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MONEY 6
MARCH GST AT ₹1.60 L CR;
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BHUBANESWAR, SUNDAY APRIL 2, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹4



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Supari given for ‘Modi teri kabar khudegi’: PM

PNS ■ BHOPAL

In a veiled attack on the Congress, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said some people are hell-bent to sully his image and they have given a “supari” (contract) for this purpose colluding with certain people sitting in India and also outside the country.

Modi said such people have taken a pledge that “Modi Teri Kabar Khudegi”.

Modi's comment has come amid a slugfest between the Congress and the BJP over Rahul Gandhi's “democracy under brutal attack in India” remarks in the UK and Germany taking note of Rahul's disqualification from the Lok Sabha. The BJP has accused the Congress of “inviting foreign powers” for interfering in India's internal matters.

The Prime Minister was addressing a gathering at Rani Kamalapati railway station in Bhopal after flagging off the semi-high-speed Bhopal-Delhi Vande Bharat Express train.

“There are some people in our country who have been determined since 2014, spoken publicly and declared their resolve that they will tarnish Modi's image. For this, they have given ‘supari’ (contract) to various people.

“Some people are sitting inside the country to support



They are colluding with some abroad, but they don't know that common Indians are my ‘Suraksha Kavach’

— PM NARENDRA MODI

these people and some are doing their work sitting outside the country. These people have been continuously trying to spoil and dent Modi's image,” he said.

But India's poor, the middle class, tribals, Dalits, backward classes and every Indian have become the security cover of Modi, which made these people furious forcing them to adopt new tricks, the prime minister said.

Amid their conspiracies, every countryman has to pay

attention to the development of the country and pay attention to building the nation, he said.

Slamming the Congress without taking its name, Modi said previous governments were busy with vote bank appeasement whereas his government is busy satisfying people. “They (the previous governments) considered one family (a reference to the Gandhis) as the first family of the country. They ignored the poor and middle class, and the Railway is a living example of this (ignorance),” he said.

A fresh war of words erupted between the BJP and the Congress after senior Congress leader Digvijaya Singh on Thursday thanked the German foreign ministry and Richard Walker, Chief International Editor of Deutsche Welle, for

“taking note of how the Democracy is being compromised in India through the persecution of Rahul Gandhi”.

Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju had shared a screenshot of Digvijaya Singh's tweet, saying, “Thank you Rahul Gandhi for inviting foreign powers for interference into India's internal matters. Remember, Indian judiciary can't be influenced by foreign interference. India won't tolerate ‘foreign influence’ anymore because our Prime Minister is:- Shri @narendramodiji”.

Modi said when he was informed about this programme (flagging off Vande Bharat express train from Bhopal), he asked why it is scheduled on April 1. “I said Congress friends will say that Modi will make (people) April fool but the train is being run from April 1. This is a symbol of our confidence, capabilities and skills,” he said.

The PM said the average Railway budget for Madhya Pradesh used to be ₹600 crore before 2014 but it has now gone to more than ₹13,000 crore.

Modi said previous governments could have easily upgraded the already existing rail network which India acquired after Independence but the development of railways was sacrificed due to vested political interests.

Stay ready to deal with new threats, PM urges military

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday asked the three Services to stay ready to deal with new and emerging threats, emphasising that all steps are being taken to equip the Armed Forces with necessary weapons and technologies.

He made these assertions during the Combined Commanders' Conference in Bhopal which began on March 30. He also reviewed the security situation and operational readiness of the Armed Forces during the valedictory session of Combined Commanders' Conference.

He was also updated about the steps underway for the creation of Theatre Commands in an effort to fight the modern day war with perfect synergy between the three Services namely army, navy and air force, sources said.

During the conference, deliberations were held over a spectrum of issues pertaining to national security, including jointness and theaterisation in the armed forces.

Giving details here, officials said the Prime Minister was briefed by Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan about the various discussions conducted during this year's conference.

Detailed report on Page 4

Defence export soars by ten-fold in last six years

Make-in-India paying dividends, asserts PM Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India has achieved an all-time high defence equipment export worth ₹15,920 crore in 2022-23 and it is a ten-fold jump in last six years. Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded this development after Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday made the announcement.

“Indian defence exports reached an all-time high of ₹15,920 crores in FY 2022-23. It is a remarkable achievement for the country,” Rajnath said in a tweet. He also said defence exports will continue to grow exponentially under the inspiring leadership of Modi.

The Prime Minister lauded India's defence export under Make in India and said it indicates the reforms in this sector over the last few years are yielding good results.

“Excellent! A clear manifestation of India's talent and the enthusiasm towards ‘Make in India’! It also shows the reforms in this sector over the last few years are delivering good results. Our Government will keep supporting efforts to make India a defence production hub,” the PM wrote on Twitter



Defence exports were ₹1,521 crore in 2016-17, ₹4,682 crore in 2017-18, ₹10,745 crore in 2018-19, ₹9,115 crore in 2019-20, ₹8,434 crore in 2020-21, and ₹12,814 crore in 2021-22.

India exports missiles, the advanced light helicopter (ALH), offshore patrol vessels, personal protective gear, surveillance systems and a variety of radars to around 85 countries. Talks are on with potential customers for light combat aircraft Tejas, different types of helicopters, artillery guns, Astra beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles, Akash surface-to-air missile systems, tanks, sonars and radars.

Egypt and Argentina have evinced interest in procuring 20 and 15 Tejas jets respectively. Moreover, India may export ALH to the Philippines.

Last year, BrahMos Aerospace and the Philippines signed a deal worth almost \$375 million for the Philippine Marines to buy three batteries of the BrahMos supersonic

cruise missile, and Kalyani Strategic Systems Limited won an export order worth \$155.5 million for supplying 155mm artillery guns, the first such order for an Indian firm.

In 2020, the Union Cabinet gave its go-ahead to the export of Akash missile systems and also created a high-powered panel for swifter export approvals.

The Government has given a major boost to self reliance over the last few years and inked deals worth over ₹36,000 crores on Thursday including warships, supersonic missiles for the navy, and surface-to-air missiles and weapon locating radars for the army.

In fact, the last financial year ending Friday saw the defence ministry placing orders with domestic manufacturers worth ₹53,000 crores including basic trainer aircraft, a satellite for the army, training ships, medium-power radars, radar warning receivers, air defence systems, and Dornier aircraft.

Georgia 1st US state to pass resolution against Hinduphobia

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The Georgia Assembly has passed a resolution condemning Hinduphobia, making it the first American State to take such a legislative step. Condemning Hinduphobia and anti-Hindu bigotry, the resolution said Hinduism is one of the world's largest and oldest religions with over 1.2 billion adherents in over 100 countries and encompasses an array of diverse traditions and belief systems with values of acceptance, mutual respect and peace.

The resolution was introduced by Representatives Lauren McDonald and Todd Jones from Forsyth County in the suburbs of Atlanta, home to one of the largest Hindu and

Indian-American diaspora communities in Georgia.

The resolution observed that the American-Hindu community has been a major contributor to diverse sectors such as medicine, science and engineering, information technology, hospitality, finance, academia, manufacturing, energy, retail trade, among others

Stating that there have been documented instances of hate crimes against Hindu-Americans over the last few decades in many parts of the country, the resolution said Hinduphobia is exacerbated and institutionalised by some in academia who support the dismantling of Hinduism and accuse its sacred texts and cultural practices of violence.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with students on Bhopal-Delhi Vande Bharat Express train after flagging off the semi-high speed train in Bhopal on Saturday. The train will run on all days except Saturday. It will depart from Rani Kamalapati station at 5.40am and reach Hazrat Nizamuddin station at 1.10pm. The Delhi-Bhopal leg of the train will start at 2.40pm and reach Bhopal at 10.10pm, officials said. The train is scheduled to halt at Gwalior and Agra enroute

PTI

Edgy calm day after Ram Navami clashes; Shah on Bihar visit

‘Not natural, disturbing’, Nitish blames vested interest for violence

PNS ■ PATNA/HOWRAH

A day after communal celebrations in six States, situation remained peaceful but tense on Saturday.

However, the prohibitory order Section 144 was still in force in the affected areas Howrah, a police officer said.

Meanwhile Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Saturday asserted communal tensions during Ram Navami festivities at Sasaram and Bihar Sharif towns were triggered by some people indulging in “gadbad” (mischief) and rejected the BJP's charge of poor law and order situation in the State.

And on the day when the BJP and Kumar's JD(U) traded charges over communal disturbances which caused Union Home Minister Amit Shah to cancel one of the programmes scheduled on April 2, the Union Home Minister reached Bihar on Saturday.

Taking over investigations into the clashes, Bengal CID collected samples and spoke to local people as well as police personnel who were deployed there during Thursday's clash, the officer said.

In Patna, while interacting with media persons here on Saturday, Kumar also made light of Shah canceling his tour of Sasaram in view of riots, remarking, “I don't know why he was coming and I don't understand why he decided not to come”.

“Communal tensions during Ram Navami festivities at Sasaram and Bihar Sharif are disturbing. Such incidents happened for the first time in the area. It's not natural.... We know that some people are indulging in “gadbad” (mischief) and are trying to disrupt communal harmony in the state. We will not allow this to happen,” the Chief Minister said.

He said police officials have been instructed to identify those who are indulging in mischief and to “take strict action against them”.

Normalcy has been restored in both the places though senior officers are camping in the affected areas by way of caution and security forces have been deployed in the area, Kumar said.

The State police have so far arrested 45 people in connection with communal riots at Sasaram and Bihar Sharif that erupted during the Ram Navami festivities. Vehicles, houses and shops were torched and several people injured in communal flare-ups reported in both towns.



CM approves metro rail project



BBSR, Cuttack, Puri to be linked

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik approved the much-awaited metro rail project on the auspicious occasion Utkal Divas on Saturday.

The metro rail project would connect Bhubaneswar, Puri and Cuttack cities.

A high-level meeting was held to review the feasibility for the proposed metro train service on different routes in

Odisha.

As per sources, the metro train service will begin from the Bhubaneswar airport to Trisulia covering the Bhubaneswar railway station, Vani Vihar, Jayadev Vihar, Patia, Nandankanan and Trisulia. The project will be extended to Puri subsequently.

Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita Sarangi had made efforts for the project. She met concerned Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri in New Delhi in this regard in October last year.

BJP, BJD celebrate Utkal Divas in Kotia

PNS ■ KORAPUT

Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Saturday visited Phatusineri in Kotia panchayat in Koraput district along with some BJP MLAs and celebrated the Utkal Divas by singing ‘Bande Utkal Janani’ with locals.

The people of Koraput would never allow anybody to intrude into this region, he said. Pradhan came down heavily on the Andhra Government's attempt to intrude into the region. “Where I am standing is Odisha's land. Why the Andhra police are here? All the nameplates of Andhra Government

should be taken off” he said and asked the Andhra officials to go back, amid cheers from the crowd.

He also paid tributes to Utkalgaurab Madhusudan Das, Utkalmani Gopabandhu Das, Maharaja Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo, Maharaja Krushnachandra Gajapati and other legends.

The BJD also celebrated the special day in this disputed area. Some party MLAs of Koraput district, Special Development Council Chairman Chandrasekhar Majhi and Nabarangpur MP Ramesh Chandra Majhi took part in the celebrations at Ganjeipadar village in Kotia panchayat.

Jagannath Sports Complex to be ready soon

5T Secy visits Puri, reviews various projects

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

5T Secretary VK Pandian visited Puri and reviewed the Jagannath Sports Complex on Saturday as directed by CM Naveen Patnaik.

Constructed under the ABHADA scheme, the sports complex comprises a cricket stadium, a multipurpose indoor hall with facilities for boxing, wrestling, gymnasium, table tennis, besides a swimming pool. A 100 seated hostel is also being built there. The CM had laid the foundation stone for the project in 2018.

It was known from the review that the cricket stadium,

swimming pool, and gymnasium works have been completed and the stadium will be dedicated to the public very soon.

The sports complex would add to the importance of Puri as a world-class heritage spot, said Pandian. He also took stock of the Srimandira Heritage Corridor project and Municipal Market Complex constrictions.

Last week Pandian had visited Puri and reviewed the progress of works of the Heritage Corridor Project, Sri Setu and Jagannath Ballav. The CM has asked Pandian to visit Puri every Saturday and make a weekly review of the progress of all the projects implemented in the pilgrim town and update him about them, said sources.

Direct BBSR-Dubai flight to take off on May 15

CM launches ticket sale on Utkal Divas

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Ahead of the launch of much-awaited direct international flight from Bhubaneswar to Dubai, sale of tickets started here on the Utkal Divas on Saturday.

The maiden international flight will take off from the Biju Patnaik International Airport here on May 15.

Launching the ticket sales at the Naveen Niwas, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said, "Direct connectivity with Dubai, which is one of the biggest aviation hubs, will

open up a direct gateway to the world. Not only it will provide seamless connectivity but also will have a huge multiplier effect on investment in Odisha in sectors like IT, manufacturing and tourism. This is the aspiration of New Odisha."

The CM handed over the first eight tickets to Mission Shakti women, sportspersons, tribal leaders, Skilled in Odisha students and artists. They are Sundargarh SDC Chairperson Binay Kumar Toppo, Keonjhar SDC Chairperson Laxmi Nayak, Koraput DLF President Jyotirekha Chetty, sand artist Sudarshan Pattnaik, footballer Anuradha Biswal, shooter Shriyanka Sadangi,

Balaram Rout from Jajpur Govt Polytechnic and Himansu Sahoo from Rourkela Govt ITI.

While attending Make in Odisha Conclave in Dubai, the CM had assured the investor community and Odia diaspora that such a direct flight would commence to ease travel from Middle East. He had also given approval to completely fund the flight operations.

Further, within two weeks of the launch of direct flight to Dubai, international flight operations will commence to Singapore and Bangkok to realise Odisha's vision to become the gateway to the East.

The Indigo Airlines recently

won the bid to operate direct flights to the aforesaid three important gateways. As per the agreement, the Indigo Airlines will operate direct flight from Bhubaneswar thrice a week. Inaugural ticket prices have been set to begin at 10,000 per single-side journey and 20,000 for round trip. Each flight will have the subsidised tickets on a first-come-first-serve basis.

The CM said a larger delegation from Odisha would go on the first flight to Dubai.

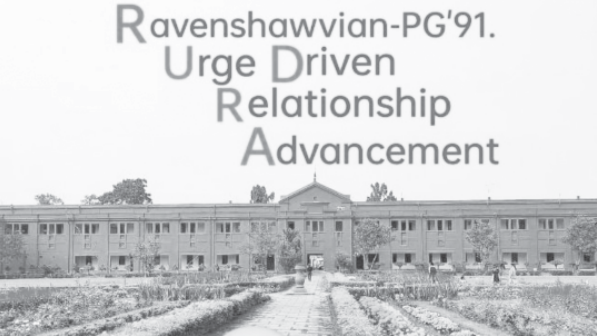
He hanked the Government of India, especially Union Minister of Civil Aviation Jyotiraditya M Scindia for facilitating services for the flight operations.



Sand artist Subala Maharana creates a sculpture titled "Happy Utkala Divas" at the State of India head office in Bhubaneswar on Saturday.

Pioneer photo

Ravenshaw PG-1991 batch meet today



PNS ■ CUTTACK

Later, all the members and invitees will congregate at Odisha Cricket Association Convention Hall to get to know one another after a gap of 32 years. Forming a whatsapp group the batch mates have been associated since 2019 and this time have decided to meet. DS Mishra, Amiyabala Parida, Dharendra Kar, Manoranjan Mohanty, Jhumpa Mitra, Manjushree Shastri, Gangotri Sarangi, Kantiprava, Sachi Mishra, Dinesh Das, Mahendra Agasti, Susant Nayak, Bikram Ghadei, Debajyoti and Raj among others are monitoring the programme.

Assembly adjourned undemocratically: BJP

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Budget Session of the State Legislative Assembly was scheduled to be held till April 6, but it was adjourned six days ahead of the schedule undemocratically. The State Government should answer why it adjourned the Assembly arbitrarily, said the BJP on Saturday.

Leader of Opposition Jayanaryan Mishra said this is an escapist Government. Six important Bills were to be passed in the Assembly, but

the Government adjourned it on Friday. The Government has failed to meet the farmers' issues like distress sale of paddy.

In Odisha, a "duplicate" Government is operating. Certificates are fake; medicines are fake and the Ratna Bhandar keys are fake. The people of the State are distressed due to the BJD Government. The Government could not face the barrage of questions posed by the BJP, for which it adjourned the Assembly, Mishra said.

