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Late City Vol.33 Issue 91
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NEW DELHI, MONDAY APRIL 3, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



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RED BULL'S VERSTAPPEN WINS AUS GP
11 SPORT

'Rioters will be hung upside down if BJP wins in Bihar'

We will remove Mahagathbandhan from power in Bihar in next Assembly polls, says Shah

PNS/PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Asserting that the current Bihar Government will "collapse after Lok Sabha polls", Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday asked voters in Bihar to fully back Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and elect a BJP Government in Bihar in 2025 Assembly polls.

Shah on Sunday asserted that the BJP will dislodge the "Mahagathbandhan" from power in the next Assembly polls in Bihar where the Government was "BAD", characterised by 'bhrastrachar' (corruption), 'arajakata' (anarchy) and 'daman' (oppression). Shah coined the acronym at a public meeting in Hisua, falling under Nawada district and the eponymous Lok Sabha constituency, squarely blaming the Nitish Kumar Government for the communal tension that forced him to cancel a scheduled visit to Sasaram, one of the



Union Minister and senior BJP leader Amit Shah being garlanded during a Samrat Ashok Jayanti function in Nawada on Sunday

rioteer-hit towns, earlier in the day. Pointing to the ongoing incidents of violence in Sasaram and Biharsharif in the State, Shah said under the BJP Government in the State "rioters will be hung upside down". The administration has so far maintained that riots in Sasaram and Bihar Sharif towns have led to no casualty. The BJP has blamed the imposition of Section 144

CrPC in Sasaram for the cancellation of the trip there of Shah, who was to attend a function on the occasion of Emperor Asoka's birth anniversary. However, the administration in Rohtas district, of which Sasaram is the headquarters, has claimed no prohibitory orders were clamped and show cause notices have been issued to police personnel who have been caught, on camera, telling

people to stay indoors since "Section 144 is in force". "I spoke to the Bihar Governor to take stock of the situation. Lalan Singh (president of JD(U)) is taking exception to that. He should remember I am the Home Minister of the country. If lawlessness prevails in Bihar, I cannot be a mute spectator. The state is a part of the country", fumed Shah. **Continued on Page 2**

77 held for Bihar Sharif violence, normalcy restored: Police

PTI ■ PATNA

Together 77 people have been arrested in connection with the communal violence that erupted in Bihar Sharif town in Nalanda district during the Ram Navami festivities, police said on Sunday. Normalcy has been restored in Bihar Sharif, the police said. Bihar Police in a tweet on Sunday said, "Normalcy has been restored in Bihar Sharif...the situation is completely under control. Total 77 people have so far been arrested by the district police as part of its investigation into the matter. Senior officers are camping in the affected areas. And adequate deployments of security forces have been made in the area".

The police dismissed rumours about the rising tension in the area. The police urged the people to not pay heed. A senior officer said, "Probe is on to nab other miscreants also responsible for Ram Navami violence amid prevailing tension in the area". **Continued on Page 2**

Rahul to appeal against conviction in Guj court

Gandhi will reach Surat today to file plea in libel case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/SURAT

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who was disqualified as a Member of the Lok Sabha last month after being convicted by a Surat court in Gujarat in a criminal defamation case, is all set to appeal against the punishment by appearing in person before the Sessions Court in Gujarat on Monday. Party sources said the former Congress chief will plead innocence in court in person. Rahul was sentenced to a two-year jail term in the defamation case and subsequently lost his Lok Sabha membership. Subsequently the second part of the Budget Session remained stalled with not more than 15 minutes of proceedings each in both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha since March 23 on the disqualification issue and the Congress' demand for a JPC in the Adani issue.

The Parliament will resume on Monday after a long break, with the Opposition parties hinting that they will continue demanding a JPC on the Adani controversy while the ruling side will be pressing for an apology from the Congress and Rahul Gandhi for his "democracy



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi outside his house in New Delhi on Sunday. PTI

Cong has finally shown faith in judiciary, now must say 'sorry' to OBCs: BJP

New Delhi: The Congress has finally shown its faith in the judicial system and it should now also apologise to backward classes for "insulting" them, the BJP said on Sunday following reports that Rahul Gandhi will file an appeal against his conviction in a defamation case.

