

absolute india

VOL. 11, ISSUE 144, MUMBAI | SUNDAY, APRIL 07, 2024 | ₹5 | PAGE 08

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CONGRESS' ELECTION MANIFESTO SMELLS OF DIVIDING THE NATION: PM MODI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday criticised the Congress' election manifesto released on April 5, calling it a bundle of lies, while claiming that the grand old party will be unable to do anything for the country's interests.

Jaipur | Agencies

Speaking at a rally in Pushkar in Rajasthan, PM Modi said "each page of the Congress' election manifesto smells of dividing the nation".

"This manifesto reflects the same ideology of the Muslim League. The Congress wants to impose the ideas of the Muslim League of the past era on the India of today. Leftists have dominated the part of this manifesto bearing the imprint of the Muslim League.

"Today, the Congress has neither principles nor policies left. It seems that Congress has given everything on contract. The entire Congress has been outsourced. Such a party (Congress) cannot do any work in the interest of the country," PM Modi said.

PM Modi further said that his third tenure is not far-off, and the BJP-led government is going to make bigger decisions in the first 100 days of his next term against corruption.

"I am fully prepared... have started making preparations in this direction. The action that took place in 10 years is a trailer. There is a lot that needs to



be done," PM Modi said.

Launching a scathing attack on the Congress, PM Modi said: "There just cannot be any development wherever Congress is present because it does not care for the poor and deprived

section of the society. First, it is a family-based party, and on top of that, it is a corrupt one.

"The Congress never cared about women's power. After Independence, the lives of crores of daughters of the

country were spent in misery from generation to generation. The Congress is responsible for this situation," he added.

PM Modi said that "the Congress members should understand that the more mud you throw, the more the Lotus will bloom".

"The Congress is not holding rallies to win the elections, but it is doing so to save the corrupt. The fight against corruption will continue," he said.

Stating that "happiness, respect, security and prosperity of women power is Modi's Guarantee," the Prime Minister said that India has to be made a developed nation by 2047.

"We need to make India the third-largest economic power. This will happen only when the participation of half of the country's population is increased. The happiness, respect, security and prosperity of mothers, sisters and daughters is 'Modi's Guarantee'," PM Modi said.

"With the Women's Reservation Bill, reservation of seats for our mothers and sisters in Parliament have been confirmed. Women are handling big projects for ISRO. India has the highest percentage of women pilots in the world," PM Modi said.

INDIA bloc a broken engine without any compartment: Devendra Fadnavis

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Deputy Maharashtra Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis on Saturday slammed the INDIA bloc, terming it a broken (detached) engine without any compartment.

"In Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), all the engines (referring to various parties and their leaders) are lined up. They raise their hands and say they are together but later take their engines in different directions. What is the purpose of such an engine? People no longer have faith in this broken engine," he said during his interaction with the media after attending a function on the occasion of BJP's Foundation Day.

"Someone described the MVA very well. Be it Maha Vikas Aghadi or INDIA bloc, it is just an engine without any compartment," said Fadnavis.

The Deputy Maharashtra Chief Minister also said that the BJP is focusing on the "Booth Chalo Abhiyan", and it is being carried out with the celebration of the party's foundation day.

"BJP is the only party which is working while keeping the booth at the centre-stage that makes it easy to reach the last person," he noted. Devendra Fadnavis further said that as far as the MahaYuti is concerned, there are



three parties -- BJP, Shiv Sena, and NCP, so it is equally important to respect the allies.

"We (BJP) never claimed that we would contest 33 Lok Sabha seats. Our effort was that we should fight for the seats we get while respecting all the three and accordingly, we (BJP) have got the seats," he added.

Consent for physical relations not misconceived without evidence of false promise of marriage: Delhi HC

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The Delhi High Court has said that when a woman makes an informed decision to engage in physical relations, consent cannot be deemed misconceived unless there is clear evidence of a false promise of marriage.

Justice Anoop Kumar Mendiratta made this observation while dismissing a rape case against a man, as the matter had been resolved amicably between the parties, who have since married.

The court said that when a woman consciously chooses to engage in physical relations, fully understanding the consequences, her consent cannot be considered misconceived unless there is evidence of a false promise with no intention of fulfillment. This promise must be directly related to the woman's decision to engage in sexual activity.

The case stemmed from the woman lodging a rape



complaint against the man, alleging that he had engaged in physical relations with her under the pretext of marriage but later reneged on his promise, citing family pressure for an arranged marriage.

Subsequently, the court was informed that the couple had settled their differences and legally married.

The woman expressed her happiness in her current marital relationship and withdrew her FIR, acknowledging that the accused's reluctance to marry

stemmed from family pressure, not bad faith or deceit.

The court noted the voluntary marriage by the accused during the investigation, indicating that the initial promise was not made with malicious intent.

Considering the harmonious relationship between the parties and the remote likelihood of conviction, the court quashed the proceedings under Section 376 of the IPC, saying that continuing the case would be an abuse of court processes and disrupt marital harmony.

Jaipur | Agencies

Chairperson of the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) Sonia Gandhi on Saturday said that India is not the property of a few people but belongs to everyone.

"This country is not the property of a few people. It belongs to everyone. Our ancestors have watered it with blood," Sonia Gandhi said while addressing a massive rally on the launch of 'Nyay' manifesto for the Lok Sabha 2024 elections in Jaipur.

She said that for the last 10 years, the country has been in the hands of a government which has left no stone unturned in promoting unemployment and economic crisis.

"Whatever the Modi government has done is in front of us. This time is full of despair but know that with despair hope is also born. I have full confidence that our Congress colleagues will light the lamp of justice and will move ahead braving thousands of storms," she said.

She said that PM Modi considers himself great but the (BJP government) is violating democratic norms



and instilling fear in the entire system.

"This is a dictatorship. Our democracy is in danger," Sonia Gandhi said.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi were also present on the occasion.

Kharge attacked PM Modi, saying that he has been taking credit for everything without doing anything.

"Is it PM Modi's job to take credit without doing any actual work? This man goes everywhere and says I did this, I did that. How many guarantees have they given to us before?" Kharge asked.

He said that in the first guarantee, PM Modi told the youth that he would provide two crore jobs every year. "20 crore jobs were to be given in 10 years. Have the youth of the coun-

try got 20 crore jobs? He said Rs 15 lakh will be deposited in everyone's account. Has this amount been deposited to the accounts? Modi is PM. How can he lie," Kharge asked.

He said that IIT, airport and AIIMS have been brought by Congress and PM Modi still says that he is developing the country.

Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi said that unemployment is at its highest.

"You have seen how the BJP government has worked in the last 10 years. What have they done to eradicate the nation from the evil of unemployment," she asked.

On the Agnipath scheme, Priyanka Gandhi said that this scheme dashed the hope of lakhs of youths who wanted to get into the Army.

She said that paper-leak has become a common problem in all states and it is one of the reasons that youths are not getting jobs.

Country has moved from 'Fragile Five to Top Five Economies': Ashwini Vaishnaw

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Union Minister for Railways, Communications and Electronics & IT Ashwini Vaishnaw on Saturday summed up India's growth journey in the last 10 years and explained what factors led to the expeditious growth, something that never happened in Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) eras.

Addressing the gathering at Viksit Bharat Ambassadors meet-up program in the capital, the Union Minister said that country has moved from 'Fragile Five to Top Five Economies' of the world and is now headed for another milestone.

He credited this to meticulous planning and focused execution, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"All this change didn't happen automatically. A lot of effort, planning and execution has gone to bring this change. If this change was to happen on its own, it would have happened in 1970s and 1980s," he said. The Minister said that four pillars have primarily driven this



growth, which include Public investment in social & physical sectors, Inclusive growth, Simplification of goals and Manufacturing push.

Elucidating the public investment and capacity building, he cited the example of his own ministry. "Earlier, an average of 1050 kms of railway tracks were built in a year, that went to 5,300 kms of tracks in a year (equivalent to the

size of Belgium, Austria and Switzerland)," Vaishnaw told the audience.

"During the first 60 years after Independence, railway electrification took place on 20,000 km track, in last ten years alone, over 40,000 km track was electrified," he added.

He also enlightened the Viksit Bharat Ambassador participants about notable rise in number of topmost institutions including

AIIMS, IITs, IIMs and also their capacity in nurturing talent over past few years.

Underlining government's focus on inclusive growth, the Union Minister spoke on how ground-breaking initiatives like Swachhata Yojana and Jan Dhan accounts have brought a transformational change across the country.

Citing growth numbers, he said: "Over 10 crore free LPG connections were distributed under Ujjawala Yojana, 80 crore people are being provided with 5 kg food-grains every month while 25 crore people have been lifted out of multi-dimensional poverty in past 10 years."

Describing simplification as the third pillar of growth, he put forth examples of Telecom sector and Law department and said that lot of endeavor and planning went into bringing the paradigm change.

"India's telecom sector was governed by an Act enacted in 1985. Today, that has changed. It took two years to conceptualise, brainstorm and enact the new Telecom law and today, that is giving us good direc-

Trinamool to approach ECI over NIA 'excesses' in Bengal

Kolkata | Agencies

Trinamool Congress has decided to approach the Election Commission of India (ECI) with complaints of "excesses" committed by a section of the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in West Bengal.

Sources said that Trinamool, instead of approaching the West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer, will directly approach ECI in New Delhi.

"We have already sought an appointment with the ECI. Two Trinamool Rajya Sabha members will submit a memorandum to the ECI," a senior Trinamool leader said. Moreover, a two-member delegation of Trinamool Congress including the West Bengal Minister of State in charge of Finance Chandrima Bhattacharya and the Trinamool General Secretary Kunal Ghosh will visit Bhupatinagar on Sunday and talk to people and learn



what happened between the people and the NIA team. Earlier, the NIA team was attacked by local people in Bhupatinagar in the East Midnapore district when they were returning after detaining two Trinamool Congress leaders Balai Charan Maity and Monobrata Jana accused of involvement in a blast at Bhupatinagar in December 2022, in which three persons were killed. This was the sec-

ond attack on the central investigating agency in three months in West Bengal.

On January 5, ED and CAPF personnel were attacked by the locals in Sandeshkhali in which Trinamool leader Sheikh Shahjahan has been arrested. Soon after the attack, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee blamed NIA for the incident, saying that NIA harassed the women in Bhupatinagar.



Manish Sisodia's judicial custody extended till April 18

Team Absolute | New Delhi

Delhi court on Saturday extended AAP leader Manish Sisodia's judicial custody till April 18 in connection with a money laundering case related to the alleged excise policy scam.

Sisodia, the former deputy chief minister of Delhi, was produced before Special Judge Kaveri Baweja of Rouse Avenue Court on the expiry of his previously extended judicial custody.

On Tuesday, Sisodia's bail application was argued by his counsel alleging delay in completing the investigation in the case.

Sisodia's counsel Mohit Mathur had argued that despite 11 months passing since the investigation concluded, there has been no evidence linking his client to the alleged bribe money.

Mathur had presented arguments before Special Judge Kaveri Baweja of the Rouse Avenue Court, contending the absence of CBI's public prosecutor. Mathur had reiterated that the alleged proceeds of crime were not proven to cause any loss to the exchequer or private consumers.

He had stressed the delay in the trial, stating that the Supreme Court's order, allowing him to approach the court, is six months old, and the



investigation should have been completed by now.

Citing the bail granted to another accused, Benoy Babu, Mathur had argued for Sisodia's bail, saying that he no longer holds a position of influence.