CM releases Rs 877-cr KALIA aid to 43L farmers

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

On the Utkal Divas, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Saturday disbursed monetary assistance to farmers under the KALIA scheme. The assistance has been provided for agriculture in Kharif season.

Except poll-bound district Jharsuguda, the farmers of other districts have been given the KALIA assistance.

The CM released total Rs 877 crore under the scheme benefitting over 43 lakh agricultural households in the State.

Patnaik said, "The State's development is linked with welfare of farmers. Therefore, we started the new financial year by providing KALIA assistance on this auspicious day."

Stating that Odisha is now self-reliant in the production of food grains, it is able to



provide food to the country's food reserves.

He said the State Government has taken many steps for development of agriculture. He advised the farmers to use more machines and modern equipments. He said the Government is implementing several grain-based missions to increase the production of nutritious food in and improve farmers' income.

He also advised farmers to focus on crop diversification.

Agriculture & Farmers' Empowerment and Fisheries & ARD Minister Ranendra Pratap Swain said the Kalia scheme has made the farmers self-reliant. Farmers' morale has improved with relief from farm loans.

Many farmers from different districts including

Malkangiri, Puri and Bargarh also gave their views on the KALIA assistance and the changes it has brought to their lives.

Kiran Kumar Sahu from Kukudakhundi block of Ganjam district, who received the scholarship, described how he got the opportunity to get enrolled into medical studies at the MKCG Medical College in Brahmapur.

Govt nod to 5 industry projects worth Rs 35,760 cr

38,100 job opportunities expected To be set up in Bhadrak, Dhenkanal, JSPur, Keonjhar

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State Government, in a bid to convert investment intents received during the Make in Odisha Conclave 2022 into ground reality, has approved five industrial projects of diverse sectors. The proposals, estimated at Rs 35,760 crore, were cleared by the High Level Clearance

Authority (HLCA) in its 31st meeting held under the chairpersonship of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik here on Saturday.

The endeavours are part of the Government's effort to welcome industrialists to invest in the State.

Official sources said the projects have the potential to generate over 38,100 employment opportunities and are spread across the sectors like IT & ESDM/ green energy equipment, steel, chemicals and textile. The committee has given a go-ahead to two steel projects, one project in green energy and equipment, one project in chemicals and one project in

technical textile.

The projects will be set up in Bhadrak, Dhenkanal, Jagatsinghpur and Keonjhar districts.

The proposal of WAREE Energies Limited entails an investment of Rs 25,000 crore for an integrated solar equipment manufacturing complex in Dhenkanal with an employment potential of 14,000 people.

The committee also approved the proposal of Super Smelters Limited for an integrated steel plant of capacity of 1.8 MTPA in Keonjhar which promises an investment of Rs 5,436.10 crore and is expected to provide employment to about

19,000 people.

The HLCA approved another project by Kashvi Power and Steel Private Limited for an integrated steel plant in Keonjhar with an investment of Rs 1,600 crore.

In the technical textile sector, the committee gave a nod to a project by MCPI Private Limited. With an investment of Rs 2,223.25 crore, the company proposes to set up a plant in Bhadrak.

In the chemicals sector, the authority approved a project of IV Dhunseri Petrochem Industries Ltd Jagatsinghpur with an investment of Rs 1,500 crore and expected employment opportunities for over 500 people.

Red Cross study-cum-training camp ends

Volunteers oriented on host of subjects

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Under the guidance of honorary secretary, Indian Red Cross Society Odisha State Branch Bibhubi Bhushan Pattnaik, a five-day JRC study-cum-training camp was organised at Nilachal Polytechnic, Bhubaneswar from March 26 to 30. Honorary treasurer Bhabani Prasad Nanda presided over the valedictory programme and advised the students to come forward to take care of nature for a healthy society.

Former secretary IRC SOSB Maj Dr Kalpana Das, Additional Secretary, Health and Family Welfare Department Ashok Kumar Rath and Youth Red Cross



officer Dr Ramesh Chandra Behera joined as guests and motivated the volunteers.

During the camp different technical sessions on subjects like history of Red Cross, school safety, substance abuse, first aid, climate change, fire safety, disaster management and WASH, importance of medicinal plants and road safety etc were held. The Fire Department demonstrated

different skills on search and rescue during fire hazards. Additional Transport Commissioner Sanjay Kumar Biswal held a quiz competition and winners were given helmets.

Similarly, Tree Man of India Dr Dilip Kumar Srichandan took a session on climate change and encouraged everybody to plant saplings. Agriculture

officer Jayanta Kumar Jena made the volunteers understand how the medicinal plants play a vital role for a healthy life. Master Trainer Chandan Kumar Mohanty oriented the volunteers on disaster management, water sanitation and hygiene. Winners of different competitions were felicitated.

Rahul case shows Indian democracy not in good shape

PM Narendra Modi always describes the Indian democracy as a vibrant one. But the way Congress MP Rahul Gandhi was convicted in a Surat Court of defamation on March 23 for his Modi jibe in an election rally in 2019 and within the next 10 hours was "disqualified" as an MP of the Lok Sabha tells that Indian democracy is clearly in a deplorable shape

The Freethought Party of India (FPI) is of candid opinion that neither Prime Minister Narendra Modi nor his business friend Gautam Adani is to be equated with India. Attack on anyone of them should never be construed as an attack on India. Fact is nobody in India is above criticism.

The FPI disapproves of the mischievous conduct of BJP MPs in not allowing the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha to function as per the



B RAMCHANDRA CST VOLTAIRE

Parliamentary rules.

It is quite shameful that Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla did not assert his authority; rather he succumbed to the pressures mounted on him by the PMO. As a result, he could not allow Congress MP Rahul Gandhi to speak his mind on the floor of the House on the demand of the BJP MPs to tender his "apology" for his speeches that he delivered in UK.

Gandhi wrote two letters to the Speaker. He met the

Speaker in his chamber. He pleaded that he should be allowed to make his stand clear on the issue of tendering an apology in the House. The Speaker acted as per the direction to him by the ruling party. Thus it proves that India is not the Mother of Democracy.

Om Birla should not have given in to the pressures of the ruling party; rather he should have threatened to the Prime Minister that he must be allowed to perform his constitutional duty towards the Republic of India; otherwise he would resign from the post of Speakership of the Lok Sabha. It is quite disturbing that parliamentary democracy is being sabotaged almost everyday by the authoritarian attitude of PM Modi.

The Lok Sabha Speaker should have not expunged any part of the speech that

Rahul Gandhi delivered in the Lok Sabha on February 7th while participating in the Motion of Thanks to the President of India. In that speech Gandhi asked for clarification from the Prime Minister on the financial relationship that he was having with Gautam Adani whose fraudulent activities have been exposed by the Hindenburg experts. Instead of replying to the debate PM Modi utilised the Speaker to expunge the key points of Gandhi's speech in the proceedings of the Lok Sabha. If critical remarks on the activities of the Government are to be expunged then why should we record the proceedings of the House at all?

(Voltaire is general secretary, FPI, Copernicus Bhawan, 121, Dharm Vihar, Khandagiri, Bhubaneswar, Mob : 9238878280)

MCL achieves record output of 193.3 MT

And despatch of 192.7 MT

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Scaling new heights, the Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL) registered a record 193.3 million tonne coal production with highest ever 192.7 million tonne coal despatch to consumers during the financial year (FY) 2022-23.

Chairman-cum-Managing Director Om Prakash Singh, while addressing at a Press conference here on Saturday, expressed his gratitude to the State and the Central Governments for extending all necessary support to the company, which ensured new milestones in its pursuits of energy security in the country. “The MCL registered a growth of 15 % for the FY 2023-23, while coal



dispatch also showed 9% growth over previous FY 2021-22,” Singh informed, expressing his gratitude to all the stakeholders, employees of the company and contractors’ workers.

Functional directors of MCL, including Director (Personnel) Keshav Rao, Director (Technical) Jugal Kumar Borah and Director (Finance) Ajit Kumar Behura, besides Chief Vigilance Officer, PK Patel also shared the dais.

“We are happy to share that MCL has achieved all its targets much ahead of schedule and contributed to Coal India surpassing its target of 700 million tonnes set for FY 2022-23,” the CMD added, while informing that the 97 per cent of total production of MCL was through eco-friendly equipment surface miners.

Singh informed that the coal despatch to power sector also increased from 127.12 million tonne in FY 2022 to 148.8 million tonne in FY

2023 with a growth of 17 per cent. Strengthening its business activities, the company made Capital Expenditure (CapEx) of Rs 3,850 crore during the FY 2022-23.

In the year ended March 31, 2023, the company had spent around Rs 200 crore under various CSR initiatives for social and economic upliftment of society, particularly the remote and peripheral areas of the coalfields, he said.

5T Secy visits Madhubabu birthplace



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

On the direction of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, his 5T Secretary VK Pandian on Saturday visited the birthplace of Utkalgaurav Madhusudan Das in Cuttack district and paid his tributes to the legendary figure.

Pandian also discussed with locals about the Madhubabu memorial's development plan. The renovation work would be carried out under the 5T initiative and the plan would be submitted to the Chief Minister by April 15 for his approval. A museum would be constructed at Madhubabu's

birthplace and a 15-feet bronze statue of his would also be installed.

Notably, after returning from Kolkata, Madhubabu used to stay in a house near his birthplace and dedicated himself to the service of Odisha. This is famous as his workplace.

The road connecting his birthplace and workplace would be renovated. Arrangements for a light-and-sound show would also be made and the life and achievements of Madhubabu would be narrated in different languages for the benefit of the visitors.

Chikiti BJD leader Deo no more



PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

Durga Prasad Deo (known as Sana Deo), a strong organiser of BJD in Chikiti Assembly seat, died here on Friday night following prolonged illness, sources said.

Hundreds of BJD workers and senior leaders including Brahmapur MP Chandra Sekhar Sahu and his well-wishers rushed to Chikiti for the last darshan of Deo. State Housing and Urban Development Minister Usha Devi was also present. He was cremated at Swarga Dwara,

Puri. Late Deo was an unchallenged leader and capable organiser of the ruling BJD who played a vital role for repeated win of BJD for two decades from Chikiti. Brahmapur MP Sahu in his message said the death of Deo is a great loss not only for Chikiti, but also for the BJD. He was a strong grass root level organiser, he added.

Former Deputy Speaker of Assembly and senior BJD leader Rama Chandra Panda also conveyed his sincere condolences to the bereaved family.

Sasan Canal mishap Transport, WR, Works officials visit spot

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

After a tragic accident near Bishalkhinda under Sasan police station in which a vehicle of a wedding party skidded into a canal killing seven people under water, the local administration has formed a committee to inquire into the incident and suggest remedial measures to curb such incidents in future.

“We have visited the spot with police and staff of the Water Resources and Works departments to find the flaws there and make permanent constructions so that no vehicles skid off the canal embankment,” said Sambalpur

RTO cum the member of the Road Safety Committee Ramdas Tudu. “No one had informed us earlier about the spot. It has come to our knowledge only after the accident. Hence, at the instruction of the Collector cum Chairman of the Road Safety Committee, we are visiting the spot and we will make it an accident free spot with necessary modifications,” said Tudu. However, locals have demanded quick measures by the Government, including widening of the bridge and the approach roads to it on both sides. Besides, they demanded sign boards, solar lights and increased height of the bridge.

NTPC Kaniha project makes dreams come true for many

40 meritorious students succeed in jobs, 10 join higher studies

SURAJ MISHRA ■ BHUBANESWAR

Satyabrat Mohapatra used to visit Maa Hingula Yatra every year as a devotee. But this year he would be joining the fest as an administrator.

Satyabrat has been included in the team of district administrators for public control and administrative coordination in the nine-day long festival at Gopalprasad area from April 4 to 12.

A student of NTPC Kaniha's educational CSR initiative Project “Vijay”, Satyabrat cleared the prestigious Odisha Civil Service Examination (OCS) 2020 and joined as trainee Assistant Collector in Angul district, which is also his home district. Son of a bus stand

hawker in Angul headquarters bus stand and a physically challenged, Satyabrat cracked the prestigious examination with a rank of 279.

AGM (CSR) NTPC, Kaniha, Rafiqul Islam congratulated him for his remarkable achievement in the Odisha Civil Services Examination and wished him all success in future endeavours.

A left-hander but meritorious, Satyabrat managed his studies with scholarships all through his educational career. He has completed bachelor's degree in Agriculture from Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT). He joined NTPC's short term CSR programme “Vijay”, which offers free civil service coaching classes in association with Gurukul Foundation's IAS Gurukul in PPP mode.

“This is an important milestone in my life and I will try for IAS soon. I am grateful to NTPC CSR initiative, which in collaboration with Gurukul

Foundation's IAS Gurukul, is helping aspirants of Odisha,” said Satyabrat.

With “Vijay” free online pre-recruitment coaching by NTPC TSTPS Kaniha, nearly 40 candidates have become successful in various stages of different competitive exams such as a bank, railway, paramilitary, police, RI, State Government, Central Government, Secretariat, Assistant Professor, teacher, engineer and corporate jobs etc. Besides, nearly 10 of them joined in higher studies in Masters, MBA, Ph.D and B.Ed courses etc., through competitive exams at state and state universities. The focus is on having meritorious disadvantaged and poor boys and girl students from remote villages including handicapped, widow, orphan, SC, ST, backward and war soldiers families from NTPC Kaniha project affected areas including Kaniha, Talcher and Pallahara tehsils.

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The NIST here organised a two-day techno management symposium ‘Sankalp 2K23’ in its campus at Palur Hills on Thursday.

As a national-level event, Sankalp aims to nurture technical expertise and skills among young individuals, providing a platform for showcasing their talents in various events such as Robotics, Web Designing, Quizzes, Coding, Paper Presentation, and more, said its Principal Dr Priyadarshi Tripathy.

The inaugural ceremony was attended by Chairman, ISTE Odisha section Dr Pravat Kumar Parhi; Principal Dr Tripathy; ISTE faculty advisor Prof Mitubaral, Sankalp Student president Sayed Imran, secretary Sritam



Shraban Rath and treasurer Kajal Kumara. Founder chairman Dr Sukant K Mohapatra graced the event in online mode.

During the inaugural address, Chairman ISTE Odisha section Dr Parhi emphasised on the importance of industry collaborations to empower students on the latest technologies and to lead a meaningful career by learning

new skills.

The event promises to be an enthralling techno-fiesta, giving students the opportunity to explore and conquer new horizons while redefining the meaning of success itself, said the Founder chairman Dr Mahapatra. Principal Dr Tripathy in his address said that these kinds of symposiums provide a platform to the students to showcase their latent abilities

and ingenuity. ISTE faculty advisor Prof Baral advised students to be multi skilled and focus on multi-disciplinary projects.

The symposium featured talks by industry experts, who shared their experiences and provided valuable insights into the latest technologies and trends in the industry. Besides, cultural events like Mr and Miss Sankalp, DJ and Band were organised.

NREGS public hearing held in Boden Block

Officials asked to maintain transparency in use of funds

AJIT PANDA ■ NUAPADA

A block level public hearing on Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) for the financial year 2021-22 for Boden block under Nuapada district was held at Boden on March 28.

The Nuapada Sub-Collector presided over the event and urged the implementing agencies and officials to maintain records properly so that there are no loopholes or



misuse of funds.

Findings of the social audit regarding worksite issues, financial deviation, process violation, improper maintenance of records and financial misappropriation found during the social audits at village and Panchayat level audits were presented by the District Social Audit team headed by district coordinator Milan Pati. This was followed

by a discussion Panchayat-wise. The Sub-Collector strongly stated that funds have to be utilized strictly for the projects sanctioned. The public hearing committee suggested proper maintenance of records and recovering funds which have been misappropriated. The executing officials were given fifteen days' time period to set their records right.

DCBL mushroom farming training to 1M women



Already, hundreds have started earning in Cuttack, Rajgangpur

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Dalmia Cement (Bharat) Limited (DCBL), a subsidiary of Dalmia Bharat Limited, is aiming to provide earning source to one million rural women through enterprise development programme in mushroom cultivation in Odisha.

The company is facilitating the training programme for Self Help Group (SHG)

women in communities surrounding its plants in Cuttack, Rajgangpur and Lanjiberna mines, enabling them to earn an additional income of Rs 5,000 a month through establishment of mushroom cultivation units.

As a case study in point, Dalmia Cement's Kapilash Cement Manufacturing Works (KCMW) in Cuttack, in the last 7 months witnessed 130 SHG members selling around 300 kg mushrooms in the local markets earning profits worth Rs 75,000. In Rajgangpur, 140 women from 17 villages have benefited through the programme.