"This is a welcome step. Though delayed, the Congress has shown faith in the judicial system," BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla told reporters at a presser. Replying to a question, he noted that Congress leaders had been till recently protesting the court's conviction of Gandhi by wearing black clothes and with "black intentions". Though it is worth pondering as to why the Congress took so many days to move a higher court for its "top" leader, when it has done so within hours in some other cases, he said.

Poonawalla also attacked Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for communal violence at some places in the State following Ram Navami processions and accused him of practising "appeasement." **PTI**

Kharge hits back at PM on 'supari' jibe

Sibal questions Modi's silence on communal violence

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Senior Congress leaders took on the Prime Minister on Sunday over the recent communal violence in West Bengal and Bihar and over his 'supari (contract)' remarks against the party. While Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Sunday questioned the "silence" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the communal violence in West Bengal and Bihar, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge slammed him over a reported hike in prices of some essential medicines, saying he has taken "supari" to "pick pockets" of the people.

Kharge, too, took the swipe at Modi over media reports stating that 384 essential drugs and more than 1,000 formulations saw a hike of over 11 per cent



effective April 1. "Mr. Modi, You have taken 'supari' to pick pockets of the people," Kharge said in a tweet in Hindi.

His dig came a day after Prime Minister Modi said at an event in Bhopal that some people are hell bent to sully his image and they have given a "supari" for this purpose, colluding with certain people sitting in India and also outside the country.

Raising the communal violence issue, Sibal said "let not 2024 General Elections be the reason" for the violence. Sibal appealed to the people of the country to put a stop to the "burning of Bengal and Bihar, and to the seeds of hatred" which, he said, can only benefit politicians and political ideologies. **Continued on Page 2**



Christian devotees attend a mass during Palm Sunday at a Church, in Patna on Sunday. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of the Holy Week and the triumphant entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem. PTI

West thinks it has right to remark on others' internal affairs: EAM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/BENGALURU

Days after Germany and the US said they were watching the legal proceedings regarding Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Sunday slammed them and said, "The West thinks it has a God-given right to comment on internal matters of other countries."

Jaishankar made these remarks during a Sunday morning 'Meet and Greet' interaction organised by Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya and Bengaluru Central MP PC Mohan with over 500 young voters, joggers and visitors at Cubbon Park.

It was his reaction to a question on Germany and the US' remarks on the disqualification of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi as a Member of Parliament. Jaishankar said, "I will give



you the truthful answer (on why we see West commenting on India). There are two reasons. It is because the West has a bad habit of commenting on others. They somehow think it is some kind of God-given right. They will have to learn only by experience that if they keep doing this, other people will also start commenting and they will not like it when it happens. And I see that happening."

He also said, "The second part of the truth - In our arguments, you are inviting the people to comment on you. Then more and more people are tempted to comment. We also need to stop giving generous invitations to the world saying there are problems in India," he said. **Continued on Page 2**

CAPSULE

CLASHES ERUPT IN WEST BENGAL AGAIN

Rishra (WB): Clashes broke out between two groups during a Ram Navami procession in Hooghly district on Sunday night. Soon prohibitory orders were imposed and internet was suspended, police said. **P5**

SHINDE SLAMS RAHUL AT SAVARKAR GAURAV YATRA

Thane: Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Sunday led the 'Savarkar Gaurav Yatra' in his hometown Thane and slammed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his repeated attacks on Savarkar and said insults to freedom fighters was akin to insulting the nation. **P5**

ANOTHER FEATHER IN ISRO'S CAP

Bengaluru: The Indian Space Research Organisation on Sunday successfully conducted the Reusable Launch Vehicle Autonomous Landing Mission. The test was conducted at the Aeronautical Test Range, Chitradurga, Karnataka. **P5**

Over 3K Covid cases logged; 1 death each from Hry, Kerala, Raj

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the WHO warning that the latest subvariant of Omicron XBB.1.16 which is fuelling a steady rise in cases in India is "one to watch", the country saw sharp jump in Covid cases with 3,824 new infections in the last 24 hours on Sunday, up by 28 per cent over the previous day and the biggest in about 184 days.