He had also stressed that Sisodia

met the triple test for bail, as outlined by the Supreme Court, and urged for a speedy trial.

Mathur had further said that Sisodia's eligibility for bail is established, given the fulfillment of all necessary conditions and the absence of any misuse of liberties, as per the

Supreme Court's guidelines.

Sisodia's role is being probed by both ED and CBI. Earlier, the CBI counsel had told the court that the investigation was at a critical stage and releasing Sisodia on bail might impede the ongoing probe or lead to his evasion of justice.

Ex-Kerala HC CJ declines to take over as state rights body chairperson

Team Absolute | Thiruvananthapuram

Even after Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan cleared the appointment of former Kerala High Court Chief Justice S. Manikumar as the Chairperson of the State Human Rights Commission (SHRC), the latter on Saturday informed the Governor that he won't be able to take up the new role.

Manikumar said that due to personal reasons, he will not be able to take up the appointment, paving the way to end the controversy that erupted after the Congress party and Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan strongly opposed the appointment, even as Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan batted for it.

It was in September last year that Manikumar's name was cleared by Vijayan and the file sent to Khan.

But Khan kept the file until last week, after which he cleared it.

Satheesan on September 29 last year wrote to Khan not to approve the proposal to appoint Manikumar.

Satheesan pointed out that he as a member of the selection committee of the SHRC had expressed strong reservations about the decision to appoint Manikumar.

"As you are aware, the position of SHRC Chairperson requires the highest level of probity and must be free of any bias towards the government in power. However, some of Manikumar's decisions as Chief Justice of the Kerala High Court have raised serious concerns about his ability to function impartially and fairly, as required by the commission," said Satheesan in his letter.

Former Leader of Opposition and Congress



legislator Ramesh Chennithala also opposed the appointment and said that Manikumar was sitting on many of his cases against Vijayan.

Hearing the news that Manikumar was not joining, Chennithala said it's nice that Manikumar is not taking up the post as all know this post was given as gratis for all the 'help' he gave to Vijayan.

Vijayan, in an unprecedented gesture, last year gave a farewell to Manikumar along with a few of his cabinet colleagues, days before his superannuation and this had raised eyebrows.

Former Goa minister Alina Saldanha joins Congress



Team Absolute | Panaji

Former Goa minister Alina Saldanha on Saturday joined the Congress, saying the grand old party was widely known for "maintaining peace, law and order" in the coastal state.

After switching to Congress from AAP, Alina Saldanha said that during the Congress regime, there was "friendship among communities".

"When Congress was ruling in the state, there was peace and friendship among various communities of the

state. It was beautiful to be part of Goa. It is a tiny state... but was an example to the other states of the country. There was law and order, and sincerity at every level. Somehow I feel we are missing those days," Saldanha, who was a minister in the Laxmikant Parsekar-led Goa Cabinet, said.

She said that Goa is known for communal harmony and "the old days of visiting each others' homes in a cheerful way should come back".

"I am confident that our candidates will win, and they will raise the issues

of the state in the Parliament," she said.

Ahead of the Assembly election in 2022, she quit the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and joined the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

She had contested on the AAP ticket from Cortalim constituency but lost to Independent candidate, Antonio Vas.

The Congress on Saturday announced the names of former Union Minister Ramakant Khalap and Viriato Fernandes for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in North Goa and South Goa seats, respectively.

People of all castes are with Congress: Siddaramaiah

Team Absolute | Kolar (Karnataka)

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday said that people of all castes across the state are with Congress and in the coming days more people will join the party "People of all castes including the middle classes are with Congress. This time the Congress will win by a large margin," the Chief Minister told media persons while participating in the election campaign for Kolar Lok Sabha candidate KV Gautam.

Reacting to the BJP's statement that the government will fall after the Lok Sabha elections, he said that the Congress has won 136 seats and secured 43 per cent of the votes while the BJP has won 64.

"More people will join our party in the coming days. There is no question of the government falling. All the guarantees will be implemented in five years," the Chief Minister said.

He said that the Centre had allocated Rs 5,300 crore from the budget. "Did they give even one rupee? The 15th Finance Commission had promised to provide Rs 5,495 crores. They had also promised to allocate Rs 3,000 crore each for the development of the peripheral ring road and lakes. Did they



give it?" the Chief Minister asked.

"Did they (BJP) bring 15 lakh rupees from abroad and give it to everyone? The BJP promised that they would create 2 crore jobs every year. They said Acche din Ayege and that farmers' income would be doubled. They said they would reduce prices. Did they?" He said that people believed in our guarantees and voted for them.

Abhishek Manu Singhvi moves Himachal HC challenging defeat in RS polls

Team Absolute | Shimla

Congress' Rajya Sabha election nominee from Himachal Pradesh and senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi on Saturday filed a petition in the Himachal Pradesh High Court, challenging the rule of declaring the victory of his rival candidate of the BJP by draw of lots.

He said if two candidates get an equal number of votes, then the formula for drawing the lottery is wrong.

Singhvi told the media here in case of equal votes, declaring the candidate whose slip comes out as the loser is legally wrong. "There is no law that the person whose name is drawn in the draw of lots is a loser."

"Generally, the one whose name comes out should win. Therefore, if this assumption is wrong then the election result is also wrong. There is no such rule in law, but a perception of the rule has been challenged in the court,"



Singhvi clarified.

Justifying his self-appearance, Singhvi said to file such a petition the petitioner has to come to the court self is the rule.

BJP's Harsh Mahajan, a Congress rebel who was once known for his proximity to Chief Minister Sukhinder

Sukhu, got elected to the Rajya Sabha on February 27 by defeating Singhvi amid reports of cross-voting by at least six ruling party legislators.

Both the candidates secured 34 votes each in the 68-member House, including three Independent legislators who are believed to have voted in favour of the BJP. Mahajan was eventually declared the winner through a draw of lots. The BJP has won the lone Rajya Sabha seat in the state after six Congress MLAs cross-voted in the polls.

Later the seats of six Congress legislators from Dharamsala, Lahaul-Spiti, Sujampur, Barsar, Gagret and Kutlehar fell vacant after the party disqualified its sitting MLAs. They are Rajinder Rana, Sudhir Sharma, Inder Dutt Lakhnampal, Devinder Kumar Bhutoo, Ravi Thakur, and Chetanya Sharma. Now, the by-elections to six Assembly seats will be held simultaneously with the state's four Lok Sabha seats on June 1.

Two Trinamool leaders accused in Bhupatinagar blast case sent to 5-day NIA custody

Team Absolute | Kolkata

Trinamool Congress leaders Balai Charan Maity and Monobrata Jana have been sent to five days National Investigation Agency (NIA) custody by a special court in Kolkata on Saturday. Earlier, both the leaders were arrested by NIA from Bhupatinagar in East Midnapore district in West Bengal in connection with a blast at Bhupatibahar in December 2022, in which three persons were killed.

After presenting them at the special court, the NIA counsel informed the court that both Maity and Jana had been found to have conspired to "manufacture" and "explode" crude bombs to spread "terror". The NIA also informed the court that unaccounted cash worth Rs 2.36 crore have been recovered from their possession and four mobile phones have been seized from them.

Thereafter, the NIA counsel sought five days custody of the two accused, which the court granted.

On Sunday, the NIA team was attacked by a group of local people in Bhupatinagar when they were returning after detaining two Balai Charan Maity and Monobrata Jana.

This was the second attack on the central investigating agency in three months in West Bengal.

On January 5, ED and CAPF personnel were attacked by the locals in Sandeshkhali in which suspended Trinamool leader Sheikh Shahjahan was arrested.

Soon after the attack, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee blamed NIA for the incident, saying that NIA had harassed the women in Bhupatinagar.



'IT Dept behaving like mafia': Kerala CPI-M on freezing bank account

Team Absolute | Thiruvananthapuram

A day after the Income Tax Department froze the bank account of the Thrissur district CPI-M, Kerala CPI-M Secretary M.V. Govindan on Saturday said that the Income Tax Department is behaving like a "mafia".

"The IT Department and other agencies are behaving like a mafia. We will not be afraid of these agencies. We will deal with it legally," Govindan said.

The IT Department said that the account had a balance of around Rs five crore while a sum of Rs one crore was withdrawn early this month. The IT Department has also asked for the details of the source of funds. The action by the IT department came two days after Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan claimed that the party always ensures that there is transparency in all its activities and pointed out



that the party does not have any secret bank accounts, as they do not accept black money. M.M. Varghese, the Thrissur CPI-M District Secretary said that the Centre

is using agencies to put pressure on political opponents. "We do not have anything to fear as all know that the agencies are trying to scare us ahead of the Lok Sabha

polls," Varghese said. On Friday, Varghese was also interrogated by the ED for several hours and has been asked to report before the agency again on Monday.



Shiv Sena renominates Shrikant Shinde from Kalyan seat

Will win Kalyan seat with a huge margin: Shrikant Shinde

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Hours after his candidature was declared in the Kalyan constituency in Maharashtra by Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, the Shiv Sena sitting MP and Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's son Shrikant Shinde said he would certainly win by a higher margin. Shrikant Shinde, who was elected in the 2014 and 2019 elections, said that he made every effort to transform Kalyan by implementing a slew of development projects with active cooperation and funding from the Centre and the state government. "There was clarity on the Kalyan seat. Already the meetings of MahaYuti leaders and workers have started there. Minister Ravindra Chavan, district and city presidents of BJP and workers of NCP have all started working together. The poll campaign has already begun. I welcome the announcement of my



candidature made by DCM Fadnavis. I will win the seat with a huge margin," said Shrikant Shinde. To a question on the BJP legislator Ganpat

Gaikwad's supporters' move not to work for him during elections, Shrikant Shinde said if those opposing him have any personal agenda they should implement it personally. "Do not spoil the atmosphere of the alliance by taking the name of the party. If someone is acting like a bully, it should be clear what their agenda is. There has been a great deal of development in Kalyan. The state government and Central government have helped. But, their agenda is to spoil the environment," he said. Meanwhile, Shinde faction Spokesman Naresh Mhaske said that Shrikant Shinde has worked hard for the development of Kalyan and he has been a notable example of how an elected representative should be. "Deputy Chief Minister Fadnavis has made it clear that BJP is not opposed to Shrikant Shinde," he added.

'Even animals know Sangli belongs to us': Maha Congress MLA



Team Absolute | New Delhi/Sangli

Adopting an aggressive stance for over two weeks, Congress MLA from Palus-Kadegaon, Vishwajeet P. Kadam, called on party President Mallikarjun Kharge and other leaders in New Delhi, reiterating the demand for the Sangli Lok Sabha constituency, on Saturday. Kadam, along with the prospective party candidate Vishal P. Patil, met Kharge and other senior leaders like K. C. Venugopal, Ramesh Chennithala and Mukul Wasnik -- all for the second time in barely 10 days with the same plea. Speaking to the media, Kadam said: "There is absolutely no question of giving up Sangli LS, as 'even animals know that it belongs to Congress' and we have placed our claim before the party seniors". On April 1, Kadam -- the son of the late senior leader Patangrao Kadam -- had shot off a letter to Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole on the same issue. The Sangli seat imbroglio flared up after the MahaVikasAghadi (MVA) ally Shiv Sena (UBT) President and ex-chief minister Uddhav Thackeray had unilaterally announced the name of top state wrestler Chandraraj Patil as its candidate. The MVA allies Congress and later even the Nationalist Congress Party (SP) pointed

fingers at Thackeray for not adhering to the principles of alliance politics, and both parties have staked claim to the Sangli LS constituency. On its party, the Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders have openly warned that in case the MVA allies insist on the Sangli seat, then it will have repercussions on other constituencies being contested by the Congress-NCP (SP). Kadam said he was not aware of what Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders like Sanjay Raut (MP) and Bhaskarjadhav (MLA) have been talking about. "However, we have presented our clear viewpoint on Sangli to the party high command, explained the implications and shall await their decision," said Kadam. To a query, in a potential softening of his stance, Kadam said that "if the Congress leadership and the MVA leaders jointly take a decision in the matter, then we shall abide by their directives". After Saturday's rounds of meetings, Vishal Patil made a telling tweet indicating - "Soon there will be some good news on Sangli LS seat," and said that the aim is not just to contest but win it with a huge margin. A similar tug-of-war is on in the ruling MahaYuti alliance even as the last date for filing nominations in Sangli is April 19 and the constituency will go to polls in the third phase of Lok Sabha elections on May 7.