The Dalmia Cement

provides raw materials and market linkage support to all SHG women to build their own cultivation enterprises.

The company has been promoting various income generation and skill development programmes in the region for empowering disadvantaged women and providing them an opportunity to earn a secure livelihood. Apart from mushroom farming, initiatives like Project Hastakala - handicraft production, spices and pickle making, flower and organic vegetable farming, terracotta products making, etc have been introduced, a release said.

IN BRIEF

COMPUTER CENTRE OPENS IN UTKAL UNIVERSITY

Bhubaneswar: On the occasion of Utkal Divas, a Computer Centre of the Utkal University was inaugurated by Vice-Chancellor Prof Sabita Acharya in the presence of Registrar Dr



Abhay Kumar Nayak, CDC Director Dr Nigamananda Das, Development Officer Dr Manoranjan Senapati and Professor in-Charge of Computer Centre Dr Prafulla Kumar Behera. The Computer Centre along with a videoconference room, a computer lab, a supervision room and a technical team office were also opened. Forty-eight students can use the computer at the same time availing high-speed Internet access.

U SAMMILANI OBSERVES UTKAL DIVAS

Bhubaneswar: The Utkal Sammilani here on Saturday observed the Utkal Divas by paying floral tributes to the statues of Utkalgaurav Madhusudan Das and Samilani's first president Maharaja Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo. Governor Prof Ganeshi Lal, who attended as chief guest, also paid tribute to Madhubabu. Utkal Sammilani Mancheswar branch president Dillip Dashsharma presided over the function, in which advisor Ananta Prasad Jena, vice-president Surendra Mohan Mishra, branch advisor Nimai Charan Das, vice-president Sital Chandra Mohanty and secretary Gobinda Charan Subudhi were present.



CSPUR DAVIANS CELEBRATE UTKAL DIVAS

Bhubaneswar: The DAVians of Chandrasekharpur here celebrated the 88th Utkal Divas amidst various activities on Saturday. Principal Indira Bhattacharya, joining as chief guest, appealed to all to uphold Odisha's rich culture and heritage



and rededicate themselves for the greater cause of the State. Mass rendition of Bande Utkal Janani, presentation of cultural programmes, enactment of skit show and speeches on the importance of the day marked the occasion.

UTKAL DIVAS HELD AT POKHARIPUT DAV

Bhubaneswar: The Utkal Divas was observed at the DAV School, Pokhariput here. Schoolchildren sang the State Anthem 'Bande Utkal Janini' to mark the occasion. A documen-



tary 'Aadmya Odisha' was also exhibited. DAV Regional Coordinator and school Principal D Sujata said that though it is necessary to go to foreign countries, it is needed to return to the country to serve the motherland.

KALINGA HOSPITAL OBSERVES UTKAL DIVAS

Bhubaneswar: The Kalinga Hospital here celebrated the Utkal Divas. A function was held to mark the occasion. It was graced



by eminent personalities like Justice Choudhury Pratap Keshari Mishra, spiritual leader Swami Mukundananda, former Chief Secretary Sahadev Sahu along with Dr Sitakantha Dash, Chairman, Kalinga Hospital. The hospital felicitated 80 employees for their uninterrupted service. Hospital MD Nilanjana Mukherjee also spoke.

PROF NANDA NEW SOA VICE-CHANCELLOR

Bhubaneswar: Eminent researcher Prof Pradipta Kumar Nanda has taken over as Vice-Chancellor of the Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (SOA) Deemed to be University here.



MO BUS SERVICE NOW IN ROURKELA

Rourkela: The Capital Region Urban Transport (CRUT) expanded the Mo Bus service in Rourkela by rolling out the buses on six new routes with effect from April 1 on occasion of Utkal Divas. Notably, for the past four and a half years, the CRUT has been providing the Mo Bus service in Bhubaneswar with a significant impact on the public transport system in the State capital.



In Baleswar

Woman's body found stuffed in sack

Murder suspected

PNS ■ BALESWAR

Police recovered a decomposed body of a woman stuffed in a sack from the Subarnarekha river in Basta tehsil of Baleswar district on Saturday.

While the identity of the woman was yet to be ascertained, it was suspected that she was murdered by miscreants and the body was stuffed into a sack and thrown

into the river.

Sources said some locals spotted a sack floating in the river at Benapur-Baruni ghat in the morning and informed police.

On getting information, police reached the spot and fished out the body from the river.

The body has been sent for postmortem and the exact cause of death would be revealed after the availability of the reports. Further investigation was on, police said.

PM reviews op readiness of Armed Forces

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday asked the three Services to stay ready to deal with these new and emerging threats, emphasising that all steps are being taken to equip the Armed Forces with necessary weapons and technologies. He made these assertions during the Combined Commanders' Conference in Bhopal which began on March 30. He also reviewed the security situation and operational readiness of the Armed Forces during the valedictory session of Combined Commanders' Conference.

He was also updated about the steps underway for the creation of Theatre Commands



in an effort to fight the modern day war with perfect synergy between the three Services namely army, navy and air force, sources said. During the conference, deliberations were held over a spectrum of issues pertaining to national security, including jointness and theaterisation in the armed forces. Giving details here, officials said the Prime Minister was briefed by Chief of Defence Staff(CDS) General Anil Chauhan about the various

discussions conducted during this year's conference. Modi complimented the Armed Forces for their role in nation building and providing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) assistance to friendly countries. During the final day of the session, various topics including aspects of digitisation; cyber security; challenges of social media; Aatmanirbharta; absorption of Agniveers and jointness were discussed. In a significant development from the past, the scope of the conference was expanded this year, wherein, a few multi-layered and interactive sessions were conducted with participation of soldiers from every command of the Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force, including the Tri-Services Andaman and Nicobar Command.

Will not entertain any rebellion, says HDK after JD(S) faces 'Bhavani challenge'

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Amid the family feud over Hassan Assembly seat in poll-bound Karnataka, former chief minister H D Kumaraswamy on Saturday said he will not entertain any 'rebellion.' He also said the second list of candidates will be released on Monday including for the Hassan seat. The Hassan seat has become a big headache for Janata Dal (Secular), which is witnessing a rebellion within the first family of the party. The party which was among the first to release its list of candidates has not been able to finalise a name for Hassan constituency yet. The reason being that the former Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda's daughter-in-law and H D Revanna's wife Bhavani Revanna is adamant about contesting the election from Hassan, which is a JD(S) stronghold. It is now learnt that the Bhavani has warned that she would contest the election as an independent candidate if she is denied a ticket. Her two sons – Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna and MLC Suraj Revanna too have backed their mother. "I will not entertain any rebel-

lion. I have already said this several times that we will respond to the sentiments of the party workers. Even if there is pressure it will not work because the final decision will be left to the wishes of the workers," Kumaraswamy told reporters. According to sources in the JD(S), Kumaraswamy is keen on fielding H S Prakash's son H P Swaroop. H S Prakash was a four-time MLA from this constituency who lost the 2018 Assembly election to BJP's Preetham Gowda. Six months after losing the Assembly election, Prakash passed away. The JD(S) second-in-command wanted to field Swaroop keeping in view the large support base and sympathy he enjoys among voters, the sources said. They added that 89-year old Deve Gowda, who is not keeping well, called the leaders from Hassan to discuss the issue at his Bengaluru residence. With the Hassan conundrum growing to enormous proportions, senior party leaders reached Bengaluru on Saturday to find a way out. "Some of our leaders have arrived here with regard to Hassan constituency and they too made an appeal.

Can't ignore Savarkar's sacrifice in India's freedom struggle: Pawar

PTI ■ NAGPUR

Nobody can ignore late Hindutva ideologue VD Savarkar's sacrifice for the country's independence struggle but disagreements over him cannot be made a national issue today as there are many pressing matters to focus on, said Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar on Saturday. Defending Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who is being targeted by the Bharatiya Janata Party for speaking about issues in India on foreign soil, he said this is not the first time an Indian has spoken about issues in the country while abroad. Pawar was speaking at the Press Club in Nagpur, where he also visited Union minister Nitin Gadkari's home. To a query on whether he spoke to Rahul Gandhi about Savarkar and if the Congress leader would slow down in his criticism of the late Hindutva ideologue, Pawar said leaders of 18-20 political parties recently sat and discussed major issues before the country. The BJP has accused Gandhi of repeatedly "insulting" Savarkar. It is also organising Savarkar Gaurav Yatra in his honour. "I suggested that there is a need for us to deliberate on the way the country is being run by those in power,"

he said. Pawar said, "Today, Savarkar is not a national issue, it is an old thing. We had said a few things about Savarkar but it was not personal. It was against Hindu Maha Sabha. But there is another side to it as well. We cannot ignore the sacrifice made by Savarkar ji for the independence of the country." About 32 years ago, Pawar said, he had spoken in Parliament about Savarkar's progressive views. He said Savarkar built a house in Ratnagiri and also constructed a small temple in front of it. "He deputed a person from the Valmiki community to perform puja in the temple. I think this was a very progressive thing," said Pawar. The NCP leader said there is no need to thrust Savarkar into the national narrative especially because there many other major issues concerning the common public. On the BJP's criticism of Gandhi, Pawar said the Congress leader also has the freedom to put his opinion like everyone else. Asked if it is proper for a leader to speak about issues concerning India on foreign soil, Pawar said one should not give much importance to it as this has not been done for the first time. The NCP leader leaders criticised the government in the past as well.

Raut gets death threat from Bishnoi, 1 held

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Less than 24 hours after Shiv Sena (UBT) leader and MP Sanjay Raut received a threat message on his WhatsApp on alleged behalf of mafia leader Lawrence Bishnoi that he would be shot dead in New Delhi, the Maharashtra police on Saturday detained one person for questioning in Pune for questioning. Identifying the person detained as one Rahul Talekar who works at a hotel in Pune, the police said that he had been handed over to the Mumbai police for further investigations. Raut had received a whatsapp message late on Friday evening warning that he would be shot dead with an AK47 in New Delhi along the lines of Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala who was eliminated last year. Raut got a threat in a WhatsApp message on Friday evening warning that he would be shot dead with an AK-47 in New Delhi, with reference to the killing of the Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala last year. The threat received by Raut reward thus: "Anti-Hindu, I will kill you. Meet me in Delhi, will finish you off with an AK47. Like Moosewala. Treat this as a message from Lawrence Bishnoi," with a reference to Salman Khan. Immediately after he received



the threatening message, Raut had complained to the Mumbai Police Commissioner about it. Raut's MLA-brother Sunil Raut lodged a formal complaint with the Kanjurmarg police on Saturday morning. Based on the technical evidence gathered by the Mumbai police that the person who had sent the whatsapp message to Raut was in Pune, the crime branch sleuths of the Pune detained Talekar, a resident of Wadgaon Sheri, from a hotel at Kharadi Chandannagar in Pune. While it is not known immediately as to the motive behind Talekar handing a death threat to Raut, the detained person has told the police that he had sent a threat message to the Sena (UBT) MP under the influence of alcohol. He reportedly told the police that he had telephoned Raut many times, but the latter had not taken his call. Preliminary investigations have revealed that Talekar had no political affiliation nor were there any criminal antecedents. Soon

afterwards, Raut complained to Mumbai Police Commissioner, and a probe was initiated, leading to the detention of the suspect in Pune. The Mumbai police are questioning him on his links with the Bishnoi gang and also the recent email threats issued to Bollywood actor Salman Khan. Reacting to the latest death threat, Raut – whose security was beefed up immediately after he received the whatsapp threat message – said: "I have been targetted in a similar manner in the past as well. But, I will not be cowed down by such threats". "My security as well as the security covers of several Maha Vikas Aghadi leaders' security have been withdrawn and deployed for the 'gaddars' (traitors)... What has the government done about this?" Raut asked. Alluding to similar threats issued to prominent NCP leader of Thane Jitendra Ahwad, Raut accused the state government of ignoring such threats faced by opposition leaders. Leaders of Opposition in the State Assembly Ajit Pawar and his counterpart from Upper House Ambadas Danve, NCP MP Supriya Sule and Congress leaders expressed serious concerns over threats and urged government to take matter seriously.

Trader cheats SBI of ₹95 cr, arrested

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested Kaushik Kumar Nath, a Kolkata based businessman in a money laundering case linked to defrauding the public sector lender State Bank of India (SBI) to the tune of Rs 95 crore. The ED said Nath availed various credit facilities from the State Bank of India by submitting forged and fabricated documents. The funds received in the guise of credit facilities were withdrawn in cash and used for purposes other than for which it was sanctioned. The SBI has been cheated and defrauded to the tune of Rs 95 crore, it said. The ED has initiated the investigation under Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) on the basis of four different FIRs/charge sheets registered/

filed by CBI, Kolkata. During investigation by ED, another case registered by the Crime Branch, Mumbai Police also came to the notice of the agency. "Kaushik Kumar Nath is frequently changing his identity and defrauding the banks. Recently, he had shifted his base to Mumbai and engaged in such type of criminal activities there," the ED said in a statement. ED has identified several immovable properties acquired by the accused from the 'Proceeds of Crime'. Out of the said properties, four properties worth Rs 3.68 crore are already attached by the ED. Nath was produced before the Special Court, Kolkata on Friday. The Court has granted him to ED custody for 10 days till April 10. Further investigation in the case is in progress, it added.

Contract inked for building 6 next gen missile vessels at cost of ₹ 9,805 cr

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/KOCHI

The Cochin Shipyard Limited has signed a contract for building six Next Generation Missile Vessels (NGMV) for the Indian Navy at a cost of Rs 9,805 crore with the delivery of ships set to begin from 2027. The state-run shipyard said the contract marks its entry into advanced weapon intense platforms. "The primary role of the ships would be to provide offensive capability against enemy warship, merchantmen and land targets," Cochin Shipyard said in a release. It said the delivery of ships is scheduled to commence from



March 2027. "The NGMVs would be heavily armed war vessels incorporating stealth, high speed and offensive capability. These ships will be capable of conducting maritime strike operations, anti-surface warfare operations and would

Now India, Malaysia can trade in ₹



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Trade between India and Malaysia can now be settled in Indian Rupee (INR) in addition to the current modes of settlement in other currencies. This follows the decision by the Reserve Bank of India in July 2022 to allow settlement of international trade in Indian Rupee (INR), the ministry of external affairs(MEA) said here on Saturday. This initiative by the RBI is aimed at facilitating the growth of global trade and to support the interests of the global trading community in Indian Rupee (INR). India International Bank of Malaysia (IIBM), based in Kuala Lumpur, has operationalised this mechanism by opening a Special Rupee Vostro Account through its Corresponding Bank in India i.e. Union Bank of India, MEA said.

NIA detains 2 in 27-K kg explosive recovery case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested two accused persons from Raniganj and Kolkata, both in West Bengal, in connection with a 2022 case relating to recovery of 27,000 kg ammonium nitrate explosive. The arrested duo is alleged to be illegal suppliers of explosives, detonators and gelatin sticks. In June 2022, a Tata Sumo car, which was found transporting around 81,000 electric detonators was intercepted by Special Task Force (STF) Kolkata. The cache of detonators was seized and Ashis Keora, the driver of Tata Sumo was arrested. Ashis led the police to a stash of illegally stored explosives, including 27,000 kgs of ammonium nitrate, 1,625 kg of gelatine sticks and 2,325 more electric

Bhutan King's 3-day India visit starts from Monday

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk will visit India for three days starting Monday at the invitation of President Droupadi Murmu. He will be accompanied by Lyonpo Dr. Tandi Dorji, Minister of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, and senior officials of the Royal Government of Bhutan. The visit is in keeping with the long standing tradition of regular high-level exchanges between the two countries, the ministry of external affairs said here on Saturday. During the visit, King of Bhutan will meet with the President and the Prime Minister. The External Affairs Minister and senior officials will call on the King of Bhutan. India and Bhutan enjoy unique ties of friendship and cooperation, which are characterized by understanding and mutual trust. The visit would provide an opportunity to both sides to review entire gamut of bilateral cooperation and to further advance the close bilateral partnership, including economic and development cooperation.

tronic detonators. After the NIA took over the case, initially registered at Police Station Md. Bazar in Birbhum, in September 2022, the agency made its first arrest in January 2023 with the apprehension of Rintu Sk. The NIA on Friday arrested another two accused from Raniganj and Kolkata, who have been identified as Merazuddin Ali Khan of Bokaro and Mir Md. Nuruzzaman of Birbhum, the NIA said in a statement. While Mir Md. Nuruzzaman had supplied 27,000 kg of ammonium nitrate to Rintu Sk, Merazuddin Ali Khan had supplied electric detonators and gelatine sticks to Rintu Sk, it said. Further investigations to establish the sources of pilferage of the explosives and other bomb making materials, including detonators and gelatine sticks are in progress, it added.