One death each was reported from Delhi, Haryana, Kerala, and Rajasthan in 24 hours and one was reconciled by Kerala. At 18,389, the active cases comprise 0.04 per cent of the total infections while the daily positivity rate stood at 2.87 per cent and the weekly positivity rate at 2.24 per cent.

With this, the country's active caseload has gone up to 18,389. **Continued on Page 2**

Cheetah strays out of Kuno; bid to bring it back to park on

PTI ■ SHEOPUR

A cheetah strayed into an agricultural field adjoining a village near Kuno National Park (KNP) in Madhya Pradesh's Sheopur district on Sunday morning, an official said. Oban, one of the eight cheetahs brought from Namibia in September last year, strayed into the field near Baroda village, some 15-20 kilometres from KNP, from the free range area of the park into which he was released last month, Sheopur divisional forest officer (DFO) P K Verma told PTI.

"As per the signals from its collar device, the cheetah was moving towards the village from Saturday night. It is sitting at the spot and a police team is

monitoring the situation and keeping villagers away. Forest department staff are trying to send it back into the park area," he said.

Forest department officials also shared a video in which staffers can be seen trying to coax Oban to get back into the forest.

So far, four out of eight cheetahs brought from Namibia to KNP in September, 2022, have been released in the wild (free range area) from hunting enclosures.

Oban and Asha were released into the wild on March 11, while Elton and Freddie, also known as "rockstars" due to their names, were allowed to move into the free range area on March 22. **Continued on Page 2**

'Prince Salim' of Indian cricket no more

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sunil Gavaskar had once written that if ever Salim Durani wrote his autobiography, the apt title would be, 'Ask for a Six'.

Those who are still alive to recollect Indian cricket's nascent days in the 1960s and early 70s, one thing that remains etched in almost everyone's memory is that if spectators wanted a big hit, Durani duly obliged.

By shouting "Sixerrrrr, Sixerrrrr", the 90,000 spectators at the then raucous Eden Gardens would make optimal use of their lungs. And legend has it that the very next ball would either soar into long or deep midwicket stands.

Durani was the 'people's man', whose impact can never be quantified by the 29 Test matches that he played over 13 years between 1960 to 1973, or the 12,000 plus runs he scored



Salim Durani: 11 December 1934 - 2 April 2023

and 75 wickets that he took with his mean left-arm spin.

The 88-year-old breathed his last on Sunday but the first and only Afghanistan-born cricketer to play Test cricket for India will forever remain 'Prince Salim' of Indian cricket. Salim bhai to all young and old, and Salim uncle to

Gavaskar. He was a "Prince" in terms of attitude and also won many hearts. A lone hundred, three five-wicket hauls, and a mediocre batting average of 25-plus doesn't tell the whole story. At a time when Test match fee was Rs 300, Durani was more of an amateur, whose only agenda was to enjoy and

let others have fun. Gavaskar's 774 runs on his debut Test series in the West Indies in 1971 was a seminal moment in Indian cricket history, as the country won its first series in the Caribbean. But would India have been able to win that Test match in Port of Spain if 'Prince Salim' wouldn't have got Clive Lloyd and Sir Garfield Sobers in a single spell as West Indies collapsed in their second innings, leaving visitors with an easy target to chase. Durani's bowling figure of 2/21 in 17 overs often gets drowned under avalanche of runs that Gavaskar and Dilip Sardesai (600 plus) made in the series. What if Durani hadn't bowled his prodigious "break back" that turned square from outside the off-stump to breach through the bat and pad of a technician par excellence like Sir Gary. **Continued on Page 2**

Amritpal last located in Meerut: Agencies

MONIKA MALIK ■ CHANDIGARH

As the Khalistan sympathizer and Waris Punjab De head Amritpal Singh continued to evade arrest for more than a fortnight now notwithstanding massive search operations in Punjab, the self-styled radical preacher is believed to have reached Uttar Pradesh. As per his latest location, traced by the intelligence agencies, Amritpal is in Meerut where he had caught an auto from Daurala.



The police has interrogated the auto driver, identified as Ajay, for hours who revealed that a few days ago, Amritpal took his auto from Daurala, and he had dropped him near Begumpal.