Sena-BJP will collectively promote democratic values, says CM Shinde on BJP's Foundation Day

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Shiv Sena leader and Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Saturday wished Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP President J.P. Nadda, and all the party functionaries on the Foundation Day of the BJP (April 6, 1980). In a bid to keep Shiv Sena's alliance with the BJP going, CM Shinde said the bond between the two parties will only get strengthened further. "Shiv Sena has been in tune with the ideology of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) since its inception. I assure you that this bond will remain strong and the two parties will collectively promote democratic values. My



best wishes to the BJP, may it continue to prosper under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," the Chief Minister said in an X post. He also said the BJP has achieved the historic feat of freeing the country

from ideological slavery and restoring the traditional culture, values, and thoughts. "There was a time when the BJP had only two MPs in the Lok Sabha. Taking a big leap from there, today the party along with its allies is on the verge of crossing the 400-mark," Shinde said. Meanwhile, the state unit of the BJP celebrated the party's Foundation Day with a flag-hoisting ceremony led by veteran leader and former Uttar Pradesh Governor, Ram Naik. "The BJP has become so strong that it is ready to realise the 'Ab Ki Baar 400 Paar' goal. We are also raising the slogan of winning 45-plus seats in Maharashtra with full confidence," Ram Naik said in his address.

MahaYuti yet to announce nominees for 8 seats, MVA for 5 seats

Team Absolute | Mumbai

With the declaration of nominees by MahaYuti, MahaVikasAghadi and VanchitBahujanAghadi, the picture is clear about the contest in 33 of the total 48 constituencies in Maharashtra. However, in 15 seats there is still no clarity as MahaYuti has yet to announce nominees in 8 seats and MahaVikasAghadi in 5 seats. In Satara and North Central Mumbai, both sides have yet to zero in on their nominees. Further, in 13 constituencies, so far one nominee has been announced by political parties. The polling in 5 seats from East Vidarbha is slated for April 19, in 8 seats from western Vidarbha and Marathwada on April 26, in 11 seats on May 7, in 11 seats on May 13 and in 13 seats on May 20. The 33 constituencies include North East Mumbai where the fight is between BJP nominee Mihir Kotecha and Shiv Sena UBT nominee Sanjay Patil, in South Central Mumbai Shiv Sena nominee Rahul Shewale vs Shiv Sena UBT nominee Anil Desai, in Shirdi Shiv Sena nominee Sadashiv Lokhande vs Shiv Sena UBT nominee Bhausaheb Waghchare, in Dindori BJP nominee Bharati Pawar vs NCP SP nominee Bhaskar Bhagare, in Jalgaon BJP nominee Smita Wagh vs Shiv Sena UBT nominee Karan Pawar. In the tribal-dominated Nandurbar, BJP nominee Hina Gavit will take on Congress nominee Gopal Padvi, in Maval Shiv Sena nominee Shrirang Barne vs Shiv Sena UBT nominee Sanjoy Waghre, in Shirur



NCP Ajit Pawar nominee Shivajirao Adhalrao vs NCP SP nominee Amol Kolhe, in Baramati NCP SP nominee Supriya Sule vs NCP Ajit Pawar nominee Sunetra Pawar and in Pune BJP nominee Muralidhar Mohol vs Congress nominee Ravindra Dhangekar. In the sugarcane-rich Ahmednagar seat, BJP nominee Sujay Vikhe-Patil is in the race against NCP SP nominee Nilesh Lanke, in Kolhapur the Congress nominee Shrimant Shahu Maharaj vs Shiv Sena nominee Sanjay Mandlik, in Hatkanangale Shiv Sena nominee Dhairya Sheel Mane vs Shiv Sena UBT nominee Satyajit Patil, in Sangli BJP nominee Sanjaykaka Patil vs Shiv Sena UBT nominee Chandraraj Patil, in Solapur the Congress nominee Praniti Shinde vs BJP nominee Ram Satpute and in Raigad the NCP Ajit Pawar nominee Sunil Tatkar vs Shiv Sena UBT nominee Ananta Gite. Moreover, VanchitBahujanAghadi founder Prakash Ambedkar is pitted against BJP nominee Anup Dhote and Congress candidate Abhay Patil in Akola constituency. In Buldhana the fight is between the Shiv Sena nominee Prataprao Jadhav and Shiv Sena UBT nominee Narendra Khedekar, in Amravati BJP nominee Navneet Rana vs Congress nominee Balwant Wankhede, in Wardha BJP nominee Ramdas Tadas vs NCP SP nominee Amar Kale, in Ramtek Shiv Sena nominee Raju Parwe vs Congress nominee Shyamkumar Barve, in Chandrapur BJP nominee Sudhir Mungantwar vs Congress nominee Pratibha Dhanorkar. In Nagpur BJP nominee Nitin Gadkari vs Congress nominee Vikas Thakre, in BhandaraGondiya BJP nominee Sunil Mendhe vs Congress nominee Prashant Patole, in Gadchiroli-Chimur BJP nominee Ashok Nete vs Congress nominee Namdev Kirsan and in YavatmalWashim Shiv Sena UBT nominee Sanjay Deshmukh vs Shiv Sena nominee Rajashree Patil. In the Marathwada region, BJP nominee Pankaja Munde will take on NCP SP nominee Bajrang Sonawane, in Dharashiv Shiv Sena UBT nominee Omraje Nimbalkar vs NCP Ajit Pawar nominee Archana Patil, in Parbhani Rashtriya Samaj Paksha founder Mahadev Jankar vs Shiv Sena

UBT nominee Sanjay Jadhav, in Nanded BJP nominee Pratap Chikhalikar vs Congress nominee Vasant Chavan, in Latur BJP nominee Sudhakar Shringare vs Congress nominee Shivajirao Kalge and in Hingoli Shiv Sena nominee Baburao Kadam Kohalikar vs Shiv Sena UBT nominee Nagesh Patil-Ashthkar. Of the 33 seats, the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena will be pitted against Shiv Sena Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray in Kalyan, Hatkanangale, Maval, Hingoli, Buldhana and South Mumbai while. In Baramati and Shirur Sharad Pawar and Ajit Pawar factions will take on each other. The 13 seats where one each nominee has been so far announced included Sambhajinagar (Chandrakant Khaire), North West Mumbai (Amol Kirtikar), South Mumbai (Arvind Sawant), Nashik (Rajabhau Waje), Ratnagiri Sindhudurg (Vinayak Raut), Rajan Vichare (Thane), Vaishali Darekar (Kalyan) and Palghar (Bharati Kamdi). These all candidates are from Shiv Sena Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray. The MahaYuti partners have yet to announce their nominees in these constituencies. BJP has declared nominations in Dhule (Subhash Bhamre), Raosaheb Danve (Jalna), Ranjitsinh Nimbekar (Madha), Piyush Goyal (North Mumbai) and Raver (Raksha Khadse). Incidentally, the MVA partners have yet to announce its nominees in these seats.

SPV set to start work on new inter-state power transmission project in Maharashtra

Team Absolute | New Delhi

The way has been cleared for starting work on the inter-state power transmission project in the Kallam area of Maharashtra which forms part of the Western Region Network Expansion Scheme, the Ministry of Power announced on Saturday. The special purpose vehicle (SPV) Kallam Transco Limited that has been formed for setting up the project has been handed over to M/s Indgrid 2 Limited & Indgrid 1 Limited (consortium), the successful bidder for the project. The bidding process was carried out by



REC Power Development and Consultancy Limited (RECPDCL), a wholly owned subsidiary of public sector finance giant REC Limited. Another power transmission project for which Tata Power Company Limited was the successful bidder was cleared for Uttar Pradesh. SPV Jalpura Khurja Power Transmission Limited has been formed for the con-

struction of 400/220 kV, 2x500 MVA GIS substation Metro Depot (Greater Noida) with associated lines and 400/220 kV, 2x500 MVA GIS substation Jalpura, according to the Ministry's statement. The SPVs were handed over to the successful bidders on April 5, 2024, in the presence of CEO, RECPDCL Rajesh Kumar and senior officials of REC Limited, Central Transmission Utility of India Limited and Uttar Pradesh Power Transmission Corporation Limited. RECPDCL was the bid process coordinator for both the projects, being executed through tariff-based bidding process.

Maha Congress slams BJP for targeting opposition

Quaid Najmi | Mumbai

The Maharashtra Congress has slammed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) after the latter's ex-MP made certain revealing claims on how the Opposition parties' leaders were allegedly targeted in corruption cases, here on Saturday. State Congress President Nana F. Patole said the BJP has plummeted to very low levels by plotting to 'eliminate the Opposition with murderous and insidious politics'. The party General Secretary Sachin Sawant also attacked the BJP leaders for misusing the government machinery to harass and trap Opposition leaders. The trigger was a former Mumbai MP Kirit Somaiya's utterances to a private television channel in which he claimed that he was assigned the task of targeting opposition leaders like the Shiv Sena (UBT)'s Thackerays or Nationalist Congress Party's Hasan Murtshir and others. Patole referred to Somaiya who hurled the allegations of corruption against various leaders with BJP's Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and took action with the help of central probe agencies like the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) or Income Tax Department (ITD). "Tired of such harassment tactics and blackmail, many chose to join the BJP. Then all the alleged corruption was washed away and they were rewarded with constitutional posts and respect. The real face of Fadnavis has been revealed before the people now," said Patole.



He said that it is evident from Somaiya's statements that a systematic racket was being run by the BJP leaders like Fadnavis and even the MahaVikasAghadi (MVA) ex-CM Uddhav Thackeray's family members were made targets. Among other things, Somaiya claimed that he was given the go-ahead by Fadnavis for such cases against the Opposition, how the BJP had no base in Maharashtra before 2014, and the Congress-Nationalist Congress Party could have targeted them (BJP) and put their leaders in jail, admitted that he completed the 'tasks' as a loyal party soldier, the opposition leaders were then taken on their side, and said though he was not agreeable to it, "it was all a political compromise" in the interests of development without graft. Sawant referred to a recent statement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi denying the Opposition's allegations on misuse of central investigating agencies, and "we neither obstruct nor direct ED," and said that Somaiya's claims "have directly proved even the PM false." "Somaiya has contended that all action taken against the MVA leaders was intended to crush them with the help of ED, CBI, and to blackmail the opposition parties... Somaiya has directly attacked the PM with this. The BJP's blackmailing strategy has been laid bare, with the electoral bonds matter, 'chanda do aurdhanda do' and other issues," said Sawant. Patole said that the Congress has consistently raised its voice on these unethical and immoral style of BJP politics of coercion with the misuse of government agencies, and now Somaiya has revealed how his own party conspired to defame the opposition to paint them 'corrupt'. The duo warned that the people of the country have become aware of all these dirty tactics and "will make the BJP sit at home after the elections." However, the SS (UBT) and NCP (SP) - which suffered vertical splits in June 2022 and July 2023, respectively, have not yet reacted to Somaiya's shocking claims though he had taken aim at several of their big leaders, many of whom are now cosy in the BJP.