China granted visas to over 18,000 Indians since January: Envoy

Kolkata: China has issued visas to over 18,000 Indians in the last three months, a Chinese diplomat said. Interacting with a group of journalists in Kolkata, Minister Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in India, Chen Jianjun, said he was looking forward to more Chinese being given visas by India. "The number of visa applications for China has been on the rise. Since January, we have given visas to 18,560 Indians," he said. "Since August, 9,409 student visas have been issued to Indian students," he said. However, Jianjun said, the number of visa applications is yet to reach the pre-pandemic levels. PNS

6 German Shepherds to take on wildlife thugs

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Six German Shepherds, ranging between six and nine months old, and their 12 handlers have joined the forest departments of Karnataka (4), Bihar (1), and Madhya Pradesh (1), to take on the wildlife criminals and protect flora and fauna in their respective states. This takes the total number of wildlife sniffer dogs trained under TRAFFIC and WWF-India's Ravi Singh in India to 94, said Ravi Singh, Secretary General and CEO WWF-India. The canines had received seven-month-long training at basic training Centre, Indo-Tibetan Border Police Force



(BTC-ITBP) camp in Panchkula, Haryana from September 2022. The dogs have been trained to detect tiger and leopard skins, bones and other body parts, bear

bile, red sanders, and other illegal wildlife products. BTC-ITBP had organised a passing out ceremony to felicitate the dogs and their handlers in their successful completion of the training course recently. Singh said, "Dogs are not just man's best friend. Once trained as wildlife sniffer dogs, they play a crucial role in protecting our wildlife from crime and illegal trade. This is also true for the 94 wildlife sniffer dogs trained by WWF-India and TRAFFIC over the years". Dr Merwyn Fernandes, Coordinator of TRAFFIC's India Office, said, "Illegal wildlife trade is a serious threat to the conservation of species in the wild. Wildlife law enforcement practices are crit-

ical in containing this threat, and the use of wildlife sniffer dogs for wildlife crime prevention and detection is crucial." "We hope at least four to five wildlife sniffer dogs are deployed in each state and at trans-border areas, working with law enforcement agencies to protect our wildlife." Dr Dipankar Ghose, Director & HoD, Wildlife & Habitats Division, WWF-India, and Interim In-Charge, TRAFFIC's India office added, "Detecting smuggled wildlife is an ongoing challenge for law enforcement agencies. TRAFFIC and WWF-India support initiatives that bring in new tools and technology for wildlife crime detection and prevention.

Indictment scrubs ‘Teflon Don’ of invincibility

AP ■ NEW YORK

When Donald Trump steps before a judge next week to be arraigned in a New York court-room, it will not only mark the first time a former US president has faced criminal charges. It will also represent a reckoning for a man long nicknamed “Teflon Don,” who until now has managed to skirt serious legal jeopardy despite 40 years of legal scrutiny.

Trump, who is the early frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination, is expected to turn himself in Tuesday. He faces charges including at least one felony offense related to hush money payments to women during his 2016 campaign. Like any other person facing trial, he will be booked, fingerprinted and photographed before being given the chance to enter a plea.

The spectacle that is sure to unfold will mark an unprecedented moment in American history that will demonstrate once again how dramatically Trump — who already held the

distinction of being the first president to be impeached twice — has upended democratic norms. But on a personal level, the indictment pierces the cloak of invincibility that seemed to follow Trump through his decades in business and in politics, as he faced allegations of fraud, collusion and sexual misconduct.

“Boy, after all this time it’s a bit of a shock,” Trump biographer Michael D’Antonio said of the indictment. “You know I always thought of him as the Gingerbread Man, shouting, You can’t catch me!” as he ran away.”

“Given his track record,” he said, “I had trouble imagining he would ever be held accountable.”

“These are not things that Donald Trump ever thought in his entire life, nor I, for that matter, that he would ever be confronted with,” Michael Cohen, Trump’s longtime fixer and a key witness in the case who served jail time for the payments, told CNN.

Of course, some of the celebration by Trump’s detrac-



tors may be premature. The former president could seek to have a judge quickly dismiss the case. And even if it moves forward, there’s no guarantee of conviction. Intensifying investigations in Atlanta and Washington are seen as potentially more serious legal threats.

Still, Trump and his team were caught by surprise when word of the New York indictment broke Thursday evening, following news reports that the grand jury hearing the case was set for a weeks-long hiatus. As the deliberations dragged on, some in Trump’s

orbit had become convinced that the case had stalled and that charges might never be brought. That included Trump attorney Joe Tacopina, who said Friday morning he had hoped the “rule of law would prevail.”

Trump, he said on the “Today” show, was “initially was shocked” by news of the charges, but quickly pivoted to his usual pushback playbook.

“After he got over that,” he said, Trump “put a notch on his belt and he decided we have to fight now. And he got into a typical Donald Trump pos-

ture where he’s ready to be combative on something that he believes is an injustice. ... I think he’s now in the posture that he’s ready to fight this.”

In the meantime, Trump and his team have tried to use the news to his advantage, hoping to energize his loyal base by painting the investigation as part of a larger plot to derail his candidacy.

Trump ally Rep. Jim Banks, R-Indi, who formally endorsed the former president Friday, said Trump “doesn’t back down” and was going to “fight back,” telling a local radio show it was “yet another chapter where Donald Trump is going to come back on top in the end.”

The media maelstrom has catapulted the former president back into the spotlight he craves, at least temporarily limiting attention being paid to his rivals, including Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is widely expected to challenge Trump for the nomination, and has been holding events across the county to promote his book.

Former president raises over \$4m in 24 hours

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Donald Trump raised over USD 4 million towards his 2024 presidential run in 24 hours after a Manhattan grand jury indicted the former US president on charges related to paying off a porn star, his office has said.

According to the former president’s campaign, over 25 per cent of donations came from first-time donors to the Trump Campaign, further solidifying his status as the clear frontrunner in the Republican primary.

“This incredible surge of grassroots contributions confirms that the American people see the indictment of President Trump as a disgraceful weaponisation of our justice system by a Soros-funded prosecutor,” it said in a statement on Friday. “With an average contribution of only USD 34, Trump’s 2024 campaign is funded by an unmatched coalition of hardworking patriots who are fed up with special interest donors like Soros spending billions of dollars to influence our elections,” it said.

Americans from across all 50 states donated to President Trump’s campaign within the first five hours of the “sham indictment”, the

statement said.

On Thursday, within minutes of Trump’s indictment, the Trump campaign fired off a fundraising email soliciting contributions toward the 76-year-old’s 2024 campaign.

It was the first of more than half a dozen fundraising emails sent out by the Trump campaign after the indictment.

The White House has refused to comment on the indictment of the former president.

“I have no comment on that,” President Joe Biden told reporters on Friday.

Vice President Kamala Harris told reporters in Zambia: “I am not going to comment on an ongoing criminal case as it relates to the former president.”

Trump is currently the front-runner among all declared and potential contenders for the 2024 Republican White House nomination. There is nothing in US law that prevents a candidate who is found guilty of a crime from campaigning for and serving as president - even from prison.

Trump was twice impeached by the House of Representatives. He was acquitted by the Senate both times.

Indians among eight found dead near Canada-US border

PTI ■ TORONTO

Canadian police have recovered the bodies of two more migrants, including that of an Indian woman, who drowned in a river while two families of Indian and Romanian descent were attempting to enter the US from Canada illegally, taking the death toll to eight.

The bodies were found on Friday in a marsh on the riverbank near Akwesasne, a community which straddles Quebec, Ontario and New York state. One other person is still missing.

The two more bodies recovered included one infant, who was a Canadian citizen of Romanian descent. The second was of a woman who was an Indian national, CTV news reported.

Police say the deceased — believed to be two families of Indian and Romanian descent — were trying to cross the St

Lawrence River into the United States from Canada. Among them were two children under the age of three, both Canadian citizens. “Unfortunately, these situations happen. It’s not something new,” Akwesasne Mohawk Police chief Shawn Dulude said of people trying to cross.

“We’ve seen it happen in the past, and hopefully as we move forward ... it’s something we can one day eliminate,” the officer was quoted as saying by the Montreal Gazette newspaper.

Akwesasne police are working with Immigration Canada to assist with identifying the victims and notifying the next of kin. They are also increasing surveillance on the river, it said.

Authorities located the first body in the marsh around 5 pm on Thursday during an aerial search conducted at the request of the Canadian Coast Guard.

Throughout the day on

Friday, search crews could be seen wading through a marshy area near the local marina with the help of a light aircraft. A helicopter also scanned the river. The last two bodies were retrieved from the water during the day.

Police recovered two more bodies from the river on Friday, after discovering six bodies and an overturned boat during a missing person search Thursday afternoon, CBC News reported.

They are believed to have been an Indian family and a Romanian family who were attempting to cross into the US, police said, adding, that an Akwesasne resident remains missing. The bodies were discovered as the result of a search for another missing person, Casey Oakes, that also started Thursday. He was last seen Wednesday boarding a small, light blue vessel departing from the east end of Cornwall Island, in St. Lawrence.

US museum to return 15 smuggled sculptures to India

PTI ■ NEW YORK

The prestigious Metropolitan Museum of Art will return 15 sculptures to India after it was learnt that the antiquities were illegally removed from the country and sold by disgraced dealer Subhash Kapoor.

In a statement Thursday, the Met said it will transfer the 15 sculptures for return to the government of India. The works range in date from the 1st century BCE to the 11th century CE, and include terracotta, copper and stone.

All of the works were sold at one point by Kapoor, who is currently serving a prison sentence in India.

“The Museum is committed to the responsible acquisition of archaeological art and applies rigorous provenance standards both to new acquisitions and to works long in its collection. The Museum is actively reviewing the history of antiquities from suspect dealers. The Museum values highly its long-standing relationships with the government of India and is pleased to resolve this matter,” the Met said in the statement. The museum contacted Homeland Security about its works from Kapoor in 2015 and is “pleased to be acting on this matter today as a result of the criminal investigation into Subhash Kapoor” by the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office, it said.

Through this cooperative partnership, the museum received new information from the Manhattan DA’s office about 15 works of art that made it clear that the works should be transferred, resulting in a constructive resolution, the statement said.

In addition, in cooperation with the DA office’s criminal investigation into Turkish sites Bubon and Perge, the museum recently removed from display from its Greek and Roman galleries three pieces from Turkey — two of which were loans and a third is part of the Met’s collection, it said.

Pak inflation woes not over yet

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The cash-strapped Pakistan government has warned of more inflation coupled with a slowdown of the economy, blaming the delay in inking the crucial deal with the IMF for the worsening economic crisis, according to a media report on Saturday.

In its monthly outlook report issued on Friday, the Finance Ministry also said that political instability has started feeding the strong inflationary expectations. The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

Holding back its inflation forecast figure for the outgoing month, the Finance Ministry painted a gloomy outlook of the economy, saying that the Monthly Economic Indicator, a tool to predict the economic growth rate based on past and current indicators, has further slowed.

“Inflation in March may remain in the upper bound as observed in February when it was 31.5 per cent,” the ministry stated. Although it did not give

a figure this time, the market expects inflation to shoot up to 36 per cent due to a host of negative measures, the report said.

A conservative internal assessment of the Finance Ministry suggested around 34 per cent inflation rate in March. The ministry said that a “potential reason for rising price level is political and economic uncertainty.”

The ministry also noted that the delay in finalising the USD 1.1 billion tranche of funding from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme was causing further economic distress.

“The economic distress resulting from delay of the stabilisation programme has exacerbated the economic uncertainty due to which inflationary expectations have remained strong,” the report said.

Pakistan has been struggling hard to revive the USD 6.5 billion derailed IMF bailout package that the Washington-based global lender approved in 2019. Although, its missteps, like the petrol subsidy and attempts to

borrow directly from commercial banks, have further complicated the matters for the cash-starved country.

The Finance Ministry said that even the contractionary monetary policies of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) were not helping contain the inflation.

“Despite the SBP’s contractionary monetary policy, the inflationary expectations are not settling down,” the ministry said, showing dissatisfaction with the central bank’s tight monetary policy.

The SBP increased the policy rate by 3 per cent to 20 per cent in the last Monetary Policy decision held this month.

The monthly outlook report stated that bulk buying during Ramzan may cause a demand-supply gap, resulting in an escalation of the prices of essential items.

Due to the lagged effect of last year’s floods, production losses, especially of significant crops, have not yet been fully recovered. Consequently, the shortage of essential items has emerged and persisted.

As a result, “inflation is expected to stay at elevated levels owing to market frictions caused by relative demand and supply gap of essential items, exchange rate depreciation and recent upward adjustment of administered prices of petrol and diesel”, the report added.

The Finance Ministry stated that the average Monthly Economic Indicator (MEI) during the first eight months of the current fiscal year indicates a further slowdown in domestic economic activities.

The slowdown seems to be driven by a lack of industrial dynamism, accelerating inflation, which erodes the purchasing power of consumers and investors and is also illustrated by negative growth in exports and imports.

The indicator was already in negative territory since the start of the fiscal year. The Finance Ministry’s latest assessment indicates that there may not be any growth during the current fiscal year if no improvement is witnessed in the remainder period.

Lanka to bring counter-terrorism Bill in parliament this month: PM

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena on Saturday said a new counter terrorism draft bill to replace the much maligned Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) of 1979 is to be introduced in the parliament later in April.

Sri Lanka is replacing the PTA with a new legislation called the Anti Terrorism Act (ATA) after the former law was roundly condemned for its draconian nature where people were allowed to be detained without being charged for indefinite periods of time.

Sri Lanka faced international calls to repeal the PTA which was enacted in 1979 as a temporary measure to counter the rising Tamil separatist militancy.

“The new bill will be presented in parliament in the third week of April. It will replace the PTA,” Gunawardena said.

On March 17, the 97-page ATA was published in the government gazette.

It aimed to replace the PTA which is often being criticised as a tool used by the successive governments to crush dissent.

The European Union since 2016 has been urging the Sri Lankan government to repeal the PTA and bring in a new counter terrorism legislation in line with international standards. The EU has linked its GSP+ export tariff concessions to Sri Lanka modifying its counter terrorism Act.

The opposition and rights groups have already objected to the ATA, saying that it does not differ much from the PTA.

They hold that ATA could be used to crush democratic protests and political opposition while the security forces being conferred powers to crackdown with judicial procedure to brand any dissent as terrorism.

Sajith Premadasa, the main opposition leader, told reporters: “We see this as undemocratic and authoritarian because it targets political opponents, trade unions and the public.”

Mano Ganesan, a minority Tamil political leader, questioned the need for a new counter terrorism law when the country is currently free of any acts of terrorism.

Critics charge that the ATA would be more harmful than the PTA. Sri Lanka, which currently is reeling under its worst economic crisis, has witnessed several activities that have threatened its national security.

The nation saw the end of Tamil insurgency in 2009 after the killing of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. A fresh security threat dented the country’s security after the Easter suicide attacks in 2019 that killed 290 people.

Israeli cops shoot man in Jerusalem

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israeli police shot and killed a man who they alleged tried to snatch an officer’s gun at an entrance to a Jerusalem holy site early Saturday, raising fears of further violence during a time of heightened tensions at the flashpoint compound.

The police said the slain man was 26-year-old Mohammed Alasibi from Hura, a Bedouin Arab village in southern Israel.

Palestinian worshippers at the entrance to the site on Saturday morning had a different account, saying that

police shot the man at least 10 times after he tried to prevent them from harassing a woman who was on her way to the holy compound.

Hours after the incident, the muddy stone alleyway leading to the compound was still stained with blood.

Authorities said that officers detained the man for questioning outside the sacred compound home to Al-Aqsa Mosque in the heart of Jerusalem’s Old City — the third holiest shrine in Islam. The compound, revered by Jews as the Temple Mount, is also the most sacred site in Judaism.

Pope leaves hospital, to preside over Easter mass

AP ■ ROME

Chipper-sounding Pope Francis was discharged Saturday from the Rome hospital where he was treated for bronchitis, quipping to journalists before being driven away that he’s “still alive.”

Francis, 86, was hospitalised at Gemelli Polyclinic on Wednesday following his weekly public audience in St Peter’s Square after reportedly experiencing breathing difficulties. The pontiff received antibiotics administered intravenously during his stay, the Vatican said. In a sign of his improved health, the Vatican released details of Francis’ Holy Week schedule. It said he would preside at this weekend’s Palm

Sunday Mass and at Easter Mass on April 9, both held in St. Peter’s Square and expected to draw tens of thousands of faithful. A Vatican cardinal will be at the altar to celebrate both Masses, a recent practice due to the pontiff having a troublesome knee issue.