Suspecting that Amritpal would have taken shelter in some religious camp or place, the Punjab Police had launched a massive search operations covering across 300 deras across the state. The police's suspicion was based on the sound of kirtan at the end of Amritpal's second video.

His close aide and media adviser Papalpreet Singh, who had been providing him all

logistic support while on the run, reportedly got separated from him. CCTV grabs of Papalpreet, casually walking in a dera in Hoshiarpur district, have also been surfaced.

Another aide arrested

Another key aide of 'fugitive' pro-Khalistan preacher Amritpal, on whose phone he recorded both the videos, has been nabbed by the police.

Continues to be on the run after escaping Punjab Police's crackdown against his radical outfit some 16 days ago, Amritpal had released two

back-to-back videos on the social media.

The police claimed that Amritpal used the mobile phone of the arrested accused to make the videos. The police is also interrogating the arrested-accused about where the videos were recorded, to whom the same were forward, who put these on the internet, among others. The police had earlier claimed that the IP addresses used to share the videos and audio clips have been traced to many foreign countries, including the UK, Canada, the US and Dubai.

Uddhav dares Modi, BJP to fulfil Savarkar's dream of 'Akhand Bharat'

PTI ■ AURANGABAD

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray on Sunday dared Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP to fulfil late Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar's dream of 'akhand Bharat' and took a dig at Modi over the issue of his educational degrees.

Addressing the first rally of Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar, formerly Aurangabad, days after communal violence, Thackeray targeted BJP and Chief Minister Eknath Shinde over the 'Savarkar Gaurav yatra', saying the sacred saffron (flag) doesn't look good in their hands.

"Savarkar suffered rigorous imprisonment and hardships for the Independence of the country and not to make Modi the prime minister. Will you fulfil Savarkar's dream of 'akhand Bharat'?" Thackeray asked.

Senior NCP leader Ajit Pawar and his counterparts from Congress Balasaheb Thorat and Ashok Chavan also spoke on the occasion.

The MVA comprises Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) NCP, and



Congress. "The BJP and (Eknath) Shinde-led Shiv Sena should follow the ideals of Savarkar and Sardar Patel. Some time back, Amit Shah had asked BJP in Maharashtra to show Uddhav Thackeray his place. This is my place. But when will you show us the place in the Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK)?" he asked.

Thackeray dubbed BJP the "Bhrasht" (corrupt) party.

"Calling it Bharatiya Janata Party is an insult to the people of India. They attack Opposition leaders with corruption charges and induct them into their party. So all corrupt leaders are now in the BJP," the former chief minister said.

He also took a swipe at PM Modi over his remarks that some people were hellbent to sully his image and they have given a "supari" (contract) for this purpose.

'Despite ban, e-cigarettes available at shops, sold sans age verification'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

E-cigarettes are easily available at tobacco shops and sold to anyone without any age verification, the findings of a joint survey have revealed. The findings have been shared with the Union health ministry.

The survey conducted across six states — Assam, Goa, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Telangana —and Delhi also found that e-cigarettes get delivered within a couple of days when ordered online (through e-commerce websites, exclusive vape websites, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook and other social media sites) and are sold without any age verification.

Also, most of the vendors are not aware that e-cigarettes have been banned by law and are openly selling those, and the e-cigarettes that are being sold are mostly manufactured in China, the survey conducted by five organisations — Voluntary Health Association of India, VOICE

Nadda India, National Law School University India, Bangalore and Karnataka NO for Tobacco — said.

Despite the ban clamped by the government in 2019, e-cigarettes are easily available at tobacco shops and sold to children below 18 years of age, it added.

Shops and vendors were randomly selected for the survey. A total of 100 points of sale were surveyed across the six states and Delhi. The survey was conducted both online and offline. The field investigators checked on the availability of e-cigarettes, age verification, awareness on the ban and subsequent penalties in case of being found guilty among the vendors.

The survey also found out that e-cigarettes are available among the tobacco vendors operating near educational institutions. Some tobacco vendors do not sell such products but assure a doorstep delivery in accordance with demand.

Barring Modi no other PM has spoken about building toilets, says former President Kovind

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



Former president Ram Nath Kovind on Sunday said barring Narendra Modi, who spoke about building toilets from the ramparts of the Red Fort, no other Prime Minister had laid stress on the subject. Kovind was speaking at the National Conference on Sociology of Sanitation where Modi's message

Mahatma Gandhi, who had always prioritised cleanliness.