Thirsty Pune voters' threat: 'No water, no vote'

Team Absolute | Pune

In an ominous development on Saturday, villagers of Khairawadi in Pune's Shivajinagar, who have been suffering due to a water crisis, threatened to boycott the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections in Maharashtra if their issue was not resolved. The nearly 10,000 residents have been protesting and highlighting the erratic, insufficient and low-pressure water supply in their localities. They said that despite repeated complaints to the authorities, no remedial measures had been taken by the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC). Losing patience, they erected a huge banner on the main road with the legend: "No Water, No Vote. Resolve our water



problems, or we shall boycott elections." This warning alarmed the politicians of different political parties who have been campaigning for the May 13 Lok Sabha elections. A resident said that for several months they have been fighting to get proper water supply, but there are shortages, low-pressure or at times non-availability of water, making their lives miserable. They pointed out that the situation was set to get worse after the onset of summer. The villagers said that on most days they have to make do with water supplied by tankers but they have to waste hours to meet their basic needs for the day, and demanded that their PMC water supply should be put on track. Compounding their problem is the ongoing Pune Metro work on University Road and the construction projects which are said to be eating into the Shivajinagar peoples' water supplies, irking them enough to consider a poll boycott.

Shiv Sena ministers to discuss LS poll strategy amid pending seat-sharing agreement

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Even as the seat-sharing arrangement remains inclusive in Maharashtra, the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena ministers will meet on Saturday at the residence state Excise Minister Shambhuraj Desai to decide the Lok Sabha poll management strategy and its implementation. Shambhuraj Desai has said that each minister will be given the responsibility of two to three constituencies. Saturday's meeting is crucial as it comes at a time when the Shiv Sena is yet to know how many seats it will ultimately get in the seat-sharing deal. Shiv Sena has staked its claim over 16 seats but so far the party has announced its nominees for eight constituencies, which include Ramtek, Yavatmal-Washim, Hingoli, Kolhapur, Hatkanangale, Maval, Shirdi and South Central Mumbai. The party has not yet declared its candidates in Thane which is Eknath Shinde's home turf and also in Kalyan, from where his son Shrikant Shinde is the sitting MP. Incidentally, the BJP has pressed for the Thane seat citing better winning prospects. Further, the Shiv Sena is not yet sure to get South Mumbai as the BJP has staked its claim on the seat while the Eknath Shinde's party is yet to announce a nominee for North West Mumbai which is currently represented by veteran Shiv Sena leader Gajanan Kirtikar. Meanwhile, the BJP has not yet announced its nominee for the North Central seat, from where Poonam Mahajan is the sitting MP.



EDITOR'S SPECS

Healthcare industry, individuals must focus on 'prevention first'

Even as cases of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are rising significantly, the focus of the healthcare industry as well as individuals must be on 'prevention-first,' said renowned cardiologist Dr Devi Shetty ahead of World Health Day.

World Health Day is marked every year on April 7. The theme this year is 'My health, my right', which aims to work for the "right of everyone, everywhere to get access to quality health services".

Dr Shetty, Founder and Chairman of Narayana Health, called for investing more in preventive healthcare measures even as cases of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are rising significantly in India, particularly among the youth.

"Hospitals are designed so badly that a person who's not a patient wouldn't like to go to that building. So, we need to create a kind of a different approach outside the hospital. It's time for the healthcare industry to pivot, placing greater emphasis on preventive measures, fostering proactive health management, and empowering individuals towards a healthier tomorrow," the doctor said. Besides the healthcare industry, even individuals must live with a 'prevention-first' mindset, as significantly in India, the cardiologist said. "Today, as we mark World Health Day, we confront a stark reality: Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) claim a staggering 65 per cent of lives in India, with diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular issues, and cancers at the forefront. What's more alarming is the rise of these ailments among our youth, often due to a lack of early screening and awareness," Dr Shetty said. "The need of the hour is a 'prevention-first' mindset," he added. Emphasising the need for early screening, he also called on the healthcare industry to put more focus on preventive measures and not just care.

SASH SIMPSON'S FAIRYTALE LIFE, FROM COIMBATORE'S FOOTPATHS TO VODKA ON GOLD-TOPPED ICE

Sourish Bhattacharyya

For those who believe rags-to-riches stories are the stuff of fairy tales, Sash Simpson's life will make them wake up and dig into the caviar.

It is 'Slumdog Millionaire' played out in real life. And it will bring back memories of 'Lion', the Dev Patel, Nicole Kidman-starrer based on the amazing story of Saroo Brierley and his search from Melbourne for his original home in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh.

The story of Sash Simpson, an orphan found off the streets of Coimbatore who's now one of Toronto's top chefs, is the subject of a documentary, 'Born Hungry', by Canadian filmmaker Barry Avrich, which was just premiered at the Palm Springs International Film Festival and then picked up by Priyanka Chopra Jonas's company, Purple Pebble Pictures.

In the words of 'The New York Times', "Sash Simpson made his name as a chef for Canada's rich, preparing them chardonnay-poached lobster and \$27 foie gras-smothered burgers" -- and vodka served with gold-encrusted ice.

It's a magical world away from the dumpsters where he would forage for food when he was just another street kid.

So, who is Sash Simpson and what is his roller-coaster story? Sash (or Sashi) was found on the streets of Coimbatore, a five-year-old orphan who only remembered that his mother had long hair and his father was a deaf and mute labourer, by volunteers of a Canadian charity named Families for Children.

They gave him shelter at their orphanage in Tamil Nadu's textile city and it was there that he caught the attention of his adoptive mother (and Families for Children co-founder), Sandra Simpson.

Remembering how she and her husband Lloyd ended up adopting Sashi when he was eight years old, Sandra told a local publication, 'Streets of Toronto', "Sashi persists in whatever he does. Every time I visited our Indian project, Sashi would be front row and centre asking, 'Canada, mummy, please!'"

In a dramatic reversal of fortunes, Sashi ended up from the floors of the Coimbatore cinema theatre that he cleaned for the privilege of sleeping on them at night, to the upscale Toronto suburb of Forest Hill, where he started living in a 22-room mansion with 32 other children from South Korea, Spain, India, Vietnam, China, Cambodia and Bangladesh, according to 'Global Indian Times'. The mansion had been gifted to the



Simpsons by a philanthropic banker.

Not a gifted student, Sashi started delivering newspapers from the age of 12 and he was 14 when found his first full-time job as a dishwasher in a restaurant. Dropping out of school, he continued with his gigs at restaurants till he discovered North 44, which was to become his workplace for more than 25 years.

Run by one of Canada's top chefs, Mark McEwan, North 44 was one of that country's leading restaurants when Sashi first tried to find a place in its hallowed kitchen.

He was turned away twice before he showed up the third time, offering to work for free for three months so that he could be tested out. He did not have to wait for that long. Within a week, McEwan hired him.

It was at North 44 where Sashi rose from peeling potatoes to chopping onions, as

'Global Indian Times' puts it, to becoming the restaurant's executive chef and running North 44 caterers.

Sashi also helped McEwan launch ByMark, a popular restaurant in Toronto's financial district, and helped his mentor produce three seasons of episodes for the Food Network TV channel. North 44 closed in 2018 following the expiry of its rental lease.

With North 44 shutting down, Sashi had to look out for himself all over again, and he did what he was best at -- he opened Sash to rave reviews in 2019, and the average check for a dinner for two was C\$230.

But if you go there looking for the welcoming whiff of Coimbatore, you'll be disappointed -- the international menu ("Modern American dishes with interna-

tional twists" is how 'Toronto Life Magazine' described the offerings) has just two nods to Sashi's origins: Gunpowder Lamb Chops and Sambar with Masala Rice, and Masala Beef Short Ribs cooked with coriander seeds, mustard and curry leaves, served with heirloom carrots and broccoli.

The Toronto Star gushed: "His two-month-old restaurant is as elegant and understated as a cashmere twinset and pearls. He slides foie gras into his burger, bakes Perigord truffles on to his pasta and shakes chocolate soufflé to order."

Talking to Nuvo Magazine, the self-taught, self-confessed workaholic chef had this to say about how he goes about putting together his menu: "Flavours come to me constantly and whatever hits my palate and I go -- wow, this is really good -- it could be Indian, French, Italian, Japanese, Korean -- it doesn't matter, if my crew, my colleagues and I feel it -- it's hitting that menu."

Like a lot else in Sashi's life, Covid struck barely a year after the restaurant opened and so it had to be shut, forcing its owner to live off loans and government grants, and taking up small home catering assignments -- just enough to keep his home running.

This phase, painful though it may have been, turned out to be a blip that lasted for two years. Sashi was back at work in his restaurant about as soon as Covid ceased to be a threat, and it's now doing as well as it did before the epidemic swept the world.

Married to Robin Pitcher, an event manager he met in 2008, Sashi is 54 years old and a father of two children. He could have turned his back on his past and lived the good life, but in 2018, Sashi opened a professional kitchen at the Coimbatore orphanage where his story began.

The idea was his adoptive mother's. Indian laws do not permit orphanages to keep young women who are not adopted by the time they turn 18. Once they leave their orphanages, these women often find themselves in very difficult circumstances. The kitchen is to help them develop skills that would equip them to find jobs in the hospitality or allied industries.

In his own little way, Sashi is paying back the debt he owes the orphanage that changed his life, which is about to experience yet another seismic shift, now that his story has gone global, thanks to Priyanka Chopra Jonas.

international

SOUTH KOREA: VOTER TURNOUT SURPASSES 10 MN ON SECOND DAY OF EARLY VOTING

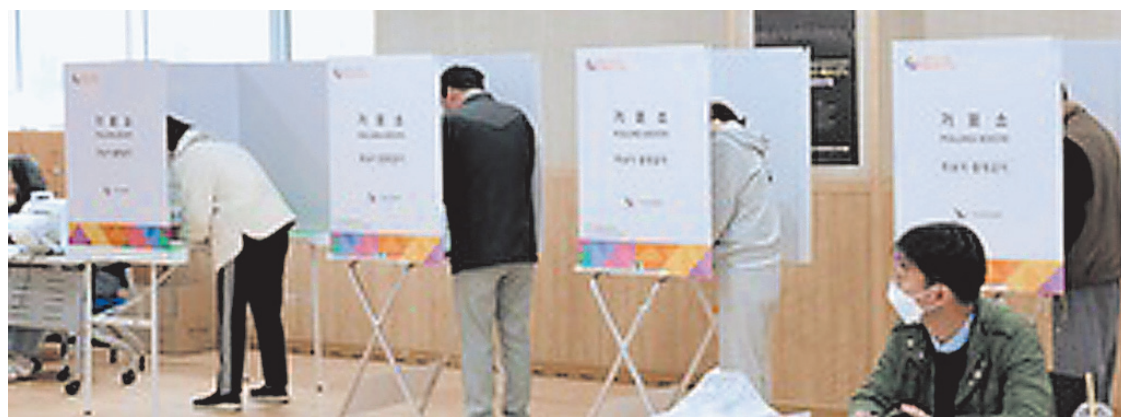
Seoul | Agencies

Turnout for the parliamentary elections in South Korea topped 10 million during the second and final day of early voting on Saturday.