But Francis is scheduled to celebrate Holy Thursday Mass, which this year will be held in a juvenile prison in Rome. Still unclear was whether he would attend the late-night, torch-lit Way of the Cross procession at Rome’s Colosseum to mark Good Friday. Before departing Gemelli Polyclinic late Saturday morning, Francis comforted a Rome couple whose 5-year-old daughter died Friday night at the Catholic hospital. Outside,



Serena Subania, mother of Angelica, sobbed as she pressed her head into the chest of the pope, who held her close and

whispered words of comfort.

Francis seemed eager to linger with well-wishers. When a boy showed him his arm cast,

the pope made a gesture as if to ask “Do you have a pen?” Three papal aides whipped out theirs. Francis took one of the pens and

added his signature to the child’s already well-autographed cast.

The pontiff answered in a low voice that was close to a whisper when reporters peppered him with questions, indicating he had felt unwell — “I felt sick,” he said, pointing to his mid-section — a symptom that convinced his medical staff to take him to the hospital Wednesday. Asked how he felt now, Francis joked, “Still alive, you know.” He gave a thumbs-up sign. Francis exited the hospital from a side entrance, but his car stopped in front of the main entrance, where a gaggle of journalists waited. He opened the car door himself and got out from the front passenger seat. Francis had a cane ready to lean on.

March GST at ₹1.60 L cr; 2nd highest ever

FY-2023 gross collection up 22%

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

GST collections in March grew 13 per cent to the second highest ever at ₹1.60 lakh crore, taking the growth rate of revenue mop-up for full 2022-23 fiscal to 22 per cent. March also saw over 91 per cent of the GST registered businesses filing returns and paying taxes — reflecting greater compliance and improving economic activity.

Gross GST revenue collected in March 2023 is ₹1,60,122 crore, of which Central GST is ₹29,546 crore, State GST is ₹37,314 crore, Integrated GST is ₹82,907 crore (including ₹42,503 crore collected on import of goods) and cess is ₹10,355 crore, the finance ministry said in a statement.

In April 2022, GST collection had touched a record high of close to ₹1.68 lakh crore. The second highest mop-up was recorded in March 2023, at a little over ₹1.60 lakh crore.

For full 2022-23 fiscal year, gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) mop-up grew 22 per cent to ₹18.10 lakh crore. The



average gross monthly collection for the full year is ₹1.51 lakh crore.

March is the fourth time in the just gone by financial year that the monthly gross GST collection has crossed ₹1.5 lakh crore-mark. Last month also witnessed the highest IGST collection ever, the ministry said.

Revenue for the month of March 2023 is 13 per cent higher than the GST revenue in the same month last year, the ministry said. During the month, revenue from import of goods was 8 per cent

higher and revenue from domestic transaction (including import of services) is 14 per cent higher than the revenue from these sources during the same month last year.

The ministry said return filing during March 2023 has been the highest ever. 93.2 per cent of statement of invoices (in GSTR-1) and 91.4 per cent of returns (in GSTR-3B) of February were filed till March 2023 as compared to 83.1 per cent and 84.7 per cent, respectively a year ago. KPMG in India Partner Indirect Tax

Abhishek Jain said the monthly and yearly GST collection point towards the growing trajectory of the Indian economy.

“Another cheer point is the highest ever compliance rate with 91.4 per cent of returns being filed in the month of March, indicating success of revenue authorities and businesses in ensuring tax compliance and preventing tax evasion,” Jain said.

Deloitte India , Partner, Leader - Indirect Tax, Mahesh Jaising said with the growth in economic activity and increased focus on GST analytics based audits, the trend should see upward trajectory in the coming months.

“Also, with the new FTP being rolled out from today, we have to wait and watch the impact on the import-export which is expected to have a role in GST collections too,” Jaising said.

Tax Connect Advisory Partner Vivek Jalan said businesses are also understanding that robust compliance is the way forward under GST and a significant boost in GST return filing taking the compliance ratio to more than 90 per cent from early 80 per cent shows that Indian businesses are fast moving into the mainstream. This would enhance the Income Tax revenues also and lead to overall GDP growth, Jalan added.

FinMin launches 3-month campaign to boost micro-insurance schemes at Panchayat level

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

To achieve saturation under Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY), the Finance Ministry on Saturday launched a three-month campaign.

“A special 3 months campaign has been launched by DFS at Gram Panchayat Level covering all districts in the country to saturate all eligible persons under the PMJJBY and PMSBY w.e.f 1st April 2023 to the 30th June 2023,” Department of Financial Services (DFS) said in a tweet.

Under the campaign, camps are going to be organised at the Gram Panchayat level across all districts in the country by the banks with active participation of the State administration and other Ministries of Government of India to ensure that benefits of the two Jan Suraksha schemes reach the masses. Chief Secretaries of States/



UTs, Chairman/ MD and CEOs of Public Sector Banks (PSBs) have been advised to extend full support during the campaign, an official statement said.

Lead District Managers (LDMs) will lead the campaign in consultation with State/ UT Level Bankers Committees of the States/ UTs and District Magistrates/ Collectors of the Districts. Line Ministries of Government of India have been

advised to utilise their field functionaries for identification and mobilisation of the Scheme beneficiaries for enrolment, it said.

All Nodal Officers from DFS have been instructed to participate in the special SLBC/ UT/LBC meetings and to undertake field visits for monitoring the Gram Panchayat level saturation campaign, it added.

The PMJJBY offers life insurance cover of Rs 2 lakh in case of death due to any reason to people in the age group of 18-50 years having a bank or post office account, who give their consent to join or enable auto-debit of premium.

On the other hand, the PMSBY offers insurance cover of ₹2 lakh for accidental death or total permanent disability and ₹1 lakh for partial permanent disability to people in the age group of 18-70 years with a bank or post office account, who give their consent to join or enable auto-debit of premium.



UltraTech Cement FY23 production up 12.4% to 105.7mn tn

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leading cement maker UltraTech's consolidated sales rose by 12.4 per cent to 105.7 million tonnes (MT) in FY2022-23, Aditya Birla group firm said in a regulatory filing on Saturday.

The company produced 94 MT of cement in FY22.

Its total sales volume in the domestic market also crossed 100 MT for the financial year that ended on March 31, 2023.

UltraTech's total sales volume for the India market in FY23 was at 101.7 MT, up 13.63 per cent compared to 89.5 MT a year ago.

“We are pleased to inform the company has achieved 100 million tonnes of production, despatches and sales in FY23,” it said.

Its grey cement production

in the domestic market was at 100.1 MT in FY23, reporting 13.75 per cent growth while its white cement production was 1.5 MT, up 11 per cent.

UltraTech's overseas production, mainly grey cement was 4.4 MT in FY23. For the fourth quarter that ended on March 31, 2023, UltraTech's total consolidated sales volume was at 31.7 MT and its India volume was at 30.5 MT.

UltraTech has a consolidated capacity of 132.35 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) of grey cement. It has 23 integrated manufacturing units, 29 grinding units, one clinkerisation unit and eight Bulk Packaging Terminals.

It is the third largest cement producer in the world, excluding China.

Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai, Tata Motors report best-ever wholesales in FY23

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai and Tata Motors reported their highest-ever dispatches to dealers last fiscal, enabling the domestic passenger vehicle industry to log in best-ever performance to date.

The country's largest car-maker Maruti Suzuki India reported its highest wholesales to date at 19,66,164 units, up 19 per cent from 16,52,653 units in 2021-22.

Its domestic dispatches rose to 17,06,831 units in 2022-23, up 21 per cent from 14,14,277 units in 2021-22 fiscal.

Hyundai Motor India said its overall wholesales last fiscal were the highest ever since commencing operations in the country.

The automaker dispatched 7,20,565 units to dealers last fiscal, up 18 per cent from 6,10,760 units in 2021-22. Its domestic dispatches rose to 5,67,546 units last fiscal, up 18 per cent from 4,81,500 units in the 2021-22 financial year.

The country's second-largest carmaker said it was its best performance to date in terms of sales volume in the domestic market in a financial year.

Tata Motors also reported the best-ever passenger vehicle dispatches in the domestic market last fiscal at 5,38,640 units, up 45 per cent from 3,70,372 units FY22.

Maruti Suzuki India Senior Executive Officer, Marketing and Sales, Shashank Srivastava said the company reported its highest-ever sales in a financial year despite chip shortage con-



tinuing to impact the production activity. He noted that the overall industry sales last fiscal rose to 38.89 lakh units, an increase of 27 per cent from 30.69 lakh units in 2021-22. “Both wholesales and retails were the highest for the industry last fiscal,” Srivastava said.

The industry sales were expected to rise to 4.05-4.10 million in the current fiscal, he added.

“We expect the industry growth to be in the range of 5-7 per cent this fiscal and the company would like to perform better than the industry,” Srivastava said.

He noted that with models like Jimny and Fronx in its kitty, the company expects to corner 25 per cent of the SUV market in the current fiscal. MSI ended the last fiscal with a market share of 12.6 per cent in the SUV segment with sales of 2,02,800 units.

The company, which has discontinued its entry-level model Alto 800 citing affordability factor, said the SUV segment continues to outpace others

with a contribution of 43 per cent in the overall domestic passenger vehicle industry.

Srivastava noted that the contribution of the hatchback segment has come down to 35 per cent last fiscal from 46 per cent in 2016-17.

“Affordability has been hit and it has affected the uptake in this segment. If the income levels go up, we can hope for it to make a comeback. Even now the top best-selling cars in the country are hatchbacks,” he said.

Srivastava noted that the chip shortage would continue to impact the industry for the next few quarters. MSI's total order backlog stood at around 3.8 lakh units, with Ertiga leading in terms of pending bookings, he added.

Srivastava confirmed that the company would have a certain production loss in the fourth quarter due to supply constraints. The company had a production loss of around 46,000 units in the third quarter.

Replying to a query, Srivas-

tava noted that the company has taken a price hike of around 0.8 per cent from April.

Hyundai reported domestic dispatches of 5,67,546 units last fiscal, up 18 per cent from 4,81,500 units in the 2021-22 financial year.

Exports rose 18 per cent year on year to 1,53,019 units.

“FY 22-23 has been a phenomenal year for the company, as we introduced seven segment-defining products like the all-new Hyundai Tucson, new Venue, Venue N Line, all electric IONIQ 5, new Grand i10 NIOS, new AURA and the all-new Verna catering to different segments thus giving a strong push to brand Hyundai amongst new-age Indian customers,” Hyundai Motor India COO Tarun Garg said in a statement.

Despite global headwinds, the company sees momentum in the Indian auto industry to continue, he added.

Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Managing Director Shailesh Chandra stated noted that the steep growth witnessed

Sebi bans 3 individuals from securities mkt for 2 yrs, fines ₹90 lakh in ZEEL insider trading case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi has barred three individuals from the securities market for two years and imposed penalty totalling Rs 90 lakh on them in a case pertaining to insider trading activities in the scrip of Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd (ZEEL).

The three individuals banned by the regulator — Bijal Shah, Gopal Ritolia and Jatin Chawla — have also been directed to pay the fine within 45 days.

In addition, Ritolia and Chawla have been directed to

disgorge illegal gains to the tune of Rs 7.52 crore and Rs 2.09 crore respectively along with interest, the regulator said in its 152-page final order on Friday.

The case relates to insider trading activities by certain entities in the scrip of ZEEL, while in possession of unpublished price sensitive information (UPSI) pertaining to audited financial results of the media company for the quarter ended June 30, 2020 as well as launch of ZEEPLEX by the company on September 1, 2020.

Bijal Shah, who was head of



the financial planning and analysis, strategy and investor relations at ZEEL during the relevant time, had access to this unpublished price sensitive information.

He in turn, communicated

the information to Ritolia and Chawla, who traded on the basis of this information and earned profits to the tune of Rs 7.52 crore and Rs 2.09 crore respectively, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said.

According to the regulator, Shah is not liable for insider trading, he has played the primary role in disclosing the unpublished Price sensitive information to Ritolia and Chawla, which resulted in the violation of the provisions of insider trading rules.

MCL reaches new high in coal production

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL) on Saturday said the company has registered a record 193.3 million tons of coal production during the 2022-23 financial year.

The MCL also posted the highest ever 192.7 million ton coal despatch to consumers, Chairman-cum-Managing Director Om Prakash Singh, said while addressing the AGM here. “The MCL registered a growth of 15 per cent for the financial year 2022-23, while coal despatch showed nine per cent growth over the previous financial year 2021-22,” Singh said. The company has achieved all its tar-



gets much ahead of schedule and has helped Coal India surpass its target of 700 million tons set for the financial year 2022-23, the CMD said.

He said 97 per cent of total production of MCL was through eco-friendly equipment surface miners. He said that the coal despatch to the power sector also increased from 127.12 million tons 2,922 to 148.8 million tons in 2022-23 with a growth of 17 per cent.

Strengthening its business activities, the company made Capital Expenditure (CapEx) of Rs 3,850 crore during the financial year 2022-23, he said adding that MCL enjoys being the top company in Odisha contributing under CSR.

Godrej Properties buys four acre in Pune for housing project; eyes ₹1K cr revenue

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Godrej Properties has acquired a 4-acre land parcel in Pune to build a luxury housing project with an estimated revenue potential of ₹1,000 crore. In a regulatory filing on Saturday, Godrej Properties informed that it has acquired around 4-acre land parcel near Korgaon Park in Pune. The development on this land will primarily be a luxury housing project. “The project will have a developable potential of approximately 7.5 lakh square feet with an estimated revenue potential of approximately ₹1,000 crore,” the company said.

The company, however, did not disclose the financial details of the transaction. Gaurav Pandey, the MD and CEO of Godrej Properties, said the demand for luxury homes has remained strong over the past few years.

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to inform general public that Sh. Radhey Shyam has acquired the Property Bearing No. 51/A area measuring 96 Sq. Yds., Out of Mustali No. 81, Kila No. 7, Situated at Vaka Moja Ballabgarh (Gang Colony) Tehsil Ballabgarh Distt. Faridabad Haryana vide two separate Transfer/ Deeds dated 25.06.2018. Doc. No. 3008 and dated 24.02.2023. Doc. No. 8788 and Now, Sh. Harsh Sharda and Sh. Radhey Shyam are mortgaging the above said property with Industrial Bank Ltd. & in case anyone has any objection, the same may be raised within 07 days of this publication to Mr. Munesh Dhanani/ Mr. Sudhir Jain (Advocates), Lava Varahas North, Unit no 907, 9th Floor, GD-111, Tower, (B-08), Netaji Subhash Place, Delhi-110034 or contact at 9066707172/ 9818228636 (M).

PUBLIC NOTICE
The Public at large is hereby notified that my client intend to purchase Flat No. A-301, situated in the layout plan of "The Aashiana Co-operative Group Housing Society Limited", Known as Aashiana Apartments, Plot No.05, Mayur Vihar Phase-I, Delhi-110091 from Mr. Sushil Garg S/o Mr. Ram Dhan Dass who represented himself as the sole owner of the said property. It is to inform the general public that the Original Agreement to Sell of the said flat in favour of Mr. Sushil Garg duly registered as Document No. 10214 in Book No. 1, Volume No. 1435 on pages 133 to 138, Dated: 03/11/2004 in the office of S.R. VIII, Delhi duly executed by Mrs. Jaya Vema W/o Mr. Vinod Vema has been lost/misplaced somewhere and not traceable by his best efforts. It is therefore, Notified that anybody claiming any right, title, interest or lien over the aforesaid flat may file such claim or objection to the undersigned within a period of 15 days from the date of Publication of this notice. Otherwise, it will be presumed that the said flat is free from all encumbrances, charges and/or lien, etc. and my client is free to purchase the said flat from the above named seller.
Mr. SAHIL ARORA (Advocate)
Enrolment No.: D/2186/2019
107, 1st Floor, M.S. Chambers, Aruna Park, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi-92, Ph.: 9811912277

OFFICE OF THE DIGP, GROUP CENTRE, C.R.P.F. DADR ROAD GREATER NOIDA-201306
No.EIV: 1/2022-23-M/School Dated, the 29/03/2023
ADVERTISEMENT
It is informed that requirement of Lady Headmistress, Teacher & Aaya for Nursery and KG for the academic Session 2023-24 at Montessori School of Deputy Inspector General of Police, Group Centre, CRPF, Dadr Road, Sutiana, Greater Noida-201306 purely on temporary and contractual basis (From 01/07/2023 to 31/05/2024). Applications are invited from eligible Indian citizens for the following posts:-

Sl. No.	Post	Number of Post	Honorarium per month	Age	Education Qualification
01	Headmistress	01	15,000/-	30-40	Graduation with at least 50% Marks and B.Ed or Two year Diploma in Elementary Education or B.T.C or equivalent and five years teaching experience in Basic School.
02	Teacher	04	12,500/-	21-40	Graduation with at least 50% Marks and B.Ed or Two year Diploma in Elementary Education or B.T.C or equivalent.
03	Aaya	04	10,000/- (2 post)	18-30	Passed class V or equivalent examination with Hindi.