The former president lauded Modi's nationwide campaign for building toilets and igniting the mind of the masses towards sanitation. The three-day national conference that began on Sunday is being attended by vice-chancellors and professors from different universities.

The conference is being organised by the Sulabh International School of Action Sociology, a sister institution of the Delhi-based Sulabh International.

Kovind also urged academicians to formulate strategies to promote issues relating to sanitation and its studies, while describing the study of sanitation as a tool of social change.

Former president Ram Nath Kovind on Sunday said barring Narendra Modi, who spoke about building toilets from the ramparts of the Red Fort, no other Prime Minister had laid stress on the subject. Kovind was speaking at the National Conference on Sociology of Sanitation where Modi's message

was also read out. "Making people aware of the transformational outcomes of sanitation and cleanliness will also help in preparing domain-specific professionals and generate more opportunities for employment and self-employment," read the PM message at the event.

Kovind recalled the words of Mahatma Gandhi, who had always prioritised cleanliness. Speaking at the event, Kovind recalled the words of

ud-Dowla Trophy way back in 1976," Mukherjee wrote in his blog. "There was a funny incident when Durani got a prank call from a teammate posing as fan who wanted to present him with a tape recorder for his brilliant series winning bowling in the Windies.

Apparently, Durani wore India tie and blazer and came down to the hotel foyer and someone from the back shouted, "So you want tape recorder huh". It was his teammate, Dilip Sardesai.

He looked drop dead gorgeous in the pictures of 1960s and 70s, and acted in a film called Charitra with Parveen Babi, though the movie tanked in the box office. The offer to become a hero in the early 70s was an indicator of his popularity.

In 2018, when Afghanistan played its first Test in Bengaluru, Durani was felicitated by the Indian board for his Afghan roots.

An easy-going person, who never understood how big a player he was, Durani will forever reside as "Shahzada Salim" in the hearts of his fans.

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These embassies are, where these diplomats are to provide security. After all, we provide security for so many foreign embassies...if they do not provide security, there will be reactions from India. The day when India would take this lightly, I would say, is behind us. This is not an India that will accept its National Flag pulled down."

Jaishankar said, "The first thing our high commissioner did was to even get a bigger flag and he put it right up there on the building. It was not only a statement to those so-called Khalistanis, but it was also a statement to the British saying that this is my flag and I will make it even bigger if somebody tries to disrespect it," Jaishankar said. "In that sense, the idea that there is today a different India, an India which is very responsible and very firm," Jaishankar added.

conviction till the matter is disposed of. On March 23, the Surat court convicted Gandhi in a criminal defamation case against him over his "Modi surname" remark based on a complaint lodged by BJP MLA and former Gujarat Minister Purnesh Modi.

As per the allegations, Rahul Gandhi, during the Congress's election campaign in Kolar in 2019, made derogatory remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surname, which resulted in his conviction by a Gujarat local

Cheetah strays out of Kuno...

From Page 1

Eight Namibian cheetahs, comprising five females and three males, were brought to KNP as part of an ambitious reintroduction programme of the species and were released into special enclosures on September 17 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

One of them, Sasha, died of a kidney ailment on March 27, while another, Siyaya, gave birth to four cubs, which were first spotted on March 29.

A set of 12 cheetahs, comprising seven males and five females, were brought in from South Africa on February 18 this year.

Kharge hits back...

From Page 1

The ordinary man becomes a victim of this hatred, he said in a statement.

"I want the Prime Minister (Modi) to speak up. It is unfortunate that in the midst of this violence he has not spoken up. Why are they quiet? It is my earnest appeal to all those, and it may not be about one particular party, who are responsible for this madness. The country needs to move forward away from the environment that is being created. Let not 2024 be the reason for this," the former Union Minister said. Sibal said let the rule of law prevail.

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77 held for Bihar Sharif violence...

From Page 1

Police said that prohibitory order under Section 144 Crpc is in place in Bihar Sharif after fresh clashes broke out on Saturday night.

The State police had on Saturday 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.

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West thinks it has right to remark...