According to the National Election Commission (NEC), 10,365,722 out of 44,280,011 eligible voters had cast their ballots as of 1 p.m. Saturday, for a turnout rate of 23.41 per cent, Yonhap news agency reported. At the same point for the previous parliamentary elections in 2020, the turnout was 19.08 per cent.

Voters will have until 6 p.m. Saturday to cast their ballots at 3,565 polling stations. Those missing the opportunity this weekend will have to vote on Election Day on Wednesday.

On Friday, about 6.9 million voters, or 15.61 per cent, went to the polls, a record for the first day of early voting for parliamentary elections. South Korea introduced the



early-voting system in 2014.

On the first day of early voting, turnout exceeded 10 per cent in all 17 major cities and provinces nationwide, led by South Jeolla Province with 23.6 per cent. The turnout in Seoul was 15.83 per cent.

South Jeolla continued to lead the way Saturday with 32.96 per cent. The southeastern city of Daegu brought up the rear at 18.79 per

cent. The quadrennial race is considered crucial for the ruling People Power Party as failure to regain a majority could potentially render President Yoon Suk Yeol a lame duck for the remaining three years of his single five-year term.

The main opposition Democratic Party, which enjoyed a landslide victory in the previous elections, aims to retain its parliamentary

majority. According to a survey conducted jointly by Yonhap News Agency and Yonhap News TV earlier this week, 80 per cent of respondents expressed a definite intention to cast their votes.

Among those intending to vote, 39 per cent planned to visit polling stations during the early-voting period, while 58 per cent intended to vote on Election Day.

10 killed, dozens wounded in Russian strikes on Ukraine

Kyiv | Agencies

At least 10 people were killed and dozens of others wounded in Russian strikes on Ukraine in the past 24 hours, local authorities said Saturday.

Four people were killed and 23 injured in the southern city of Zaporizhzhia in missile strikes, said Zaporizhzhia Governor Ivan Fedorov, Xinhua news agency reported.

More than 40 buildings, including 24 private houses and nine apartment blocks, were damaged in the attack, Fedorov said in a statement.

Besides, six people were killed and 11 others wounded in overnight missile strikes on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, according to Mayor Ihor Terekhov.

The attack hit residential areas in the northern Shevchenkivskiy district,



damaging nine apartment buildings, three dormitories, two kindergartens, two schools, and a gas station, Terekhov said in a post on Telegram.

Russia launched six missiles and 32 Shahed combat drones at Ukraine overnight Saturday, said Ukrainian Air

Force Commander Mykola Oleschuk. According to him, three missiles and 28 drones have been intercepted.

The Kyiv region was also targeted, but reported no casualties, said the Kyiv Regional Military Administration.

China-based hackers will disrupt India elections with AI-generated content, warns Microsoft

Team Absolute | New Delhi

With major elections taking place around the world this year, particularly in India, South Korea and the US, a Microsoft Threat Analysis team has warned that China will create and amplify AI-generated content to benefit its interests.

Despite the chances of such content in affecting election results remaining low, China's increasing experimentation in augmenting memes, videos, and audio will likely continue -- and may prove more effective down the line.

According to the tech giant, China is using fake social media accounts to poll voters on what divides them most to sow division and possibly influence the outcome of the US presidential election in its favour.

"China has also increased its use of AI-generated content to further its goals around the world. North Korea has increased its cryptocurrency heists and supply chain attacks to fund and further its military goals and intelligence collection. It has also begun to use AI to make its operations more effective and efficient," the company said in a blog post.

Deceptive social media accounts by



Chinese Communist Party (CCP)-affiliated actors have already started to pose contentious questions on controversial US domestic issues to better understand the key issues that divide US voters.

"This could be to gather intelligence and precision on key voting demographics ahead of the US presidential election," the company warned. China's geopolitical priorities remain unchanged but it has doubled down on its targets and increased the sophistication of its influence operations (IO) attacks.

The Taiwanese presidential election in January this year also saw a surge in the use of AI-generated content by China-affiliated cyber criminals.

UN chief demands paradigm shift in Israel's military strategy in Gaza

United Nations: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called for a paradigm shift in Israel's military strategy in Gaza and in aid delivery to save lives.

Following this week's appalling killing of seven humanitarian workers from World Central Kitchen, the Israeli government has acknowledged mistakes and announced some disciplinary measures, Guterres said on Friday. "But the essential problem is not who made the mistakes, it is the military strategy and procedures in place that allow for those mistakes to multiply time and time again."

Fixing those failures requires independent investigations and meaningful and measurable change on the ground, he said at a press encounter as the Gaza conflict is about to become six months old.

In its speed, scale and inhumane ferocity, the war in Gaza is the deadliest of conflicts -- for civilians, for aid workers, for journalists, for health workers, and for UN staff. Some 196 humanitarian aid workers, including more than 175 UN staff members, have been killed, Guterres was quoted by Xinhua news agency as saying.

An information war has added to the trauma, obscuring facts and shifting blame. Denying inter-



national journalists entry into Gaza is allowing disinformation and false narratives to flourish, he said.

Guterres demanded an investigation into those killings, noting that investigation can only work with the cooperation of the Israeli authorities.

"One hundred and ninety-six humanitarian workers have been killed, and we want to know why each one of them was killed," he said.

In the aftermath of the killing of World Central

Kitchen staff, the United Nations was informed by the Israeli government of its intention to allow a substantial increase in humanitarian aid distributed in Gaza, said Guterres. "I sincerely hope that these intentions are effectively and quickly materialized because the situation in Gaza is absolutely desperate." Dramatic humanitarian conditions require a quantum leap in the delivery of life-saving aid -- a true paradigm shift, he said.

Guterres repeated his urgent appeals for an immediate humanitarian cease-fire, the unconditional release of all hostages, the protection of civilians, and the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid. Last week, the Security Council called for just that in its Resolution 2728. In December, the council demanded, in another resolution, accelerating the delivery of life-saving aid under a UN mechanism. All those demands must be implemented. Failure would be unforgivable, he said. "Six months on, we are at the brink of mass starvation, of regional conflagration, of a total loss of faith in global standards and norms. It's time to step back from that brink, to silence the guns, to ease the horrible suffering, and to stop a potential famine before it is too late," said Guterres.



PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI TO HOLD ROADSHOW IN JABALPUR TODAY

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold a roadshow in Jabalpur today (Sunday), a top BJP leader said.

This will be PM Modi's first visit to Madhya Pradesh after the Model Code of Conduct came into force on March 16.

Madhya Pradesh unit BJP president VD. Sharma told mediapersons that PM Modi will lead a roadshow and also address a poll rally in Jabalpur. Two days later (on April 9), he will address a public meeting in Balaghat. "Jabalpur is getting ready to welcome PM Modi. The roadshow that PM Modi will lead in Jabalpur on April 7 will be historic. The BJP will create a history by winning all 29 Lok Sabha seats in Madhya Pradesh," Sharma added.

Balaghat, Jabalpur and Chhindwara parliamentary con-



stituencies in the Mahakoshal region of the state will go to the polls in the first phase on April 19. This region comprises numerous tribal voters.

Balaghat is expected to see a triangular contest with BJP candidate Bharti Pardi, Congress' SamratSaraswat and BahujanSamaj Party nominee KankarMunjare in the fray, while in Jabalpur, BJP's Ashish Dubey and Congress' Dinesh Yadav are the main contenders.

In 2019, the BJP had won 28 out of the total 29 constituencies in Madhya Pradesh. The Congress bagged only the ChhindwaraLok Sabha seat.

Chhindwara constituency, which is the home turf of Congress veteran and former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath, is currently represented by his son, NakulNath.

Three other Lok Sabha constituencies where voting will be held on April 19 are -- Sidhi, Shahdol and Mandla.

PM Modi's guarantee is to save citizens from hardships, says Rajnath Singh in MP's Singrauli

Team Absolute | Bhopal

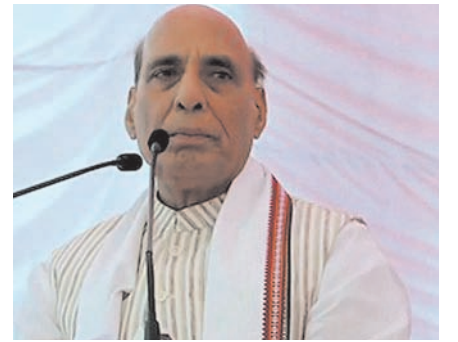
BJP veteran and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday led the party's campaign for the first phase of Lok Sabha elections scheduled on April 19, in Madhya Pradesh.

Rajnath Singh attended a roadshow and addressed a public rally in Singrauli - MP's coal mines hub and part of SidhiLok Sabha constituency in the Vindhya region of Madhya Pradesh, bordering Uttar Pradesh.

Campaigning for the party's SidhiLok Sabha candidate Rajesh Mishra, the Defence Minister asserted, "PM Modi's guarantee is to save citizens from hardships, while the useless opposition is spreading hatred."

Rajnath Singh (72), who led the then Opposition (BJP) during the UPA government, did not miss the opportunity to hit back at Congress. He alleged that the "Congress-led UPA rule was mired in corruption, leading to some ministers getting jailed at the time."

Addressing the large gathering of party supporters and workers, Rajnath Singh said, "The BJP fulfils each and every promise made in its manifesto. We were mocked for our commitment to the Ram Temple but it was built. We abrogated Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir."



He accused the Opposition bloc of spreading hatred and misinformation. Rajnath Singh, who is among the 40-star campaigners' list including PM Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, addressed his first poll rally in Madhya Pradesh.

Madhya Pradesh has 29 parliamentary constituencies. Sidhi is amongst the six Lok Sabha seats to be polled on April 19, five other constituencies are -- Chhindwara, Shahdol, Mandla, Balaghat and Jabalpur.

The BJP has fielded Mishra against former minister Kamleshwar Patel, who lost the assembly election from the Sihawal assembly segment under SidhiLok Sabha earlier in November last year.

Former Congress MLA RamlalMalviya joins BJP in Madhya Pradesh

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Senior Congress leader and two-time MLA, RamlalMalviya, along with several party workers, joined the ruling BJP in Madhya Pradesh on Saturday.

Malviya was elected MLA from the Ghatia assembly segment under the Ujjain Lok Sabha constituency in 2018 on the Congress symbol, and earlier in 1998. He lost the assembly election in 2023 against BJP's Satish Malviya.

Several other district-level Congress workers from Ujjain drove to Bhopal and they joined hands with the BJP ahead of the Lok Sabha elections in the state set to begin on April 19.

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav along with Madhya



Pradesh BJP chief VD Sharma and senior party leader, Narottam Mishra welcomed them at party headquarters.

"Today is a historic day (foundation day of the BJP), and we welcome all of you. Under the leadership of PM Modi, the BJP has become the world's largest political

party and will continue to grow," CM Yadav said.

He further stated that the BJP will not compromise with the development works in Madhya Pradesh. "All those who have joined the BJP will be respected and will be given specific roles to play in the Lok Sabha elections," he added.