Notes:- The number of above mentioned posts can be reduced and increased at any time without informing.
02. **Application form/mode of application:-** (A) Application form has to be submitted in the following format (1) Name/paste photo of applicant (2) Name of the father/husband of the applicant (3) The post for which the application is made (4) Applicant's permanent address (5) Applicant's current correspondence address and mobile number (6) Applicant's citizenship (7) Applicant's date of birth (8) Applicant's caste (9) Applicant's education (10) Applicant's class nursery educational experience (11) Any other information (12) Signature of the applicant (B) **Method of applying:-** Application of interested candidates, for the appointment to the said posts can till date 24/04/2023 till 1600 hrs. to Office of Deputy Inspector General of Police, Group Centre, Central Reserve Police Force, Dadr Road, Greater Noida-201306 and Candidates qualifying to the post will be called appear for the interview on 01/05/2023 at 10:00 hrs at the Office of Deputy Inspector General of Police, Group Centre, CRPF, Dadr Road, Greater Noida-201306.
Notes:- Detailed advertisement can be on the website of CRPF www.crpf.gov.in, Sd/- Deputy Inspector General of Police, Group Centre, CRPF, Greater Noida

PUBLIC NOTICE
TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN
My client Mr. Vijay Chopra son of Late Mr. Tarsem Lal Chopra resident of 601, Tower C, The IVY, Sushant Lok, Phase-I, Gurugram, Haryana has entered into Agreement to Sell dated 5th of November, 2022 with Mrs. Nirmal Arya, the widow of Late Dr Raj Pal Arya, resident of 4 College Road North Liverpool L23 8UP, U.K., with respect to the purchase of Property No.Y-96, Regency Park-II, DLF City, Phase-IV, Gurugram, Haryana with condition that she will get the sole ownership in her favour by getting the WILL Probated in the Indian Court of Law (Haryana), within the stipulated date of 31st March, 2023. The said Property is registered under the joint ownership of Mrs. Nirmal Arya and Late Dr Raj Pal Arya (who passed away on the 10 Sept, 2020 leaving behind a WILL, in favour of his wife Mrs. Nirma Arya) and as such under Indian Court of Law the WILL is required to be probated to prove the ownership solely in favour of Mrs Nirmal Arya. The Seller has not provided the Probated WILL through Haryana Court providing the sole ownership in her favour, as required and settled vide the said Agreement to Sell, and didn't turn up for completing the transaction on the stipulated date. As the case is still pending in the court of law with next court date on 10-05-2023, my client had conveyed his willingness to the seller, through email, that he will get the Sale Documents registered upon the seller providing the proof of sole ownership in her favour. This public notice is being given to caution the public in large that anyone who intend to purchase the above subject property may be doing at their own risk and responsibility.
Gajender Yadav (Advocate)
Chamber No.59, Distt. Court, Gurugram (Haryana) Mob: 931707317

AFTER IMPRESSING AT WORLDS, PREETI EYES BERTH IN ASIAN GAMES-BOUND CONTINGENT

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After impressing in her maiden Women's World Boxing Championships, the prodigiously talented Preeti Pawar is eager to put to test the learnings from the tournament at the first Olympic qualifiers - the Asian Games this year -- provided she secures a spot in the Indian contingent.

The 19-year-old put up a fearless display across all her three bouts in the marquee event here as she notched an RSC win before topping the top seed and last edition's silver medallist Lacramioara Perjoc of Romania.

She made a pre-quarterfinal exit after losing a fiercely-contested bout to two-time medallist, Thailand's Jitpong Jutamas, earning plaudits from everyone.

"Junior and youth level is mostly about who attacks more but once you are at the senior level, you have to play with your mind and be more technical," Preeti told PTI.

"I feel I need to modify my game, I should not be attacking all the time, I need to counter more. I am working on improv-



ing my strength and tweaking techniques.

"If I qualify for the Asian Games that will be great. So, I want to be prepared for the Olympic qualifying event," added Preeti, who competes in

the 54kg class, an Olympic category.

The Asian Games from September 23 to October 8 in Hangzhou, China are the first Paris Olympics qualifying event for boxers from the continent.

For someone, who was averse to the idea of taking up boxing a few years back, the Bhiwani pugilist has made a name for herself quickly in the sport.

"I never thought I'd come

into sports and choose boxing as my career. I wasn't interested in sports. I was focussed on my studies.

"One day, my uncle and father came and said to me that I have to do boxing."

The then 14-year-old's immediate reaction was "Main nahi karungi, boxing toh bilkul bhi nahi (I will never take up boxing)."

But Preeti, whose father is an assistant sub-inspector in Haryana Police, reluctantly started training at her uncle and former national medallist boxer Vinod Sai Pawar's, boxing academy.

"In the beginning boxing was forced on me, I used to go for training but after coming back I used to cry, kabhi pair dard hota tha kabhi haath (sometimes my feet would hurt, other times my hands)."

"It went on for 6-7 months. When I started playing, competitions I developed interest. Then when I won medals, the confidence and interest increased."

At her uncle's boxing club, there weren't many girls, so Preeti regularly sparred with

boys, much to the dislike of her mother.

"Mummy was scared that I'll get punched. Once during training, I got hit and passed out. I had to be taken to a doctor," recalls Preeti.

The Haryana-based boxer clinched the silver medal at the Youth Asian Championships in 2021. She also joined the Inspire Institute of Sports, which has sponsored her since then.

Making her transition to the senior level, Preeti won bronze in her maiden event -- the 2022 Asian Championships at Jordan. She lost to the Tokyo Olympics featherweight champion Sena Irie of Japan in the semifinal.

"When I boxed in my first senior competition, I felt this is where real boxing starts. I lost to the Tokyo Olympics champion but I got a lot of confidence from that bout."

The teenager is a little low on experience but believes there is no substitute to hard work.

"I don't think anyone has been able to achieve what I have in a such a short time. So, time doesn't matter how long you have been there, it is the hard work that counts."



ITF Mysuru Open: Mukund -Vishnu pair bags doubles title

PTI ■ MYSURU

India's Mukund Sasikumar and Vishnu Vardhan bagged the doubles title at the ITF Mysuru Open as the duo showed admirable endurance against compatriots B Ritvik Choudary and Nikki Poonacha here on Saturday.

The two defeated top seeds Choudary and Poonacha 6-3, 6-4 in 1 hour and 10 minutes.

Mukund and Vishnu warded off seven break points in the match while they converted two opportunities to break their opponents to ease their way to the title.

"I am very happy to return to Mysore Tennis Club. I was here as a 12-year-old and I was also the winner of the first International tournament here in 2012. Now, I am very happy to win the doubles title, so I think I partially defended my title," Vardhan said after the match.

"When I came here with my mom in 2012 I was reconsidering playing tennis professionally and from that point to be in Grand Slam ranking and India No 1, it has been a remarkable journey," said Mukund after the match.

"During the pandemic, my life had hit the rock bottom again but I was decided that irrespective of how this week had gone, this will be a new start to an unforgettable journey this year and I hope to return here soon but hopefully you will see me in bigger tournaments."

In fact, it was the second match of the day for Mukund and Vishnu and they showed great powers of concentration to stay focused on the task.

They also won more than 80 percent of points on both first and second serves, indicating the consistency in their game.

Earlier in the day, Mukund and Vishnu romped into the doubles final upsetting second seeded Australia-Ukraine pair of Blake Ellis and Vladyslav Orlov 6-4, 7-5.

The USD 25,000 event is being hosted by the Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association (KSLTA).

In the singles, India's campaign ended when Mysuru lad S D Prajwal Dev went down fighting to George Loffhagen of Britain 5-7, 4-6 in a tight semifinal match that lasted precisely two hours.

Loffhagen will face eighth seeded Australian Blake Ellis, who shocked second seeded American Oliver Crawford 7-5, 6-3 in the other last four clash. The final will be played on Sunday.

Results (Singles, semifinals)
George Loffhagen (GBR) beat SD Prajwal Dev (IND) 7-5, 6-4 (8) Ellis Blake (AUS) beat (2) Oliver Crawford (USA) 7-5, 6-3

Doubles, Final:
Mukund Sasikumar (IND) / Vishnu Vardhan (IND) beat Ritvik Choudary (IND) and Nikki Poonacha (IND) 6-3, 6-4.

Maini bags maiden F2 podium at Melbourne

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Indian driver Kush Maini of Campos Racing fought off a strong challenge from Arthur Leclerc of DAMS in a rain-interrupted race to claim his first-ever Formula 2 podium with a third-place finish at the Albert Park, here on Saturday.

Maini started from P3 on the grid on prime tyres and held on to his position for several laps while Arthur Leclerc was right behind him putting pressure on the softer tyres.

Leclerc got past Maini but the Indian fought back and made a last second dive onto the inside and got back P3.

Leclerc kept the pressure on through the safety car restarts as well but Maini held on to a well-deserved maiden podium in F2.

"I have been waiting on the doorstep of getting onto a podium and narrowly missed it at Bahrain," the 22-year-old said.

"It was great to get my first podium on a new track as a rookie. It is most important to keep consistent as it's a very long series. We have had a good start to the season so far with consistency in qualifying always in the top 8."

Dennis Hauger (MP Motorsport) and Jak Crawford (Hitech Pulse-Eight) took the top-two finishes.

Haaland misses Man City match vs Liverpool due to injury

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester, Apr 1 (AP) Prolific striker Erling Haaland was not part of Manchester City's squad to play Liverpool on Saturday after failing to recover from a groin injury.

The Norway international, who has scored 42 goals in all competitions this season, had to withdraw from his country's European Championship qualifiers against Spain and Georgia last week because of the problem.

"He is not fit. He doesn't feel proper," City manager



Pep Guardiola said ahead of the game.

"It is not a big issue but today he was not right."

Haaland leads the Premier League scoring charts with 28 goals and has hit nine in his last three games in all competi-

titions.

The game was important for both teams, with City eight points behind first-place Arsenal with a game in hand, and Liverpool fighting to secure a top-four spot for Champions League qualification.

Guardiola earlier this week said the 22-year-old Haaland would be given the chance to prove his fitness during the team's training session on Friday. Haaland's father, Alf-Inge, was quoted by Norwegian TV during the week saying his son had traveled to Barcelona for treatment.

NBA, players reach deal for new labour agreement



AP ■ NEW YORK

The NBA will have labor peace for years to come. The league and its players came to an agreement early Saturday on a new seven-year collective bargaining agreement, the NBA announced. It is still pending ratification, though that process is almost certainly no more than a formality.

The deal will begin this summer and will last at least through the 2028-29 season. Either side can opt out then; otherwise, it will last through 2029-30.

Among the details, per a person familiar with the negotiations who spoke to The Associated Press: the in-sea-

son tournament that Commissioner Adam Silver has wanted for years will become reality, and players will have to appear in at least 65 games in order to be eligible for the top individual awards such as Most Valuable Player. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because neither the league nor the National Basketball Players Association released specifics publicly.

Another new part of the CBA will be a second luxury tax level that, when reached, will keep teams from using their midlevel exception to sign players. That was a clear compromise, given how some teams wanted the so-called "upper spending limit" that

would have essentially installed an absolute ceiling on what can be spent each season and help balance the playing field between the teams that are willing to pay enormous tax bills and those who aren't.

Not in the CBA is a change to the policy that would allow high school players to enter the NBA draft. It was discussed and has been an agenda item for months, but it won't be changing anytime soon - probably not for at least the term of the next CBA.

"We also appreciate that there is a lot of benefit to really having veterans who can bring those 18-year-olds along," NBPA executive director Tamika Tremaglio said in February during an NBPA news conference at All-Star weekend.

"And so, certainly anything that we would even consider, to be quite honest, would have to include a component that would allow veterans to be a part of it as well."

Silver said Wednesday, at the conclusion of a two-day Board of Governors meeting, that he was hopeful of getting a deal done by the weekend. He also said there had been no consideration - at least on the league's part - of pushing the opt-out date back for a third time.



Marseille held 1-1 at home by Montpellier in French league

AP ■ MARSEILLES (FRANCE)

Marseille missed the chance to put pressure on French league leader Paris Saint-Germain after being held at home by in-form Montpellier to 1-1. Matteo Guendouzi's first-half penalty was all Marseille had to show for dominating possession and chances as the visitors stayed unbeaten in the seventh game since coach Michel Der Zakarian returned last month.

Marseille's draw means PSG can move nine points clear on Sunday with a win at home over Lyon. The visitors made a better start and Arnaud Nordin fired Montpellier ahead in the 12th minute, though he had to wait for a VAR check to celebrate after he was initially flagged offside. Wahbi Khazri made a fine turn to elude Guendouzi and set off on a run that sucked in four Marseille defenders before he played the ball to Elye Wahi, who sent it straight on to Nordin for the French forward's fifth league goal.

Verstappen takes pole position at F1 Australian Grand Prix

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Max Verstappen will have his best chance of claiming an inaugural Australian Grand Prix title after taking pole position in his Red Bull for Sunday's third race of the Formula One season on the Albert Park circuit.

Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton is among rivals sharing renewed hope after the dominance Red Bull has had over its rivals was diminished during Saturday's qualifying session.

Verstappen, a two-time world champion, was not pleased with the performance of his RB19 despite setting a track record around the circuit on Saturday.

After setting a lap record during practice earlier on Saturday, the drivers' championship leader set a benchmark of 1 minute, 16.732 seconds in the final session of qualifying.

"I have been on the podium once, but I want to be on a different step this time," Verstappen said after claiming his first pole position in Australia. His teammate Sergio Perez, who sits just one point behind the Dutch driver in the championship, will start from the back of the grid after



enduring a horrible day in Melbourne.

After declaring Red Bull would win every race this season after their supremacy in Bahrain, Mercedes driver George Hamilton shared the front row of the starting grid after recording a time 0.236 seconds slower than Verstappen.

Hamilton will start in third position on what was an encouraging day for Mercedes, with Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso qualifying fourth.

"This is totally unexpected. For us to be up in the two front rows is a dream," Hamilton said. "To be this

close to Red Bull is incredible. I think this gives everyone in the team a boost and a glimpse of hope. This will spur everyone on. It will inspire everyone to continue to push."

Verstappen, who won the season-opening race in Bahrain, was progressively faster on Saturday but raised concerns about his car on the lap prior to setting the new mark.

"Downshifts are getting worse as well," Verstappen said.

Verstappen said he has confidence in the Red Bull's reliability. But he was surprised by how close the Mercedes pair finished.

Sinner stuns top-ranked Alcaraz in Miami Open semifinals

AP ■ MIAMI GARDENS (FLORIDA),

Tenth-seeded Jannick Sinner of Italy stunned top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz in the Miami Open semifinals, rallying from a set down to beat the defending champion, 6-7 (5), 6-4, 6-2 in a three-hour thriller.

Sinner ended Alcaraz's winning streak at 10 matches on Friday night. Sinner's powerfully steady baseline game wore down Alcaraz, who appeared to be cramping early in the decisive third set while

he also dealt with an apparent finger injury. He will lose the No. 1 ranking to Novak Djokovic.

Sinner, the 21-year-old who made the Miami Open final last year but hasn't been past the quarterfinals of a major, will face fourth-seeded Daniil Medvedev of Russia in the championship match Sunday. Medvedev has beaten Sinner in all five meetings.

Alcaraz had been so dominant recently, he hadn't lost a set since February before Sinner's rally in the Miami

humidity. The Alcaraz hype train has been so breakaway NBA stars Luka Doncic and Jimmy Butler showed up to watch the Spanish star from the teal seats.

Alcaraz also fought Sinner in Indian Wells in the semifinals, and it was a taut match but not quite like this. These two young guns are poised for a long and spectacular rivalry. Sinner's victory ended Alcaraz's hope of becoming the first man since Roger Federer in 2017 to win the Sunshine Double of Indian Wells and Miami.