From Page 1

"We have to stop (urging) America and the world (by saying), why are you standing by doing nothing? So if somebody from here goes and says why are you standing by and saying nothing, then obviously they are going to comment. Part of the problem is them, and part of the problem is us. And I think both need fixing," he added.

Sending a terse message to for-

view of rising Covid cases, the Union Health Ministry in its revised guidelines said that antibiotics should not be used unless there is clinical suspicion of bacterial infection.

It also said the possibility of co-infection of Covid-19 with other endemic infections must be considered and systemic corticosteroids are not indicated in mild disease.

"Seek immediate medical attention if difficulty breathing, high-grade fever or severe cough, particularly if lasting for more than 5 days. A low threshold is to be kept for those with any of the high-risk features," said the guidelines.

It further said additionally, in moderate or severe diseases at high risk of progression, the guidelines recommend, "Consider Remdesivir for up to 5 days (200 mg IV on day 1 followed by 100 mg IV OD for the next 4 days)," it said.

From Page 1

Shah alleged that Lalu Prasad and Nitish Kumar have practiced politics of appeasement which has helped terrorism flourish, while Modi has scrapped Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir.

"I pray to God that peace is restored at the earliest in the State. There is no point speaking with State Government here," he said.

Making a sharp attack on Nitish Kumar, the BJP's former NDA ally, Shah said the "BJP has shut its doors for all times to come" for the JD(U) leader and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar the "propagator of casteism."

Addressing a public rally in Nawada, the top BJP leader asked voters in Bihar to "give full majority to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and elect a BJP Government in the 2025 State elections."

The Union Home Minister slammed the JD(U)-RJD alliance in Bihar and claimed that "after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, this Government will collapse and the BJP will form the Government."

He described the JD(U)-RJD coming together as an opportunistic alliance and reminded that the RJD leader Lalu Prasad's son and the current deputy-CM Tejashwi

Over 3K Covid cases logged...

From Page 1

This was according to the Health Ministry data released on Sunday.

Though health experts have said there is no need to panic and people with co-morbidities should be extra cautious, the global health agency has, while adding XBB.1.16 as the sixth variant under monitoring, noted that even as global cases and deaths continue to decline, some countries -- including India -- are reporting recent spikes in cases.

"XBB.1.16 has replaced other circulating sub-variants in India," Maria Van Kerkhove, the WHO's

Covid-19 technical lead, said at a recent Press briefing. "So this is one to watch. It's been in circulation for a few months," she said. So far, there are about 800 sequences on XBB.1.16 from 22 countries, mostly from India.

Kerkhove said XBB.1.16 has a similar profile to XBB.1.5, but has additional changes in the spike protein. In lab studies, XBB.1.16 has shown signs of increased infectivity as well as potentially increased pathogenicity, she noted.

Kerkhove said, "We haven't seen a change in severity in individuals or in populations," but "one of the things we are very concerned about is the potential for the virus to change to become not only more transmissible but more severe. "So we have to remain vigilant," she said.

In the meantime, as a precautionary measures in

Form No. URC-2
Advertisement giving notice about registration under Part I of Chapter XXI

[Pursuant to section 374(b) of the companies Act, 2013 and rule 4 (1) of the companies (Authorised to Register) Rules, 2014]

- Notice is hereby given that in pursuance of sub-section (2) of section 366 of the Companies Act, 2013, an application has been made to the Registrar of Companies that Bercos Melody House, a partnership firm, may be registered under Part I of Chapter XXI of the Companies Act 2013, as a company limited by shares
- The principal objects of the company are as follows:
 - To carry on the business of cafes, restaurant, hotel, catering, bars, pubs, fast-food restaurants and snack bars.
 - To carry on the business as manufacturers, dealers, service providers of food & beverages and to engage in wholesale & retail business including online business & providing related services
- A copy of the draft memorandum and articles of association of the proposed company may be inspected at the office at B-26, Mayfair Garden, Hauz Khas, New Delhi-110016.
- Notice is hereby given that any person objecting to this application may communicate their objection in writing to the Registrar at CRC Manesar, Plot No. 6,7,8 Sector 5, IMT Manesar, District Gurgaon, Haryana -122050, within twenty-one days from the date of publication of this notice, with a copy to the company at its registered office.

