for a British skeleton to relinquish responsibility, as the ruler of the world's largest democracy is never ready to shoulder the responsibility. The generations brought up since 1947 with the prejudice that the British rulers are responsible for whatever is wrong in the subcontinent. The point is not to judge who is responsible for what. Similarly, digging the graves can never be an option. The vital point is seeking accountability from the present leadership and from all those who have ruled India since independence till date. But is there any space for such debate in today's academic arena? If not, the scholarly debate is feeding the political agenda shamelessly.

One may ask the relevance of this prelude in discussing an issue related to the present north-eastern region of the country. The answer is that the destiny of the north-east is not different from that of the nation. The north-east has paid heavily for the country's partition and related affairs. The most devastating one is that the partition of India tore the demographic fabric of



the country. If the region bleeds, the cause is related to the saga that inflicted wounds decades ago. After all, the dubiousness that persists among the people of the area proves this true. Similarly, the identity issue and the conflicting interests among different communities got hyped during the election period in the region.

Recently, the union minister and BJP stalwart from the north-east, Kiren Rijiju, initiated a fresh controversy about the Chakma and Hajong communities living in Arunachal Pradesh. Just a few days ago, Rijiju made a controversial statement, saying that more than 67,000 people belonging to the Chakma and Hajong communities who are presently residing in Arunachal Pradesh would be relocated to Assam with the help of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). This sparked new controversy in Assam for obvious reasons. But in response to Rijiju's statement, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma stated that he is unaware of what Rijiju said in this context. Instead, the Assam CM stated that the state government plans to provide citizenship to the Assamese people living in Arunachal Pradesh. However, as both CAA and the relocating of Chakma and Hajong from Arunachal Pradesh are sensitive issues, the opposition did not want to miss the opportunity to corner the ruling BJP, consid-

ering the electoral importance of the issue. Top leaders of both the regional parties born of the anti-CAA movement in Assam—the Rajior Dal and the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP)—came down heavily on chief minister Sarma for his apparent engagement with the Union and Arunachal Pradesh governments to settle Chakma and the Hajong refugees in the state. Assam State Congress president Bhupen Borah expressed apprehension about a conspiracy against Assam and the interests of the larger Assamese society by the BJP. Thus, Rijiju's statement became a handy issue for the anti-BJP political parties during the election. This might have impacted the second phase of the poll in Assam, held on 26 April. But the issue has not died yet, as another phase of the election is scheduled in Assam on 7 May. The significant point is that the status of the Chakma and Hajong communities has been an unaddressed issue for decades, not only in the context of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam but also in substantial parts of the erstwhile

north-eastern region. According to online data, people from the Chakma community live in Mizoram and Tripura. As per the official data available in the public domain, nearly one lakh Chakma refugees live in Manipur. In Tripura, the number of Chakma refugees is estimated at about thirty thousand. On the other hand, many people in the Hajong community live in Assam, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh. Relocating these people from one state to another is neither straightforward nor realistic.

However, the statement of both Union Minister Kiren Rijiju and Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma proves one thing clearly: the BJP is yet to evolve consensus on such an issue plaguing the interests not only of certain sections but also of the more extensive interests of the north-east related to India's national interests. Similarly, this also exposes the biting reality that the so-called leadership of the saffron party representing the north-east does the groundwork before making a statement on such a

sensitive issue in the region. But the important point is: why are Chakma and Hajong refugees living in such a state even after so many decades since independence? People belonging to both communities, particularly the Chakmas, are paying the price of the partition of India and the sinister design of both East Pakistan and now Bangladesh. The Chakmas originally belonged to the Chittagong Hill region of Bangladesh. After the creation of Pakistan, a sizable section of the Chakma community was forced to leave East Pakistan in the same manner as was the case with mainstream Hindu Bengali communities. The creation of Bangladesh in the name of so-called Bengali nationalism hardly changed the situation there. The communal Islamic agenda of Bangladesh became more potent after the assassination of Mujibur Rahman and during the rule of Ziaur Rahman. Ziaur Rahman was the face of fanatic Islam in Southeast Asia during his tenure in office, both as martial administrator and president of Bangladesh. Subsequently, Hussain Md. Ershad and Khaleda Zia extended Ziaur Rahman's agenda during their tenure in office in Bangladesh.