Medvedev beat fellow Russian Karen Khachanov 7-6 (5), 3-6, 6-3 on the same day Wimbledon announced Russians will be allowed back.

Medvedev has won 23 of 24 matches - the lone loss to Alcaraz - and is in his fifth straight final.

Also Friday, No. 15 seed Petra Kvitova beat unseeded Sorana Cirstea 7-5, 6-3 in the second women's semifinal. Kvitova will face Elena Rybakina in the final.

Alcaraz prevailed in the first set in a tiebreaker but that took a lot out of Alcaraz's 19-

year-old legs. Between points in the third set, Alcaraz was stretching noticeably during the third set, trying to stave off cramps and waved to the crowd for support.

Despite Alcaraz getting the second set back on serve, Sinner stunned Alcaraz in the ninth game, breaking him at love to go up 5-4 and then closing it out. Alcaraz had won 21 straight sets.

An ATP trainer came out to attend to Alcaraz midway through the second set, examining one of his fingers before the cramps set in.

Red Bull team principal Christian Horner said this week in Melbourne he believes gender equality in the sport is inevitable.

"I think it is fantastic to see the amount of girls, females, that are showing interest in Formula One now and we're seeing it at all levels," he said.

"I think the interest is growing. It is appealing to more women to get involved in the sport, whether that is from an engineering basis, or across all aspects of the organization."

"As the sport does become more accessible, and we are pushing to make it more accessible, I think that is something that will naturally happen anyway."



Mayers 73 propels Lucknow to massive 193/6 vs Delhi

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Kyle Mayers made a grand entry on IPL stage with a scintillating 38-ball-73 to lead Lucknow Super Giants to an imposing 193/6 against Delhi Capitals in their season-opener, here on Saturday.

The left-hander from Barbados, who was included in absence of South African opener Quinton De Kock, made Capitals pay a heavy price for dropping him on 14, by blazing his way to a 28-ball fifty as his knock had as many as seven sixes.

Deepak Hooda (17, 18b) at the other end was a mere spectator to Mayers' fury as they stitched 79 runs in 42 balls to accelerate the run-rate in the middle overs.

The duo departed in the space of one ball, while Marcus Stoinis (12) got out cheaply in the middle overs.

But LSG maintained the momentum with Nicholas Pooran (36; 21b) and Krunal Pandya (15 not out; 13b) taking the charge, before Ayush Badoni's mini assault (18; 7b, 1x4, 2x6) and a last ball six from 'Impact Substitute' Krishnappa Gowtham yielded 22 runs from the 20th over bowled by Chetan Sakariya (2/53).



The last five overs produced 66 runs, primarily due to Pooran and Badoni using long handles to good effect. Playing their first-ever home game since joining IPL last year, LSG were in a spot of bother with DC bowlers making full use of the

two-paced tricky Ekana wicket after opting to bowl.

It took LSG openers, KL Rahul and Mayers, 16 balls to get going and hit their first boundary.

They were reduced to 19/1 inside four overs when left-arm

pacer Sakariya prolonged Rahul's lean patch by dismissing the Indian opener with a slower one. It was Sakariya's third dismissal of Rahul in four IPL match-ups.

But things soon tilted in the home team's favour after Khaleel

Ahmed grassed a sitter off Mayers in the last over the Powerplay.

Mayers unleashed his fury against debutant Mukesh Kumar, crunching him for two massive sixes in the very next over.



There was no stopping Mayers as he continued his assault on their frontline spinners Axar Patel and Kuldeep Yadav in his knock studded with seven sixes and two fours.

Patel however had the last laugh when he cleaned up Mayers with a ball that turned almost square from an imaginary fifth stump line.

Thereafter, it was his West Indies teammate Nicholas Pooran who seized the momentum in his 21-ball 36 (2X4, 3X6) as he along with Krunal Pandya kept the run flow.

Delhi were also let down by their ground fielding. For them, Khaleel was the pick of the bowler as he made a fine comeback from injury to return 2/30 with wickets of Stoinis and Pooran, latter caught smartly by Prithvi Shaw.



Rohit, Archer both fit for MI's opener: Coach Boucher

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Mumbai Indians head coach Mark Boucher confirmed that skipper Rohit Sharma and pacer Jofra Archer are fit for their IPL opener against Royal Challengers Bangalore on Sunday. There were speculations that Rohit might not be available for the opening game as he had missed the captains' photo shoot in Ahmedabad. But Boucher dispelled all rumours.

"Yes, Rohit is fit. He has trained the last two days and is 100 per cent ready to go. I think he didn't feel particularly well that morning and just as a precaution, we told him to stay at home," Boucher said at the pre-match press conference on Saturday.

"There are a lot of photo shoots the boys have had to do. He's not had a lot of time to himself so we thought it was better," he added. In Jasprit

Bumrah's absence, England pacer Jofra Archer, who himself is coming off a long injury lay off, will lead the MI pace attack.

"Jofra is good, he is 100 per cent ready for tomorrow. He didn't train today, it was an optional training session. He felt that he was ready to put the spikes on tomorrow. We are very happy with his progression since he has been with us. He'll be playing tomorrow."

The five time champions had a poor last season where they finished 10th but Boucher doesn't want to look back as he wasn't in charge back then.

"I can't comment too much about last year I wasn't there. But we have spoken about it, some new talents in the team, new energy, some guys who have done really well in the previous IPLs. "They understand that last year we didn't have a good season but things can change very quickly, energies have been good, we are in a good space."



Punjab Kings beat KKR via DLS method in rain-hit IPL season-opener

PTI ■ MOHALI

Punjab Kings' costliest recruit Sam Curran dismissed the dangerous Andre Russell at the nick of time to ensure a seven-run victory over Kolkata Knight Riders via Duckworth-Lewis method in a rain-hit afternoon encounter of Indian Premier League, here on Saturday.

Chasing a target of 192, KKR were left stranded at 146 for 7 after 16 overs when heavy downpour put spanner on their hardwork. The DLS par score at that time was 153. Had KKR not lost Russell (35 off 19 balls), who was looking to walk away with the game and then Venkatesh Iyer to Arshdeep Singh in the next over, the par score would have been lower before heavens opened up.

The two wickets in the 15th and 16th over proved to be decisive as KKR needed 46 off 24 balls at that stage with Shardul Thakur (8 not out) and Sunil Narine (7 not out) were at the crease. Kolkata needed 62 from 32 balls when Curran dismissed an on-song Russell and Arshdeep removed the 'Impact Substitute' Venkatesh Iyer (34) which proved to be turning point. Russell was holed at deep mid-wicket and Iyer was snapped at point.

The burly West Indian Russell had ignited KKR's hopes of a turnaround with three fours and two sixes, while Iyer made the first real impact with in his 28 ball knock that had three fours and a six.

KKR had a poor start as they were reduced to 29/3 inside the first five overs but a 46-run stand for the fourth wicket between Iyer and skipper Nitish Rana (24) brought them back in contest. Then a 50-run partnership between Iyer and Russell put them on course for a possible chase. But KKR just did not have enough firepower in them on the day and Arshdeep's brilliant figures of 3/19 in 3 overs was a game-changer for the 'Red Devils'.

Floodlights malfunction leads to near-30 minute delay in KKR's chase vs PBKS

PTI ■ MOHALI

Kolkata Knight Riders' chase against Punjab Kings in their IPL match on Saturday was delayed by almost half an hour due to floodlight malfunction. The PCA-IS Bindra Stadium here has a total of six floodlights at a comparatively lower height.

Floodlight malfunction is common at Indian stadiums and on the day, once KKR came out to bat, a lot of bulbs in multiple towers didn't turn on and it became a frustrating wait for the players, who then went inside the dressing room.

The onus on stadium maintenance lies with Punjab Cricket Association and the inordinate delay was certainly an embarrassment for the local

unit. As of now, the cause of malfunction hasn't been known but it is a given that PCA brass will get a rap on the knuckles from the BCCI bigwigs. The delay also causes problems for the broadcasters — two this season as the match will now end well after 7:30 pm, the time when the next game starts.

In the second match of the IPL season here, Punjab Kings lost momentum in the second half of their innings after being asked to bat, adding just 91 runs for four wickets to finish at a total of 191 for five in their 20 overs. Bhanuka Rajapaksa top scored for Punjab Kings with 50 from 32 balls with five fours and two sixes while their new captain Shikhar Dhawan scored 40 from 29 balls with the help of six fours.

Arshdeep bowled an eventful second over, striking on the first ball to have Mandeep Singh (2) caught at deep mid-wicket by Curran. After Anukul Roy hit him for a four, the India pacer had the left-handed batter caught at short mid-wicket. Earlier in the first half, Bhanuka Rajapaksa slammed a quickfire 50 to guide Punjab Kings to a challenging 191 for five against Kolkata Knight Riders.

Rajapaksa added 86 runs for the second wicket with captain Shikhar Dhawan (40) to lay a strong platform, with Sam Curran (26 not out) providing late flurry on a batting friendly field. Punjab dominated the first half of the innings with aggressive batting and looked primed to cross 200, but KKR managed to pull things back in control with regular wickets after a sturdy 86-run association between Rajapaksa and Dhawan.

The left-handed Sri Lankan Rajapaksa made the most of wrong lines bowled to him by KKR bowlers, racing to the first half-century for PBKS this season. Riding on the momentum provided by Prabhsimran Singh (23) at the top, Rajapaksa ensured Punjab maintained the domination while Dhawan played the second fiddle throughout his stay.

They went about their job with precision to score nearly 10 runs an over, adding 86 runs from just 55 balls for the second wicket. The Sri Lankan batter toyed with the KKR bowling, finding gaps and clearing the ropes at will and perished only after scoring 50 from 32 balls with five fours and two sixes.

Jitesh Sharma hit a couple of sixes to score a quickfire 21 from 11 balls while playing his first IPL match, Raza scored 16 from 13 balls with a six and a four each.

Gaikwad's sixes clean, pure timing: Kumble

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Former India captain Anil Kumble was mighty impressed with Chennai Super Kings opener Ruturaj Gaikwad's six-hitting prowess during his 92-run knock in the IPL opener against Gujarat Titans, saying all his hits over the fence were "clean" and results of "pure timing".

However, Gaikwad's show, featuring four boundaries and nine sixes from 50 balls, was overshadowed by the Titans' all-round performance. Shubman Gill struck 63 off 36 balls to help the defending champions Titans chase down the 179-run target in 19.2 overs.

"We don't associate him (Gaikwad) with six hitting but to hit nine sixes in an inning is really amazing. Clean, it looked really clean. It was not like he was going out of shape and trying to muscle it, just pure timing," said Kumble in a release from the official IPL broadcasters.

Former India wicketkeeper Parthiv

Patel also praised Gaikwad, one of the players retained by CSK during the mega auction last year ahead of IPL 2022, for his dazzling knock.

"It seemed like Ruturaj Gaikwad was batting on a different wicket compared to the other batsmen. The approach he used is extremely praiseworthy," said Parthiv, a JioCinema IPL expert.

Gaikwad's form during IPL 2021 — he scored 635 runs in 16 games, including a century — was instrumental in CSK winning their fourth IPL title. His dip in form coincided with the Chennai outfit finishing ninth among 10 teams last year.

He has a special liking for Titans bowling attack, as in the three innings he has played against Hardik Pandya's side, he has scored 218 runs, including a half-century in every game.

Patel felt that CSK's score of 178 was not competitive enough to unnerv the Titans.

"On this wicket, the target was



below par, so a strong start is essential. I think the Gujarat Titans got that and kept the momentum. The way the Titans started their chase, Wriddhiman Saha got the license to use the first six overs to his advantage as much as he could," said the former India wicketkeeper-batter.

Patel predicted that from the way Gill

Right knee injury may cut short NZ batter Williamson's IPL stint

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson's continuation in the ongoing IPL season has been put under doubt after suffering a right knee injury during his team's winning effort against Chennai Super Kings here.

The 32-year-old got injured following a nasty fall while fielding on the boundary during the CSK innings. He had limped off the field in the 13th over on Friday. The extent of his injury is not yet known, but going by what was seen on Friday night, it did not seem a minor injury.

Williamson, who was making his Gujarat Titans debut, intercepted a ball headed for a



possible six off CSK opener Ruturaj Gaikwad's bat.

He managed to palm the ball into the field of play before it bounced onto the boundary ropes. But he fell awkwardly on the ground and clutched his right knee in pain.

He was taken off after receiving on-field treatment and did not come back to bat with B Sai Sudharsan coming in as a substitute fielder first and later he took Williamson's place in the Titans' playing XI under the

Impact Player rule.

Titans captain Hardik Pandya had said at the post-match press conference that he did not know how serious was the injury.

"It is knee (injury) for sure but I don't have any update about what exactly has happened. I don't know how serious the injury is and how much time it will take (to heal). Right now there is no time frame," Pandya said.

"I had just messaged him. He (Williamson) has gone for the scans, once he comes back after the scans and doctors check (on him), then only we will be able to know what exactly it is."

Archer to go straight to Ashes after IPL stint: County club coach

PTI ■ LONDON

England pacer Jofra Archer will continue to prepare for the Ashes while playing in the IPL, and once the lucrative T20 tournament is over, he'll straight-away get into the gruelling five-Test series against Australia, according to his country club coach.

Sussex head coach Paul Farbrace said that Archer, who returns to Mumbai Indians this season after missing the entire last edition due to an elbow injury, is unlikely to play any red-ball cricket before the home Ashes series starts in June.

The first Ashes Test commences at Edgbaston on June 16. Following his recovery from an elbow injury and a stress fracture in his back, Archer has appeared for the national side seven times this year.

"The England plan for Jofra is he'll go and play in the IPL. I



think all things being equal, he (Archer) will go straight into the Ashes off the back of the IPL," Farbrace was quoted as saying by 'BBC Sport'.

Since Archer is unlikely to play any red-ball cricket before the Ashes due to his IPL commitment, the 27-year-old doesn't want to waste the opportunity to fine tune his Test bowling ahead of the oldest cricketing rivalry in the world.

Archer could play a Test against Ireland at Lord's from

If Ruturaj continues way he is batting, he will do wonders for Indian cricket: Hardik

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Chennai Super Kings batter Ruturaj Gaikwad's dazzling knock of 92 went in vain in the IPL opener against Gujarat Titans but opposition captain Hardik Pandya was all praise of him, saying that he will do wonders for Indian cricket.

Gaikwad's classy knock off just 50 balls from which he struck four boundaries and nine sixes took CSK to 178 for 7. The Titans, however, chased down the target with four balls to spare, riding on Shubman Gill's 63 off 36 balls on Friday.

"Some of the shots he (Gaikwad) played was nothing to do with the bowling. There were some tremendous shots. Full credit to him the way he batted, and if he continues to do so he is going to do wonders for Indian cricket," Pandya told reporters at the post-match conference.

"He has the game and when the time comes I am sure the Indian cricket team will back him enough," he said.

The 26-year-old Gaikwad has played nine T20Is after making his debut in July 2021, scoring 135 runs at a modest average of 16.87. He had also played one ODI in 2022.

Pandya said the way Gaikwad was batting on Friday, it was getting difficult to bowl at him.

"Obviously, we all know what kind of a player he (Gaikwad) is. It looked like at one time CSK would score 220-230. We were finding it difficult on what area we should bowl at. I had genuinely felt that we would not get him out at all," the Titans captain said.

"He is all-round cricketer, some of the shots he played

were not bad balls, actually good balls and that makes a lot of difference. As a bowling unit and as a captain, that made my job more difficult," he said.

Analysing his side's win in the last over, Pandya said, "A couple of shots from myself and Shubman put us in a difficult situation but again Rahul (Tewatia) getting the best out of his ability and Rashid coming in and showing what he can do.

"So overall we are quite happy but in a way, a lot of things we can learn from this victory. Even (if) we had lost we would have learnt a lot of things."

AFFIDAVIT

By virtue of an affidavit before Executive Magistrate, Jagatsinghpur, I, Afzal Khan, S/o Ayub Ali Khan, Villabishanpur, Po- Bishanpur, Ps.- Tirlot, Dist- Jagatsinghpur declare that, I have changed my Father's name Ayab khan to Ayub Ali Khan for all purposes.

CHANGE OF NAME (SELF)

I, Ansuman Jayadev, son of Hemanta Kumar Sahoo, resident of Maheswarpur, P.O. Brahmaparada, P.S. Dharmasala, Dist. Jaipur, Odisha-755005, have changed my name from Ansuman Jayadev to Anshuman Jaydev vide Affidavit No. 12AA 085254 dated 03-01-2023 at Dharmasala.