Lok Sabha Nominations Of 16 Candidates Found Invalid For 2nd Phase In MP

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The nomination forms of 93 candidates were found to be valid, while 16 were rejected during the scrutiny of papers for the second phase of Lok Sabha elections in Madhya Pradesh, poll officials said on Saturday.

These 16 rejected nominations include that of the opposition INDIA bloc nominee and Samajwadi Party's (SP) Khajuraho candidate Meera Yadav.

Yadav's form was declared invalid by the returning officer on Friday.

Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) AnupamRajan said candidates are allowed to withdraw their forms till April 8. The nominations of 93 candidates are valid, while those of 16 candidates were found invalid during the scrutiny on Friday, Rajan said.

Seven seats - Tikamgarh (SC), Damoh, Khajuraho, Satna, Rewa, Hoshangabad and Betul (ST) - will go to polls in the second phase on April 26. Union minister and sitting MP VirendraKhatik is contesting from Tikamgarh (SC). Khatik has



won all three elections held in this constituency after it was carved out following delimitation in

2008. Congress has fielded Pankaj Ahirwar from this seat. Another key seat going to polls in this phase is Khajuraho, where sitting MP and BJP state president VD Sharma has been renominated. Congress had vacated the Khajuraho seat, giving it to the Samajwadi Party (SP) as per the seat-sharing formula of INDIA bloc constituencies.

However, the nomination paper of SP candidate Meera Yadav was rejected. The development left the SP fuming, with its chief Akhilesh Yadav terming it a "blatant murder" of democracy and demanding a judicial probe.

After scrutiny, 14 contestants are now left in the Khajuraho constituency. The BJP has renominated sitting MPs from Satna (Ganesh Singh), Rewa (Janardan Mishra) and Betul (DurgadasUikey) and fielded new faces from Hoshangabad (Darshan Singh) and Damoh (Rahul Lodhi).

Congress has fielded sitting MLA SiddharthKushwaha from Satna, former MLA Neelam Mishra from Rewa, RamuTekam from Betul, ex-MLA Sanjay Sharma from Hoshangabad and former legislator Tarwar Singh Lodhi from Damoh.

INDIA Bloc To Support New Candidate In Khajuraho After Nomination Of SP's Meera Yadav Cancelled, Says JituPatwari



Team Absolute | Bhopal

The opposition alliance INDIA bloc decided to extend support to some other candidate from the Khajuraho seat after the nomination papers of the Samajwadi Party's Meera Yadav were

rejected on Friday.

Addressing a press conference after a meeting of Madhya Pradesh heads of the INDIA Bloc, state Congress President JituPatwari said that they will support some other Lok Sabha candidate from Khajuraho to give BJP state chief VD Sharma a

tough fight on the Bundelkhand seat.

Patwari termed the cancellation of Yadav's nomination papers a 'conspiracy' by the BJP. "Panna Collector acted as an agent of the ruling party and got the nomination form of the Samajwadi party cancelled."

Patwari added that it was the responsibility of the district returning officer to get the timely corrections done in case there was a shortcoming in the paperwork; however, no guidance was given, and the papers were rejected right away.

The candidate and her supporters waited for three hours, but Collector didn't turn up in the office, and this was the time that things could have been corrected, Patwari said.

He also accused the BJP of building mental pressure on the opposition by claiming that a large number of Congress workers are joining the saffron party. He said that those Congress workers are joining the ruling party because they either have criminal records or have been served the notices of royalty and want to evade police pressure. "If these leaders and workers failed to do any good for Congress, then what good they could do for the BJP is a matter of contemplation," Patwari hit out at the BJP. He also accused the Modi government of targeting the opposition leader and putting them behind bars to throttle the democracy.

Madhya Pradesh BJP chief VD Sharma terms Congress' election manifesto 'bunch of lies'

Team Absolute | Bhopal

Madhya Pradesh unit Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president VD Sharma on Friday called the election manifesto of Congress a bunch of false promises, while criticising the grand old party over corruption.

"It's a guarantee of injustice, not justice," Sharma, who is contesting his second Lok Sabha election from Khajuraho constituency, told mediapersons.

"Will those who robbed the entire population of their rights by committing scams and corruption while in power give full rights to half the population?" Sharma questioned.

The Congress on Friday released its poll manifesto for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, making various promises, including 50 per cent reservation for women



in government jobs, if it comes to power at the Centre.

Congress President MallikarjunKharge, in the presence of senior party leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul

Gandhi, and AICC general secretary KC Venugopal, released the election manifesto of the party, focusing on five "pillars of justice" and 25 guarantees under them.

Two Girls Of Shelter Home Rescued From Jhabua

Team Absolute | Jhabua

A man from Jhabua was arrested for abducting two minor girls from a shelter home. He had held the girls captive at a rented house in Jhabua from where the girls were rescued safely and the accused was booked under the relevant sections including POCSO act.

Rau police station in charge Rajpal Singh Rathore said that the superintendent of the shelter home had lodged a complaint on March 25 that two girls from the facility were missing from there. The girls had not reached their relatives' place so the police registered a case of abduction against an unidentified person.

During the investigation, police received information that one of the girls was also abducted by a man named AjitDamore of Jhabua a few months ago. When information about Damore was gathered, police got to know that the accused was changing his places in order to mislead the



police. Two cases of abduction were also registered against the accused in two police stations of Jhabua city.

Somehow, police got his location in Meghnagar in Jhabua district. The police team reached there and managed to arrest Ajit and recovered the two girls from his rented house. They were taken to the city and handed over to the superintendent of the shelter home safely. The senior police officer had announced a reward of Rs 5000 for searching the girls each.

Woman Living With A Man With Or Without Marriage Entitled To Maintenance After Separation

Team Absolute | Bhopal

A woman who had lived with a man for a significantly long period of time, with or without legal marriage is entitled to maintenance post separation, Madhya Pradesh High Court has ordered.

The verdict came after a man, SaileshBopche, moved from Balaghat district court to MP High Court challenging the court's orders to provide Rs 1500 monthly allowance to the woman he used to live with but now has separated with.

According to information, Bopche has been living with a woman for a long period of time and the couple also have a child. After being separated, the woman went to court claiming she got married to Bopche in a temple but failed to prove it. She demanded a maintenance allowance from the man. The district court gave a verdict in the woman's favour after



which Bopche moved to High Court.

Bopche challenged the orders on the grounds that the woman, who claimed to be his wife, was unable to prove the marriage. However,

MP HC has dismissed his petition.

The bench of justice G S Alhuwalia said, "Since the petitioner (man) and respondent (woman) were living together as husband and wife

for a significantly long period of time, also the woman has given birth to child and there is no evidence to deny the fact, the respondent is entitled for a monthly maintenance."

Congress fields two ex-MLAs, a new face for remaining three LS seats in MP

Team Absolute | Bhopal

The Congress on Saturday announced candidates for three remaining Lok Sabha seats in Madhya Pradesh.

With the announcement of three candidates, the Congress has fielded as many as 28 candidates for a total 29 Lok Sabha seats in Madhya Pradesh, while it gave one seat - Khajuraho to INDIA bloc partner SP. Surprisingly, SP's candidate Meera Yadav's nomination was canceled on Friday.

The Congress has fielded former MLA Praveen Pathak against BJP's Bharat Singh Kushwaha from Gwalior. Pathak had been elected on a Congress ticket from Gwalior South assembly seat in 2018 but faced defeat in 2023.

Ex-legislator Satyapal Singh Sikarwar has been fielded from Morena and will face off with BJP's Shivmangal Singh Tomar. Sikarwar was elected as MLA from the Sumawali assembly

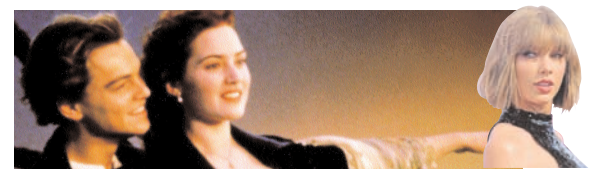
seat in 2013 on a BJP ticket.

His father had also won the same assembly seat in 2003. Sikarwar was expelled from the BJP in 2020 for anti-party activities, following which he joined the Congress.

MorenaLok Sabha seat was won by BJP's Narendra Singh Tomar in 2019, but he was elected as an MLA last year and later made the speaker of the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly after the BJP registered a resounding victory in November last year.

Congress has fielded Narendra Patel from Khandwa.

Former minister Arjun Yadav's name was doing rounds as a candidate from Khandwa until the last minute. Earlier, Yadav has also announced that he will be ready to contest the election against Union Minister JyotiradityaScindia, if the party decides; however, he was denied a Lok Sabha ticket.



Britney Spears shares nude pictures of herself

Los Angeles | Agencies

Pop icon Britney Spears, who often finds herself mired in controversies, dropped bombshell pictures of herself recently. The singer-songwriter shared a series of photos of herself posing completely naked in the sea, reports *Mirror.co.uk*.

The 42-year-old singer described her tropical holiday as a "beautiful treat to myself", as she shared a series of snaps of herself without a bathing suit.

As per *Mirror.co.uk*, in one snap she stands with her hands covering her chest, in another she sits with legs akimbo in the white sand.

"What a beautiful treat to myself!!!" Britney wrote, sharing the pictures on Instagram.

"I believe in God again every time I go to this destination and there probably isn't another person that feels as blessed as I do every darn time I leave!!! But I will back sooner this time!!! Game of chess!! When people say we are so happy for you I'm like well how come you all got offended when I wasn't in the coffin at my funeral ??? Jk." Last month, she let fans into her beauty regime as she revealed she has undergone laser treatment on her face. The Toxic hitmaker recently dyed her hair a lighter blonde shade and indulged in some 'self care' and updated fans on Instagram. She revealed that she's a fan of all her recent treatments though as the new lighter hair do isn't to her taste as she revealed she hates her new hair and wants to change it. Sharing a selfie on Instagram, Britney wrote: "I haven't been really good with my self-care... I haven't



done my nails in two months and I did my first ever laser treatment for my face only a week ago. It kinda hurt though... not a fan"

Mariah Carey's : 'I don't read anything about myself'

Los Angeles | Agencies

Singer-songwriter Mariah Carey does not like to read anything about herself as she treats it like a "coping mechanism" for her global fame. "I would say it's writing. It's prayer. It's like these little things that can take you from possibly being in a really bad mood to just being in a better place immediately. And just really being thankful for all scenarios, all the moments that come our way," she told *people.com*.

"I don't read anything written about me. That's one of my coping mechanisms. It's taking a bath." When it comes to taking a bath, Carey doesn't really like it when someone else runs her one because they will often get things wrong, reports *femalefirst.co.uk*. The singer said: "If someone is kind enough to say 'OK, I know you're probably going to want to get inside and go in the bath, so I'll run it for you.' Well..." They put in too many bubbles. That gets a little bit out of control because then you can't just lay back without getting bubbles all over you." Therefore, she's not so much into bubbles. Carey prefers bath salts.

She added: "And those can really be good, especially if you're a little sore or whatever, you can just soak in bath salts. My latest favourite are the orange ones. They're really good. Then there's the lavender ones that are really relaxing."



Angela Bassett had no idea of Buck's sexuality on '9-1-1'

Los Angeles | Agencies

The sexuality of British actor Oliver Stark's character of Buck on '9-1-1' was something that even the cast of the show didn't know about. Recently, the 100th episode of the procedural ended with Buck sharing a kiss with Tommy (Lou Ferrigno Jr.), and it has left even the cast member Angela Bassett revealing she was also very surprised, reports *Variety*.