But has the situation changed during the rule of Sheikh Hasina? This bears greater significance. After all, Sheikh Hasina is familiar with her pro-India image. Both New Delhi and

Dhaka claim that the ongoing phase is the best one as far as the bilateral relationship between the two nations is concerned. But Hasina has taken hardly any initiative to ensure the legitimate rights of the Chakmas living in Bangladesh. Naturally, taking back the Chakmas ousted from Bangladesh is a far cry. For a lasting solution for the Chakma refugees, the right way is to deal with Bangladesh at the bilateral level. As far as Hajongs are concerned, this requires broader consensus among stakeholders in the north-eastern region. The issue related to the plight of the Hajong community also connects with Bangladesh. But it would be wrong to ignore the random propaganda that is going on in Bangladesh regarding non-Muslim ethnic groups in the Chittagong Hill area. It is never an easy task for Bangladesh to take a decisive stand regarding refugee rehabilitation in Bangladesh. This proves the apathy of partition that has victimised people on the subcontinent in different phases. Is it the proper approach to search for a British ghost for this? Along with the political leadership, the academic pundits need to ponder about lasting solutions to the ethnic enigma plaguing the north-east and jeopardising India's national interests.

The writer is an independent contributor

Political chess in the north-east: BJP's power play and opposition resilience

ABHIJIT DEB

In the wake of the conclusion of polling across most north-eastern states, excluding Assam, all eyes are now fixed on the impending election results, signalling the region's paramount importance in national politics.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is banking heavily on clinching victory in nearly all 25 seats, underscoring its concerted bid to solidify its hold in the region and diminish the long-standing dominance of the Indian National Congress.

The formation of the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) by the BJP after it stormed to power at the centre in 2014 aimed to forge a formidable non-Congress front, rallying support from smaller regional parties to challenge the Congress stronghold.

However, internal dissent within NEDA, stemming from the BJP's dominant stance, has revealed underlying power struggles within the coalition.

Despite initial hiccups, the BJP has shown adaptability by recalibrating its strategy to accommodate regional aspirations and recognising the imperative of inclusivity for sustaining alliances and electoral triumphs.

The distribution of seats in the Lok Sabha election 2024 across states reveals the diverse electoral landscape, with Assam boasting 14 seats, while Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh hold two seats each, and Nagaland, Mizoram and Sikkim have one seat each.

The BJP's reigning status or coalition presence in several states underscores its burgeoning influence, notably in Assam, Manipur, Tripura, and Arunachal Pradesh.

The shift towards a unified campaign under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) banner in this election marks a departure from the absence of seat-sharing arrangements in 2019, signalling a strategic pivot towards coalition politics.

Disparities in seat-sharing arrangements, such as BJP allies con-



testing separately in Mizoram and Sikkim, alongside seat-sharing pacts with parties like the National People's Party (NPP), Naga People's Front (NPF), and Nationalist Democratic Progressive Front (NDPP), underscore the BJP's

efforts to foster coalition coherence. The stakes are particularly high in Assam, where the BJP is vying for 11 seats, bolstered by support from allies like the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the United People's Party Liberal

(UPPL), highlighting the state's pivotal role as a critical battleground.

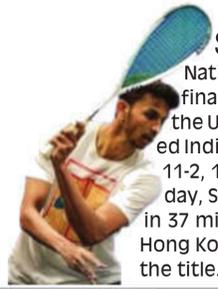
Strategic alliances, including instances of mutual support like the NPP backing the BJP in Arunachal and the BJP abstaining from contesting in

Meghalaya, underscore the collaborative nature of coalition politics in the region.

Opposition dynamics are palpable, with the emergence of the INDIA bloc posing a formidable challenge, especially in Manipur and Tripura,

providing a counterweight to the BJP's dominance. Nonetheless, the Congress is optimistic about retaining certain key seats, particularly in Assam and Meghalaya, showcasing its resilience amid an arduous political landscape.





SENTHILKUMAR ADVANCES

National champion Velavan Senthilkumar advanced to the 12th final of his career in the Professional Squash Association Tour at the USD 12,000 Batch Open Challenger event in Paris. The top-seeded Indian, ranked 58 in the World, defeated Hong Kong's Andes Ling 11-2, 11-1, 11-6 in 22 minutes in the semifinals on Saturday. On Friday, Senthilkumar defeated the fifth-seeded Czech 11-5, 11-6, 11-2 in 37 minutes in the quarterfinals to set up a last-four clash against Hong Kong's Ling. He will take on Frenchman Melvil Scianimanico for the title.