Trump has become the first former president to be indicted in a criminal case after a grand jury investigation into hush money payments made on his behalf during the 2016 presidential campaign, write ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and MEG KINNARD

TRUMP INDICTMENT & INVESTIGATION

Donald Trump’s unprecedented indictment comes as the Republican faces other legal investigations and launches a bid to return to the White House in 2024.

The indictment will test the Republican Party already divided over whether to support Trump next year, in part due to his efforts to undermine his 2020 election loss.

Trump has denied any wrongdoing and accuses prosecutors of engaging in a politically motivated “witch hunt” to damage his campaign.

Here’s a look at the hush money case, the grand jury investigation and possible ramifications for Trump’s presidential campaign:

WHAT’S THIS CASE ABOUT?

The grand jury spent weeks meeting in secret to probe Trump’s involvement in a \$130,000 payment made in 2016 to the porn actor Stormy Daniels to keep her from going public about a sexual encounter she said she had with him years earlier. Trump lawyer Michael Cohen paid Daniels, whose real name is Stephanie Clifford, through a shell company before being reimbursed by Trump, whose company, the Trump Organisation, logged the reimbursements as legal expenses.

Earlier in 2016, Cohen also arranged for former Playboy model Karen McDougal to be paid \$150,000 by the publisher of the supermarket tabloid The National Enquirer, which then squelched her story in a journalistically dubious practice known as “catch and kill.”

Trump denies having sex with either woman. Trump’s company “grossed up” Cohen’s reimbursement for the Daniels payment to defray tax payments, according to federal prosecutors who filed criminal charges against the lawyer in connection with the payments in 2018. In all, Cohen got \$360,000 plus a \$60,000 bonus, for a total of \$420,000.

Cohen pleaded guilty to violating federal campaign finance law in connection with the payments. Federal prosecutors say the payments amounted to illegal, unreported assistance to Trump’s campaign. But they declined to file charges against Trump himself.

WHAT ARE THE CHARGES?

The indictment has not yet been unsealed, so it’s not totally clear.

Some experts have said they believe Trump could be charged with falsifying business records, which can be a misdemeanor or a felony under New York law. To secure a conviction on the felony charge, prosecutors would have to prove that records were falsified with the intention of committing or concealing a second crime. It’s not clear what prosecutors may allege as the second crime.

WHAT HAS TRUMP’S LAWYER SAID?

Trump’s lawyer, Joe Tacopina, said Thursday that the former president didn’t commit any crime and vowed to “vigorously fight this political prosecution in court.”

Tacopina has accused prosecutors of “distorting laws” to try to take down the former president. He has described Trump as a victim of extortion who had to pay the money because the allegations were going to be embarrassing to him “regardless of the campaign.”

“He made this with personal funds to prevent something from coming out — false, but embarrassing to himself, his family, his young son. That’s not a campaign finance violation, not by any stretch,” Tacopina said on ABC’s ‘Good Morning America’ before the indictment.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

Law enforcement officials have been making



“THE THUGS AND CRIMINALS WHO ARE CORRUPTING OUR JUSTICE SYSTEM WILL BE DEFEATED, DISCREDITED AND TOTALLY DISGRACED”
— DONALD TRUMP

security preparations for days for the possibility of an indictment and a court appearance by the president.

Trump was expected to surrender to authorities next week, though details were still being worked out, according to a person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to discuss a matter that remained under seal.

WHAT’S THIS GRAND JURY AND WHO TESTIFIED?

A grand jury is made up of people drawn from the community, similar to a trial jury. But unlike juries that hear trials, grand juries don’t decide whether someone is guilty or innocent. They only decide whether there is sufficient evidence for someone to be charged.

Proceedings are closed to the public, including the media. New York grand juries have 23 people. At least 16 must be present to hear evidence or deliberate and 12 have to agree there is enough evidence in order to issue an indictment.

David Pecker, a longtime Trump friend and the former chief executive of the parent company of The National Enquirer, returned to the courthouse this week where the grand jury was meeting.

Pecker’s company, American Media Inc., secretly assisted Trump’s campaign by paying \$150,000 to McDougal in August 2016 for the rights to her story about an alleged affair with Trump. The company then suppressed

McDougal’s story until after the election.

The grand jury also heard from Cohen, as well as Robert Costello, who was once a legal adviser to Cohen.

The men have since had a falling out, and Costello indicated he has information he believes undercuts Cohen’s credibility and contradicts his incriminating statements about Trump. Costello testified at the invitation of prosecutors, presumably as a way to ensure that the grand jury had an opportunity to consider any testimony or evidence that might weaken the case for moving forward with an indictment.

Trump was also invited to testify, but didn’t.

WHAT ARE THE POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS FOR TRUMP?

Neither the indictment itself nor a conviction would prevent Trump from running for or winning the presidency in 2024.

Last week in Waco, Texas, Trump took a defiant stance at a rally by disparaging the prosecutors investigating him and predicting his vindication as he rallied supporters in a city made famous by deadly resistance against law enforcement.

“You will be vindicated and proud,” Trump said in a speech brimming with resentments and framing the probes as political attacks on himself and his followers. “The thugs and criminals who are corrupting our justice system will be defeated, discredited and totally disgraced.”

Before the charges were handed down, many party leaders had also already begun to defend the former president.

During a visit this month to Iowa, former Vice President Mike Pence called the idea of indicting a former president “deeply troubling.” Another 2024 Republican prospect, New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, has said there is a sense that the former president is being unfairly attacked.

Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, a declared candidate who also served as Trump’s UN ambassador, has called Bragg’s case an attempt at scoring “political points,” adding, “You never want to condone any sort of prosecution that’s being politicised.”

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is considering joining the 2024 Republican field, slammed the investigation as politically motivated. But he also threw one of his first jabs at the former president in a quip likely to intensify their rivalry. DeSantis said he personally doesn’t “know what goes into paying hush money to a porn star to secure silence over some kind of alleged affair.”

WHAT ABOUT OTHER TRUMP INVESTIGATIONS?

The New York case is just one of many legal woes Trump is facing.

The Justice Department is also investigating his retention of top secret government documents at his Florida estate, Mar-a-Lago, after leaving the White House. Federal investigators are also still probing the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol and efforts to overturn the 2020 election that Trump falsely claimed was stolen.

In Georgia, Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis has been investigating whether Trump and his allies illegally meddled in the 2020 election. The foreperson of a special grand jury, which heard from dozens of witnesses, said last month that the panel had recommended that numerous people be indicted, and hinted Trump could be among them. It is ultimately up to Willis to decide whether to move forward.



- May surgical conditions in children are TOTALLY DIFFERENT FROM ADULTS
- The laparoscopic hand instruments in children consists of smaller length and diameter
- In children, the inside space to work is less which makes surgery very difficult
- Minimally Invasive surgical team needs to be highly experienced and trained.

Trump at the end of primrose path

The spectacle around Donald Trump’s indictment and arraignment in a court will mark an unprecedented moment in American history that will demonstrate once again how dramatically Trump has upended democratic norms. But on a personal level, the indictment pierces the cloak of invincibility that seemed to follow Trump through his decades in business and in politics, as he faced allegations of fraud, collusion and sexual misconduct, writes JILL COLVIN

When Donald Trump steps before a judge next week to be arraigned in a New York courtroom, it will not only mark the first time a former US president has faced criminal charges. It will also represent a reckoning for a man long nicknamed “Teflon Don,” who until now has managed to skirt serious legal jeopardy despite 40 years of legal scrutiny.

Trump, who is the early frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination, is expected to turn himself in on Tuesday. He faces charges, including at least one felony offence, related to hush money payments to women during his 2016 campaign. Like any other person facing trial, he will be booked, fingerprinted and photographed before being given the chance to enter a plea.

The spectacle that is sure to unfold will mark an unprecedented moment in American history that will demonstrate once again how dramatically Trump - who already held the distinction of being the first president to be impeached twice - has upended democratic norms. But on a personal level, the indictment pierces the cloak of invincibility that seemed to follow Trump through his decades in business and in politics, as he faced allegations of fraud, collusion and sexual misconduct.

“Boy, after all this time it’s a bit of a shock,” Trump biographer Michael D’Antonio said of the indictment. “You know I always thought of him as the Gingerbread Man, shouting, ‘You can’t catch me!’ as he ran away.”

“Given his track record,” he said, “I had trouble imagining he would ever be held accountable.”

“These are not things that Donald Trump ever thought in

his entire life, nor I, for that matter, that he would ever be confronted with,” Michael Cohen, Trump’s longtime fixer and a key witness in the case who served jail time for the payments, told CNN.

Of course, some of the celebration by Trump’s detractors may be premature. The former president could seek to have a judge quickly dismiss the case. And even if it moves forward, there’s no guarantee of conviction. Intensifying investigations in Atlanta and Washington are seen as potentially more serious legal threats.

Still, Trump and his team were caught by surprise when word of the New York indictment broke Thursday evening, following news reports that the grand jury hearing the case was set for a weeks-long hiatus. As the deliberations dragged on, some in Trump’s orbit had become convinced that the case had stalled and that charges might never be brought. That included Trump attorney Joe Tacopina, who said on Friday morning he had hoped the “rule of law would prevail.”

Trump, he said on the “Today” show, was “initially was shocked” by news of the charges, but quickly pivoted to his usual pushback playbook.

“After he got over that,” he said, Trump “put a notch on his belt and he decided we have to fight now. And he got into a typical Donald Trump posture where he’s ready to be combative on something that he believes is an injustice. ... I think he’s now in the posture that he’s ready to fight this.”

In the meantime, Trump and his team have tried to use the news to his advantage, hoping to energise his loyal base by painting the investigation as part of a larger plot to



derail his candidacy.

Already, the charges have been a boon to his struggling fundraising. The campaign announced Friday evening that it had raised over \$4 million in the 24 hours after the indictment became public, far smashing its previous record after the FBI search of Trump’s Mar-a-Lago club.

More than 25 per cent of

donations, according to the campaign, came from first-time donors. The average contribution: \$34.

His campaign also continued to blast out supportive statements from dozens of top Republicans who have rallied behind Trump, including several of his declared and likely challengers, underscoring his continued hold on the party.

Trump has been in contact by phone with key congressional allies, including members of House leadership and top committees, according to people familiar with the conversations, who, like others, spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the response.

Trump ally Rep. Jim Banks, R-Ind., who formally endorsed the former president on Friday,

said Trump “doesn’t back down” and was going to “fight back,” telling a local radio show it was “yet another chapter where Donald Trump is going to come back on top in the end.”

The media maelstrom has catapulted the former president back into the spotlight he craves, at least temporarily limiting attention being paid to

his rivals, including Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who is widely expected to challenge Trump for the nomination, and has been holding events across the county to promote his book.

Trump aides have been discussing other ideas to maximise the situation, including the possibility of holding a press event either before or

after the arraignment. Trump is expected to travel from Florida to New York on Monday and stay overnight at Trump Tower in midtown Manhattan before heading to the courthouse early on Tuesday. He will return to Florida after the arraignment.

Trump has long denied that he had a sexual encounter with the porn actor known as Stormy Daniels and has blasted Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg for pursuing the years-old case.

Trump is also facing continued investigations in Georgia, over his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election, and in Washington, where a special counsel is probing the events of January 6, 2021, as well as Trump’s handling of classified documents at Mar-a-Lago and potential obstruction of the investigation.

But Sam Nunberg, a longtime former aide who broke with Trump years ago, said that while he no longer supports Trump, he believes the Manhattan case is “a waste of time,” given the allegations, which remain under seal. And he said he was skeptical it would ultimately matter.

“It doesn’t surprise me,” he said of the indictment. “What would surprise me is if he actually ended up behind bars in prison and I don’t see that happening.”

D’Antonio said that sentiment - and a continued belief that Trump will somehow prevail and dodge the charges - continues among the many people who have reached out to him in the last 24 hours, despite the charges.

“They’re like, he’s going to get away with it,” he said. “Somehow, he’s going to get it thrown out.” AP

PERSPECTIVE

Demystifying philosophical layers of temples

A notion of sacred has held humankind from time immemorial, bestowing meaning on material pursuits. The onslaught of rapid urbanisation and technological progress has intriguingly rendered sacred spaces all the more relevant. With changes unfolding at breakneck speed, such spaces facilitate introspection and self-enquiry. People from the Indian subcontinent would generally be familiar with the sanctifying ethos of a temple, but a few recognise its philosophical and cosmological foundations. Temples pave the way for individual salvation and also stimulate congregational worship. It is precisely at an interface of these two processes that the philosophical moorings of a temple can be located.

For several centuries, Vastu-shastras have functioned as the principal textual manuals for constructing temples. Texts like Manasara and Mayamatam emphasise the need to construct temples or even towns on square grid plans. Shapes like squares, triangles, circles and even points are liberally employed in temple architecture, and they each carry a distinct meaning. In this case, a square represents the manifest territorial world that needs to be transcended. The square grid plans, which in the words of scholar Stella Kramrisch function as “forecasts for temples”, are known as vastu-purusha mandalas. Gods associated with each of the squares within the mandala are ritually invoked to pacify the vastu-purusha, and ensure that

peaceful conditions prevail.

Such diagrams also illustrate the underlying impulse of Indian philosophical traditions to collapse all distinctions between man, God and cosmos. The Samkhya philosophy stresses the unity between microcosm and macrocosm, while Advaita Vedanta extends this further in its theory of the union of atman and brahman. To that extent, each part of a temple is considered to represent the cosmos in a microcosmic capsule, and this imparts spiritual meaning to even the most insignificant components of a shrine. The components of a temple are generally named after parts of the human body, illustrating the organic unity underlying temple architecture in the Indian subcontinent.

This metaphysical union can also be most prominently noticed in the image-worshipping traditions that have passed on from time immemorial. If Vedic texts stress the importance of concentrating the mind on a single object, the Puranas and Agamas are known for their pronounced sectarian predisposition. Nonetheless, continuity can be seen in the way these texts extol aniconic traditions such as the worship of bana-lingas and salagramas.

The linga and yoni manifest forces embodied by Shiva and Parvati respectively. In other words, the stone shaft known as the linga represents Shiva as a silent spectator of the world whose existence is contingent upon the creative energies released by Shakti, who resides at the base. This creative



interplay of two opposing forces provides the dynamic equilibrium required for maintaining the cosmic balance. The salagramas, on the other hand, are stones resembling the discus of Vishnu, and generally acquire this shape because of weathering activity caused by rivers.

These continue to be venerated by Vaishnavites across the country, as was recently noticed in the ecstatic reception

to the Salagrama stones that arrived in Ayodhya from Nepal.

A regular visit to the temple is also suffused with philosophical import. Before entering the sanctuary, a devotee is greeted by the imposing structure of a temple, which in many ways resembles a mountain. Vastu-shastras frequently liken temples to Mount Meru, which is held in high esteem by Hindus. A devotee then enters

the porch and views several sculptures adorning the walls of any temple. Subsequently, the devotee sets foot into the hallowed precincts of the dimly-lit garbha-griha which — almost like a cave within a mountain — is unadorned and houses the chief deity. Texts suggest that an invisible axis connects this deity with the superstructure of a temple. In fact, it is during the consecration of a temple that the deity’s

attributes are manifested by the intervention of priests. This ritual process is called “pranapratishta” and literally suggests instilling prana (life) within the deity.

In other words, the deity is considered to have life just like a human being, and germinates within the womb-chamber (garbha-griha) of a temple. After seeking darsan of the deity, a devotee circumambulates the shrine, and attends to

the subsidiary deities placed on its side walls. This is also a profoundly meaningful exercise as it helps a devotee absorb the energies prevailing within a temple.

The power of visual motifs can also be discerned in the narrative friezes adorning the walls of several temples in India, illustrating stories from epics and Puranas. The Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal, which is the only temple in the complex under active worship, contains such friezes and their stories are generally concerned with the restoration of dharma. The Kirat-arjuniya tale is illustrated in several temples of the region. This involves a conflict between Shiva in his incarnation as a hunter (kirata) and Arjuna, who seeks to consolidate his military powers when in exile. Arjuna is put through numerous challenges, before being blessed with the desired armoury. Such stories of perseverance, devotion and truthfulness serve to enhance a devotee’s spiritual experience within a temple.

For all these reasons, the structural features of temples are chiefly responsible for making them an integral part of India’s spiritual landscape. The vibrant temple culture of Bharat has withstood the ravages of time chiefly because of these empowering philosophical and cosmological concepts that subliminally enrich devotee’s experience within a shrine. These need to be acknowledged to foster a society that is rooted to its traditions even as it embraces cosmopolitan ambitions.

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ANIRUDH NAVEEN