She said, "I just saw it today! I was a little behind, so I had to thankfully I could go to Hulu and catch up on it." The actress told *Variety*, "He was quite the ladies' man from the beginning — the wild card — so this is something new and surprising for him as well." As per *Variety*, Bassett, who has portrayed Sergeant Athena Grant-Nash alongside Stark since the drama's 2018 debut, added that she heard about the kiss after it was done. "So I asked him, I said, 'How was it?' He said, 'When you close your eyes, it all feels the same,'" she said with a laugh. Following Thursday's episode, Stark opened up about the character's sexuality, saying that showrunner Tim Minear called him during the third episode of the season and asked him what he thought about the storyline and making his character bisexual. "He had already been in contact with Lou, who plays Tommy — he wanted to know that he was on board before bringing it to me. So not with too much notice he said, 'I think this is the most truthful way to continue Buck's storyline.' And I said, 'I 100 per cent agree,'" Stark said. "I think it's deserved and I think it's earned — and I am excited to get the chance to tell it."

Madonna pairs black corset with pearl necklaces

Los Angeles | Agencies

Legendary singer-songwriter Madonna is raising the temperature with her latest outfit. The 'Queen of Pop' notified her fans of her upcoming gig through an Instagram post. The singer took to her Instagram, and dropped a series of pictures featuring her in a leather corset and fishnets, reports *Mirror.co.uk*.

Madonna wrote in the caption: "Safada is coming to Rio".

The concert will see her wrap up her tour in Rio de Janeiro on May 4.

As per *Mirror.co.uk*, taking place at Copacabana Beach, the event is her thank you to fans for supporting her career since the 1980s.

The new behind-the-scenes pictures are from her appearance in a commercial promoting the 100th anniversary of a Brazilian bank which was shot at the Palais Garnier in Paris last year.

For the sultry shoot, the 'Like a Virgin' hitmaker paired the sexy black corset with a massive slack of eye-catching pearl necklaces, sleek leather gloves, and wore her platinum blonde locks in crimped mermaid-like waves.

Madonna hit all her best poses in the over-exposed snaps as she was seen seductively popping candy in her mouth as she gazed up into the camera.



After welcoming first child, Robert Pattinson wants big family

Los Angeles | Agencies

English actor Robert Pattinson, who recently became a father, plans on having more children with Suki Waterhouse.

The 37-year-old actor and his musician/actress girlfriend Suki, 32, recently welcomed their first child together and Robert is so smitten he is eager to add to their family as soon as possible, reports *Female First UK*. A source told

DailyMail.com: "Rob has taken to fatherhood the same way he has taken his film roles, with complete seriousness and joy. He didn't know what it would be like but it's just blowing his mind. And to see how Suki has adapted and changed this soon since the birth has warmed his heart in a way that is un-



plainable"

"Rob wants more children, and once Suki has the same idea, he is keen to try for another as soon as she is ready. They are having a really fun time being parents and it feels like second nature to them," the source added.

As per *Female First UK*, Suki confirmed the tot's birth

by sharing a picture on Instagram of her cradling the baby. She captioned the image: "Welcome to the world angel!". Although Robert and Suki - who are reportedly engaged - have kept their relationship largely out of the public eye, Suki previously opened up about their romance.

Rachel McAdams : 'absolutely terrified' to make Broadway debut

Los Angeles | Agencies

Hollywood actress Rachel McAdams says she is "absolutely terrified" to make her Broadway debut but is hopeful that she will get to do more shows in the future. The 'Mean Girls' star, 45, is now set to take on the title role in the new play 'Mary Jane' and said that she found the prospect of taking to 'The Great White Way' to be "intimidating" to begin with.

"(I'm) terrified, absolutely terrified. I was intimidated to take it on, so there was always something hold me back a little bit," she said while speaking on 'The Broadway Show with Tamsen Fadal'. In the play, McAdams, who has worked in iconic films such as 'The Notebook', 'The Hot Chick' and 'About Time', among many others, plays a singer mother with an ailing son living in Jackson Heights and is hopeful that she will get to star in another Broadway show at some point in her career. She said: "It just got its hooks in me and I was like, 'There's something in the universe that's telling me this is the one. Hopefully not the last one I'll do.'" The Regina George depicter added that the piece has "changed" her in some ways even though it is



"relatable" as well, reports *femalefirst.co.uk*.

She said: "The energy that this play follows moves in a lot of places, but it's all relatable; it's all grounded still, even at its most heightened moments. This play is just so gorgeous, the writing is incredible."

"It's heartwarming and it's heart-wrenching and it's surprising and it's funny. And it's a testament to the human spirit. It certainly is a play that has changed me."

ABSOLUTE PIC OF THE DAY



Michelle Keegan



SAI SHAKTI TEAM CROWNED CHAMPION OF SUB-JUNIOR WOMEN'S HOCKEY LEAGUE

Lucknow | Agencies

SAI Shakti Team beat Odisha Naval Tata Hockey High-Performance Centre 3-2 in a thrilling final to win the title in the 2nd Khelo India Sub Junior Women's Hockey League at the Padma Shri Mohammad Shahid Synthetic Hockey Stadium here on Saturday. Meanwhile, SAI Bal Team defeated Pritam Siwach Hockey Academy 5-1 to finish in third place.

In the final of the tournament, the SAI Shakti Team defeated Odisha Naval Tata Hockey High Performance Centre 3-2. Khushi (13', 20') netted a brace for SAI Shakti Team in the first half before Neharika Toppo (39') reduced the goal deficit for Odisha Naval Tata Hockey High-Performance Centre to one with a penalty stroke in the third quarter.

Karuna (45') then converted a penalty corner for SAI Shakti Team at the end of the same quarter to take the score to 3-1. Odisha Naval Tata Hockey High-Performance Centre captain Sweety Kujur (57') scored with just a few minutes left on the clock to give her team a chance at making a comeback, but the SAI Shakti Team held onto their lead to win the Finals 3-2.



SAI Bal Team wins bronze In the 3rd/4th classification match, SAI Bal Team defeated Pritam Siwach Hockey Academy 5-1. Sukarmani Mundu (4', 8') scored a brace while Lalpeksangi (20'), Shanti Horo (53') and Lalanchhungi (56') scored a goal each for SAI Bal Team. The solitary goal for Pritam Siwach

Hockey Academy came from Diya (57'). In the 5th/6th classification match, Khelo India State Excellence Centre, Bilaspur defeated HAR Hockey Academy 2-1. Diksha (4') opened the scoring for HAR Hockey Academy in the first quarter but a brace from Madhu Sidar (20', 27') ensured a fifth-place finish for Khelo

India State Excellence Centre, Bilaspur. In the 7th/8th classification match, Jai Bharat Hockey Academy defeated Raja Karan Hockey Academy 5-0. Tamanna (18', 54') and Nisha Saini (19', 47') scored braces while Captain Annu (44') scored a goal for Jai Bharat Hockey Academy.

Tennis: Sumit Nagal makes winning start in qualifying round at Monte Carlo

Team Absolute | New Delhi

India's No.1 Sumit Nagal cruised past 63-ranked Italian Flavio Cobolli in straight sets, 6-2, 6-3 to kick off his qualifying campaign at the Monte Carlo Masters Qualifiers on Saturday.

From the start, Nagal put up a professional effort, exhibiting deft groundstrokes and superb court coverage. He kept Cobolli on the back-foot with his thunderous forehand. In the first set, Nagal took the lead with a break of serve in the fourth game and held onto the lead to win 6-2. Cobolli fought with more vigour in the second set. But in the eighth game, the Indian star answered forcefully with a serve break, demonstrating his mental toughness. With confidence, Nagal ended the match with a 6-3 score. This was his ninth top-100 win (seventh on Clay) and fourth-



best career win (by ranking of opponent). Nagal will next face the winner of the match between Diego Schwartzman and third seed Diaz Acosta.

Japanese GP: Verstappen edges out teammate Perez to claim pole position

Suzuka (Japan) | Agencies

Red Bull's Max Verstappen continued his reign of pole positions in the 2024 season by clinching P1 on the grid for the Japanese Grand Prix.

Teammate Sergio Perez joined Verstappen on the front row, underlining Red Bull's formidable presence at the sharp end of the grid. Despite a valiant effort from Perez, Verstappen's mastery prevailed, with the Mexican's time falling just short of his teammate's benchmark.

The world champion improved his last effort to a 1m 28.197s after recording the quickest time in the early laps of Q3 with a lap of 1m 28.240s. Perez made a heroic effort, but in the end, his time was just 0.066 seconds slower than Verstappen's, placing him in P2. Behind the Red



Bull duo, Lando Norris secured third place, displaying his raw talent and determination. Carlos Sainz, riding high on the wave of his recent victory in Australia, secured a commendable fourth place, further solidifying Ferrari's resurgence in the championship battle. Fernando Alonso emerged

as the leading Aston Martin in fifth, showcasing his enduring skill and experience on the iconic Suzuka circuit. Meanwhile, birthday celebrations were in order for Oscar Piastri, who delivered a stellar performance to secure sixth place on his special day.

In the midst of the grid, a familiar face found himself in an uncharacteristic position. Lewis Hamilton, a stalwart of Formula 1, could only manage seventh place alongside his future Ferrari teammate Charles Leclerc.

Further down the order, George Russell faced scrutiny from the stewards for a pit lane incident in Q1, casting a shadow over his ninth-place grid slot. Yuki Tsunoda, competing in front of his home crowd, rounded out the top 10, hoping to deliver a strong performance on familiar territory.

Indian men's hockey team goes down 1-5 to Australia in their opening game of tour

Perth | Agencies

The Indian men's hockey team went down 1-5 against Australia in their opening game of the five-match Test series here. Tim Brand (3'), Tom Wickham (20', 38'), Joel Rintala (37'), and Flynn Ogilvie (57') were the goal scorers for the hosts, while Gurjant Singh (47') netted the solitary goal for India.

In the opening quarter, India initiated a strategy centred on ball possession and dictating the game's pace. However, despite their efforts, it was Australia that seized an early advantage in the match. Tim Brand (3') broke through India's defense on a swift counterattack, finding the back of the net and putting Australia in the lead. Responding to the setback, India intensified their offensive manoeuvres, mounting pressure on the hosts.

Australia, in turn, ramped up their attacks, earning two consecutive penalty corners. Nevertheless, India's



goalkeeper P.R. Sreejesh exhibited remarkable skills, thwarting Australia's attempts to widen their lead with two outstanding saves. Meanwhile, the Indian team penetrated Australia's defence and even won a penalty corner but couldn't capitalise on it. The first quarter ended with Australia having a 1-0 lead. India kicked off the second quarter with a determined push to equalise the score, adopting an

aggressive approach. Despite earning an early penalty corner opportunity, they were unable to capitalize on it.

The home team, on the other hand, continued to press forward, eventually reaping rewards when Tom Wickham (20') executed a remarkable stretch to score a superb goal, effectively doubling Australia's lead. After successfully extending their lead, the hosts shifted their focus to maintaining posses-

ion, effectively stifling India's offensive advances. As the halftime whistle blew, Australia comfortably held a 2-0 lead, firmly in control of the proceedings. In the second quarter, Australia persistently applied pressure on India by pressing them and testing their defensive capabilities at frequent intervals. This relentless approach paid dividends as they swiftly added two more goals to their tally. Joel Rintala (37') and Tom Wickham (38') capitalised on the opportunities presented, effectively stretching Australia's lead to 4-0 in quick succession.