For more updates www.thestatesman.com

ARCHERY WORLD CUP

Men's recurve team wins gold, Deepika bags silver

India also clinched the mixed team recurve bronze as Ankita Bhakat and Dhiraj finished the meet with eight medals ~ five gold, two silvers and one bronze

HARPAL SINGH BEDI
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Indian men's recurve team of Tarundeep Rai, Pravin Jadhav and Dhiraj Bommadevara won the historic gold at the Archery World Cup in Shanghai, China on Sunday while Deepika Kumari bagged a silver in the women's individual recurve event.

India also clinched the mixed team recurve bronze as Ankita Bhakat and Dhiraj finished the meet with eight medals - five gold, two silvers and one bronze.

The country's compound archers accounted for five medals, including four golds, on Saturday.

In the men's team recurve finals, India faced a daunting task against the top-seeded team from Korea, featuring Kim Woojin and Kim Je Deok - two members of the Tokyo Olympics gold medal-winning team. Lee Woo Seok was the third archer.

The Indian trio, however, remained calm under pressure to pick up a stunning 5-1 win



against the Koreans to secure the top podium.

This was India's first World Cup gold medal in men's recurve team archery in 14 years.

The historic win will significantly boost India's chances of securing a berth in the Paris Olympics through the rankings route.

Till now, Dhiraj Bom-

madevara has obtained India's only archery quota for Paris.

Soon after, Dhiraj went on to partner with Ankita Bhakat to win the bronze medal in the mixed team event after blanking Mexico 6-0.

On Wednesday, Dhiraj Bommadevara shot a new national record score of 693 in the men's recurve qualifiers and obtained third seeding.

Indian archers, however, drew a blank in the men's individual recurve event.

Pravin was ousted in the opening round itself while Dhiraj exited in the third round. Olympian Tarundeep Rai's medal charge ended in the quarter-finals.

However, Deepika Kumari struck silver in the women's individual recurve event.

In the men's team recurve finals, India faced a daunting task against the top-seeded team from Korea, featuring Kim Woojin and Kim Je Deok - two members of the Tokyo Olympics gold medal-winning team. Lee Woo Seok was the third archer.

The three-time Olympian accounted for South Korea's Nam Suhyeon 6-0 in the semis but lost to another Korean Lim Sihyeon by a similar scoreline in the gold medal match.

This was Deepika's second successive medal since returning to the international arena after her maternity break.

She participated in her first international competition after a 14-month-long hiatus at the 2024 Asia Cup in Baghdad this February and marked the occasion by winning the individual gold.



Maheshwari secures Paris Olympics quota

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Maheshwari Chauhan secured a Paris quota for India in the women's skeet event at the ISSF Final Olympic Shotgun Qualification Championship in Doha, Qatar on Sunday.

The Doha meet is the final shotgun qualifying event for the Paris Games. The top two eligible shooters in each indi-

vidual event (maximum one per country) secured quotas. Maheshwari finished second in the skeet event after Francisca Crovetto Chacud of Chile. Both scored 54 but the Chilean finished top after pipping the Indian shooter in the shoot-off.

This was India's 21st quota in shooting for the Paris Summer Games and only the fifth one in shotgun events.

Uber Cup: Indian women beat Singapore to assure place in quarter-finals



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Putting up yet another awesome display Indian women's badminton team routed Singapore 4-1 to virtually assure themselves a place in the quarter-finals of the Uber Cup in Chengdu, China on Sunday.

The young and new look Indian team, without big names like PV Sindhu, Ashwini Ponnappa-Tanisha Crasto and Gayatri Gopichand-Treasa Jolly, downed Canada 4-1 in its Group A opener on Saturday and continued the momentum with another stellar victory against Singapore.

With two wins in as many outings, India have almost secured a top-two finish in the

group, and a last-eight berth by extension.

The Indian face a tough final group fixture against China on Tuesday but the result of the tie will be inconsequential if the hosts beat Canada, as expected, later in the day.

The tie against Singapore didn't start well for the Indian as their star campaigner Ashmita Chaliha, 53rd in the world bad rankings, lost to world No. 18 Ye Jia Min in the opening singles rubber.

Priya Konjengbam/Shruti Mishra initiated the Indian fightback by winning their doubles match against Xiao En Heng and Jin Yu Jia 21-15, 21-16.

World No. 83 Isharani Baruah

accounted for the 151st-ranked Insyirah Khan 21-13, 21-16 to hand India the lead before Simran Singh/Ritika Thaker, who lost their match against Canada, picked up their first win of the tournament to settle the tie.

Jadumani Singh outperformed Aldarkhishig Battulga of Mongolia by winning the bout with an RSC (Referee Stop Contest) decision in round two.

Akash, on the other hand, faced a tough challenge against Mongolia's Ganbaatar Gan Erdene but made a remarkable comeback after losing the first round to win the bout 4-1. Both the boxers will play their

quarter-finals bout on Tuesday. Late on Saturday, Jatin (57kg), Sagar Jakhar (60kg) and Yashwardhan Singh (63.5kg) also entered the next round.

Both the Indians won their bouts with an identical 5-0 win while Sagar received a walkover from his opponent Leong Brandon of Singapore.

The Boxing Federation of India has fielded a 50-member India squad for the ongoing tournament, which has been witnessing high-voltage action with the presence of 390-plus boxers from more than 24 countries, fighting for the medals across 25 weight categories.

The finals for the youth and U-22 category will be played on May 6 and 7 respectively.

Asian Boxing C'ships: Jadumani, Akash enter quarter-finals



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, 28 APRIL

Mandengbam Jadumani Singh (51kg) and Akash Gorkha (60kg) recorded contrasting victories to enter the quarter-finals of the Asian U22 quarters Boxing Championships in Astana, Kazakhstan on Sunday.

Jadumani Singh outperformed Aldarkhishig Battulga of Mongolia by winning the bout with an RSC (Referee Stop Contest) decision in round two.

Akash, on the other hand, faced a tough challenge against Mongolia's Ganbaatar Gan Erdene but made a remarkable comeback after losing the first round to win the bout 4-1. Both the boxers will play their

quarter-finals bout on Tuesday. Late on Saturday, Jatin (57kg), Sagar Jakhar (60kg) and Yashwardhan Singh (63.5kg) also entered the next round.

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IPL: Will Jacks, Kohli shock Gujarat, keep RCB's playoff hopes alive

AGENCIES
AHMEDABAD, 28 APRIL

Cometh the hour, cometh Will Jacks! In a must-win battle, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) thrashed Gujarat Titans by nine wickets with 24 balls to spare in Match 45 of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024, here on Sunday. And credit for the win goes to English allrounder Will Jacks, whose explosive batting (100 not out off just 41 balls) made it look like a cakewalk for the visitors on a wicket which was looking slow during the first 10 of the game.

Former India captain Virat Kohli, too, displayed some aggressive cricket to guide his team home as he smashed 70 off 44 balls. The former RCB captain was animated throughout the match as if he was on some mission. Kohli has faced a lot of social media trolls in recent times for his strike rate. But on Sunday, Kohli once again managed to silence his critics.

Even after the match, Virat was quick to share his thoughts with the commentator by saying, "All people who talk about strike rates and me not playing spin well talk about



these things (numbers). It's just about doing my job...It's about us as cricketers having some self-respect."

Talking about the match, Will Jacks bludgeoned the GT bowlers for a 41-ball hundred and shared an unbeaten 166-run partnership with Kohli to help RCB stay alive in the race to the playoffs.

Kohli exploited the larger sections of the Narendra Modi Stadium to convert singles into twos efficiently. Particularly adept against spin, Kohli has amassed 43 runs from 23 balls after facing only nine deliveries of fast bowling in the Power-play.

Meanwhile, Will Jacks showcased his phenomenal batting prowess in the 15th over, targeting Mohit Sharma with relentless aggression, ham-

mering him for two boundaries and three towering sixes.

Titans' hopes of containing him with Rashid Khan's leg-spin were dashed as Jacks continued his onslaught, smashing consecutive sixes and a boundary to swiftly secure a comprehensive victory for RCB with four overs to spare in the daunting 201-run chase.

Earlier, Sai Sudharsan (84) and M. Shashrugh Khan (58) struck brilliant fifties to help Gujarat score 200/3 in 20.

After being asked to bat first, the hosts didn't get a positive start as Wriddhiman Saha (5) and Shubman Gill (16) failed to impress on a slow-looking track. It was Swapnil Singh who got the first breakthrough for Bengaluru. He got the better of Saha in the very first over.