In the fourth and final quarter, Australia won an early penalty corner, but the Indian team not only denied the hosts from capitalising on it but also pulled one back on a counter-attack as Gurjant Singh (47') netted a goal through a powerful shot. However, Australia restored their four-goal lead as Flynn Ogilvie (57') scored through a penalty corner to contribute to the hosts' 5-1 win.

FIFA and member associations must fight match-fixing together, says Gianni Infantino

Team Absolute | New Delhi

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has told the first FIFA Integrity Summit that the threat of match manipulation has not gone away and can only be tackled if the world governing body and its Member Associations (MAs) join forces and fight it together.

The two-day event, which is taking place in Singapore in collaboration with the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and the Football Association of Singapore (FAS), is aimed at the integrity officers of the 211 MAs and the six confederations, reports 'inside.fifa.com'.

Its main focus is to update them on global integrity trends, share best practices, present the new FIFA Integrity Handbook and Education Roadmap and explore relevant decisions from FIFA and the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) regarding match manipulation. In a video address played during the opening of the summit, Infantino said that, as a multi-billion-dollar industry, football would always be a tempting target for criminal activity. "We must ensure that the playing field



remains level and the game free of malevolent

outside influences, because if it doesn't, then the very existence of our beloved sport will be under threat. We have to remain on our guard," he was quoted as saying by 'inside.fifa.com'.

He further said that FIFA had signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in Vienna, Austria, in 2020, and this was renewed in New York last September. This collaboration led to the Global Integrity Programme, which aims to provide the MAs with the knowledge and tools to prevent and combat match-fixing. A key part of this commitment involves providing education and training to players, referees and integrity officers.

"FIFA is committed to preventing and sanctioning all forms of match manipulations, corruption and other unethical or illegal activities, but we can only do this with your help," Infantino stressed. "FIFA's Member Associations are responsible for combating and tackling match manipulation in their territories and nobody is immune from this threat."

IPL 2024: 'It was as loud as I've ever heard when MS walked out to bat,' says Pat Cummins

Hyderabad | Agencies

Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) skipper Pat Cummins was stunned after listening to the cheering of the packed Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium for MS Dhoni when he came out to bat in the 20th over of Chennai Super Kings (CSK) inning on Friday.

"The crowd was crazy tonight. When MS walked out, it was as loud as I've ever heard, but yes we love playing here and we made it two from two." Cummins said in the post-match presentation ceremony.

However, Dhoni scored just one run off two deliveries but it was a moment of delight for the spectators who came out to watch him bat. Cummins was instrumental in SRH's six-wickets



win against CSK as he

claimed the prize wicket of Shivam Dube, who scored 45 off 24 deliveries. It was also the 50th IPL wicket for Cummins.

"Different soil slowed up as the game went on. Still a fantastic game. We have got plenty of fast bowlers. Shivam was hitting the spinners. So we took a chance with the fast bowlers bowling cutters," said Pat Cummins in the post-match presentation. Cummins also praised Abhishek Sharma's blistering knock of 37 runs in 12 deliveries and said he would never want to bowl him.

"I would not be wanting to be bowling to Abhishek Sharma. The crowd was crazy tonight, especially when MS walked out. We love playing here, at home conditions."

GOLF: INDIAN-AMERICAN BHATIA LEADS IN TEXAS, NEEDS TO WIN TO QUALIFY FOR MASTERS

San Antonio | Agencies

Indian-American Akshay Bhatia is just 36 holes away from a maiden start at the Masters next week. The 22-year-old Bhatia, however, needs to stay on top and win the Valero Texas Open, where he leads a strong field by as much as five shots with two rounds to go.

Augusta National is holding one spot for the winner of the Valero Texas Open.

After a stunning 63 on the first day, he added 2-under 70 with a pair of late birdies for a 2-under 70 that stretched his lead to five shots. He had started with a three-shot lead and opened at the tenth with a 15-foot birdie putt, perhaps a sign that this might be another easy day. However, he bogeyed the 11th from the bunker on the next hole and then three-putted for bogey on 15.

He also failed to birdie the par 5s on the back nine, his first nine for the day. He also lost the lead.

But the 22-year-old settled with birdies on the par 5s on the front nine, at the second and the eighth, and in



between had a birdie on the par-3 eighth. The wind kept whipping and the players kept dropping shots and Bhatia went into the lead and kept expanding it.

Bhatia was at 11-under 133. Denny McCarthy, who played in the afternoon, got within four shots of him until a bogey from the fairway on the par-5 18th for a 70. That dropped him to 6-under 138, along with Brendon Todd (72) and Russell Henley (69).

Rory McIlroy had another steady day of pars and did well enough for a 70 to stay in the mix at 139.

McIlroy, in his final event before he tries again to complete the career Grand Slam at Augusta National, has made three birdies in each of the opening two rounds. Bhatia won the Barracuda Championship last summer, but it was played as an Additional Event the same week as The Open Championship and it did not get him into the Masters. Tommy Fleetwood (69), Webb Simpson (67) and Monday qualifier Peter Kuest (71) were among those at 140. Of the top nine players, only Bhatia, Todd, Simpson and Kuest are not already in the field for the Masters.



Sunny Leone claims her ex-partner cheated on her

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Sunny Leone, shared during a recent episode of the show that her ex-partner cheated on her. The actress revealed that she was engaged to the person and they were about to get married in two months when he told Sunny that he doesn't love her anymore.

The episode takes an emotional turn when Sunny consoles Dewangini. She also pours her heart out while recalling her own heartbreaking story of a broken engagement and overcoming betrayal.

She said, "I also was engaged once before I met my husband. I had a gut feeling that something was wrong, and something was really wrong... He was cheating on me! I just asked him if he loved me anymore, and he was like, 'No, I don't love you anymore!'"

Sunny eventually tied the knot with Daniel Weber and the couple has three children - daughter Nisha, and a pair of twins, Noah and Asher.

The actress added, "This was two months before our wedding. A destination wedding in Hawaii, the dress was picked, everything was done... And it was like the worst feeling ever. But then God does amazing things and sends an angel, my current husband who was there when my mom passed away, and also when my dad passed away. And he has been here since. There is a bigger, greater plan for you and you deserve the best."



Neha Dhupia : everything has been a "game changer"

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Neha Dhupia has had a journey of over two decades in the industry and said that everything has been a "game changer" for her from winning a prestigious beauty pageant in 2002 to working in different OTT shows today. Talking about what has been a game changer project for her, Neha told : "When you are in the business for 22 years, one game changer project doesn't cut it. So, I think from winning Miss India to getting my debut to having a change of heart from the kind of films I want to do then doing reality, to becoming a mum, to producing my own content to being interested in developing and being part of different OTT shows.. all baby steps." The actress shared that she has been proud of her "time frame, consistency, hustle and relevance".

"Everything is a game changer because if you think that there is one point in your life that is going to change it forever, I don't think you can have a career that lasts over two decades and it's the time frame, consistency and hustle that I am most proud of and also the relevance," said the actress.



I am tired of wasting time meeting people : Anurag Kashyap

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Auteur Anurag Kashyap, who is known for 'Black Friday', 'Gangs of Wasseypur', 'Ugly', 'Dev.D' and others, appreciates people who are weird and eccentric. He thinks that such people have beautiful souls. On Saturday, the filmmaker took to the Stories section of his Instagram, and reshared a post about liking the people who have different thought process compared to the larger group of people. The post read, "I like weird people. The black sheep. The odd ducks. The eccentrics. The artists. The loners. The people who actually think for themselves. The kind of people whose morals are not swayed by groupthink. More often than not, these people have the most beautiful souls." Of late, the filmmaker has been quite active on Instagram.

Earlier, he had shared on his Instagram story that he is done meeting newcomers in the industry who have nothing substantial to offer. The filmmaker has now put a price cap on people who seek his time for potential collaboration. He wrote on his Instagram story: "I wasted a lot of time trying to help newcomers and mostly ended up with mediocre s**t. So now onwards I don't want to waste my time with meeting random people who think they're creative geniuses. So I will now have rates."

He further mentioned, "If someone wants to meet me for 10-15 minutes I will charge Rs 1 lakh, for half an hour Rs 2 lakh and for 1 hour Rs 5 lakh. That's the rate. I am tired of wasting time meeting people. If you really think you can afford it, call me or stay the f*** away. And all paid in advance (sic)."



At times it used to get really dark for me Divyendu describes his 'Mirzapur' character Munna

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Divyendu, has shared that his character of Munna Tripathi from the streaming series 'Mirzapur' is a troubled soul. The actor also shared that he will not be a part of the upcoming 3rd season of the show. The actor told 'Human of Bombay', "I shall declare, I am not a part of Mirzapur Season 3."

In an unexpected twist, at the end of the second season of the crime drama, his character Munna was killed. However, fans continued to speculate conspiracy theories that Munna Tripathi is in fact alive. But, the actor's statement cleared the air.

Talking about his character, Divyendu said: "For me, Munna was a really troubled soul. I knew that this was a banger of a script and it would be iconic. It would explode. But, funnily enough, initially, I was approached for Babloo's character but then a couple of days later they realised I would be a much better fit for Munna."

"When I was in character, it was affecting my personality a lot. We shouldn't over-romanticise going too deep into a character because it is not easy. At times it used to get really dark for me. I felt suffocated. It's so tricky that you don't even realise that you are in that zone. It's only when you come out of it you realise how dark it was," he added.



Ileana D'Cruz cooks 'chicken katsu for the soul'



Actress Ileana D'Cruz had a good time making a meal for herself and shared that she enjoyed the yummy dish while it was

hot and fresh. Ileana took to her Instagram stories on Saturday morning and shared a picture of chicken katsu, a Japanese dish of fried chicken made with panko bread crumbs, and called it

"for the soul".

The actress added a line to describe how it was in taste: "Was so good to cook a yummy meal and enjoy it while it was hot and fresh. The simplest things."

Tiger punches Akshay for buying him a new phone

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actor Tiger Shroff seems to have taken Akshay Kumar's "unique condition" for buying a mobile phone a tad too seriously, going by his post on social media. A video shared by the actor showed Akshay and Tiger practicing boxing on punching bags.

Tiger then approaches Akshay and asks him to buy a new phone. Upon hearing that, Akshay tells "Jab tak tu mera seena chauda nahi



karega naa, main tujhe koi phone lekar nahi doonga."

Tiger then walks past Akshay, who begins to practice. Suddenly, Tiger punches him from behind, causing

Akshay's 'chest to puff out'. The video is shared with the caption: "Hamara toh aise hi chalta rahega par ab time aa gaya hai Chote screen se Bade parde pe aane ka..."

Bipasha Basu mentions how daughter Devi loves to clean 'toys, floors and parents'

Team Absolute | Mumbai

Actress Bipasha Basu has shared a sneak peek into how her toddler daughter Devi Basu Singh Grover loves to clean. Bipasha took to Instagram stories and shared a clip of her daughter and her little friend named Dua playing around and cleaning things, including "parents".

The actress shared the video with the caption: "Devi and Dua, we love to clean... Clean parents too after cleaning floor and toys." Bipasha's daughter is a little over a year old now. She was born in November 2022. The actress got married to Karan Singh Grover in April 2016, after they worked together in the 2015 film 'Alone'.



INSTAGRAM PIC OF THE DAY



Mahlgha Jaberi