Lilian Kasait and Peter Mwaniki reign supreme at the TCS World 10K Bengaluru

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE
BENGALURU, 28 APRIL

Kenyan runners dominated the race as Peter Mwaniki clinched the men's title while Lilian Kasait bagged the women's crown in the 16th edition of the TCS World 10K Bengaluru on Sunday.

The contest between the Indian elite athletes saw a stellar performance from Kiran Matre who took the first position and break the event record with a timing of 29:32.

Meanwhile, Sanjivani dominated the Indian women's lineup to set herself up for a comfortable first-place finish.

As winners of the prestigious USD 210,000 World Athletics Gold Label Road Race, Peter Mwaniki and Lilian Kasait took home an equal prize cheque of USD 26,000 each.



Men's Overall winner Kenya's Peter Mwaniki at the finish line at the TCS World 10K Bengaluru.

In the Indian elite category, Kiran Matre and Sanjivani Jadhav bagged the grand cash

for breaking the event record. Mwaniki, who came into the race as a hot favourite, got off to a conservative start. At the 7.5km mark, he was level pegging with his Kenyan peer Hillary Chepkwony.

However, Mwaniki surged forward in the final stretch to finish comfortably with a timing of 28:15, while Hillary Chepkwony (28:33) finished behind him. Also logging a resounding performance was 17-year-old debutant Hagos Eyob who clocked an impressive 28:39 to finish third.

The international elite women's race took shape early in the run as the world's second-fastest 10K runner, Emmaculate Achol looked to lead the pack from the get-go. Following the 7.1 Km mark, Lilian Kasait seized the opportunity to power ahead of Achol,

with Irene Chaptai's event record of (30:35) in danger. Lilian Kasait finished her run just short of the event record, clocking 30:56. Meanwhile, Emmaculate Achol (31:17) and Lemlem Hailu (31:23) finished second and third respectively. "It was a very aggressive race, we were fast from the beginning. Emmaculate was really pushing us all. I just tried to keep up with her. At the 7km mark, I felt I could push myself and decided to go for it," Kasait said after the race.

The race for the Indian elite men saw the top four positions finish ahead of the previous course record. In an evenly-fought contest, Kiran Matre breached the finish line while clocking his personal best of 29:32. In close pursuit were Ranjeet Kumar Patel (29:35) and Dharmendra (29:45) who com-

pleted the podium.

"Between the 4th and 8th kilometre, I found the run quite challenging, so I'm very pleased with the result. Last year I finished 12th, so this victory is very satisfying. I hope to use this momentum to prepare for the Paris Olympics and try to break the 28-minute mark," Kiran opined.

Meanwhile, event record holder Sanjivani dominated the line up in the women's category to complete her third victory at the TCS World

The Indian women's run saw an early push in by Sonam (36:27). Sanjivani eventually broke through in pursuit of another event record, though she fell short with a timing of 34:03. She was closely followed by Lilli Das (34:13) who finished second while Preenu Yadav finished third at 34:24.

Renuka stars in comprehensive 44-run win over B'desh in 1st T20I

AGENCIES
SYLHET, 28 APRIL

A clinical outing with the ball helped India register a comprehensive 44-run victory over the Bangladesh women's team in the first T20I at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium on Sunday.

Bangladesh tottered hard to get past the 100-run mark as India thoroughly maintained their position in the driver's seat. India's dominance was foreshadowed in the powerplay with the pace duo of Renuka Singh Thakur and Pooja Vastrakar combining to strike twice in the powerplay. After the two dismissals, the writing was on the wall for Bangladesh. Skipper Nigar Sultana waged a lone battle from no end but hardly found

any support from her teammates. With a steady approach, she scored a half-century but her individual efforts were not enough to take her side across the finish line. On their way to 101/8, Bangladesh were helped by a couple of misfields from the Indian fielders as they conceded some boundaries that were avoidable.

The wickets were shared amongst the Indian bowlers, but Renuka starred with 3/18. Earlier in the innings, India stumbled early but got off to a flying start after winning the toss and putting Bangladesh to bowl. Left-arm quick Fariha Trisna castled Smriti Mandhana (9) in the third over. Shafali Verma and Yastika Bhatia steadied India's dwindling ship with their composure.