Dated this 3rd day of April 2023

SD/- SD/- SD/- SD/-
Kabir Kishin Advani Sameer Advani Devi Advani Amit Advani

'Rioters will...

From Page 1

Shah alleged that Lalu Prasad and Nitish Kumar have practiced politics of appeasement which has helped terrorism flourish, while Modi has scrapped Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir.

"I pray to God that peace is restored at the earliest in the State. There is no point speaking with State Government here," he said.

Making a sharp attack on Nitish Kumar, the BJP's former NDA ally, Shah said the "BJP has shut its doors for all times to come" for the JD(U) leader and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar the "propagator of casteism."

Addressing a public rally in Nawada, the top BJP leader asked voters in Bihar to "give full majority to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and elect a BJP Government in the 2025 State elections."

The Union Home Minister slammed the JD(U)-RJD alliance in Bihar and claimed that "after the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, this Government will collapse and the BJP will form the Government."

He described the JD(U)-RJD coming together as an opportunistic alliance and reminded that the RJD leader Lalu Prasad's son and the current deputy-CM Tejashwi

Rahul to appeal against conviction in Guj...

From Page 1

However, the party has given strict instructions that there will be no congregation of party workers on the route to the court.

Earlier in the day Rahul met his mother former Congress chief Sonia Gandhi at her residence for about two hours and he was accompanied by Robert Vadra.

Gandhi, in his plea, has asked the Sessions Court to set aside the Magistrate order convicting him in the defamation case, said Panwala. He has also asked for an interim stay on the

conviction till the matter is disposed of.

On March 23, the Surat court convicted Gandhi in a criminal defamation case against him over his "Modi surname" remark based on a complaint lodged by BJP MLA and former Gujarat Minister Purnesh Modi.

As per the allegations, Rahul Gandhi, during the Congress's election campaign in Kolar in 2019, made derogatory remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surname, which resulted in his conviction by a Gujarat local

court on March 23. The court convicted the Congress leader for his "all thieves have Modi surname" remark under 504 (Intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

The complainant claimed that the remark, made at a rally at Kolar in Karnataka ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, had defamed the entire Modi community. In his controversial remark, Gandhi had said, "How come all the thieves have Modi as the common surname?"

Remain cautious, wear mask: Experts on Covid surge in city

'Focus should be on clinical cases'

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As Delhi witnesses a sudden spurt in Covid cases, experts have stressed that there is no need to panic over the absolute numbers and the focus should be on protecting the vulnerable population, especially those who are immunocompromised or have comorbidities.

They have also advised people to remain cautious by masking up and avoiding public gatherings.

Delhi recorded 416 fresh

Covid cases on Saturday, the highest in over seven months, with a positivity rate of 14.37 per cent, according to data shared by the city health department. While the government did not issue a bulletin on Friday, the numbers on Thursday stood at 295 while the positivity rate was at 12.48 per cent.

Dr Chandrakant Lahariya, an epidemiologist and public health specialist, told PTI, "There is a clear dissociation between infection and disease. It means that people are testing positive but they do not have symptoms. There is increased testing for flu so there is targeted testing and hence an increase in cases."

"Since there is a surge, patients admitted (for other ailments) are being tested and they are turning out to be Covid positive."

He explained that since



Ranjan Dimri

the variant XBB.1.6 has a "growth advantage", so there is an increase in cases.

However, he stressed that at this juncture, there is no point in just tracking absolute numbers.

"Our focus should be on looking for clinical cases rather than laboratory-tested cases. For India, there is a 30-fold increase in cases but the daily deaths have not increased in

that proportion. We should not worry about the actual number of cases but clinical outcomes."

"It is time we should focus on an integrated approach of clinical, epidemiological and genomic one. All three should be reviewed together to reach a conclusion," he said.

Following a review meeting on Friday, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said that only

three deaths have been reported over the last four-five days.

In all three patients, comorbidities were "very severe" and it has been assessed that the fatality was due to comorbidities and perhaps Covid was "incidental", but one can't say that.

Lahariya also said that is no cause for worry till the time a new variant of concern emerges somewhere in the world or if there is a change in clinical outcomes like an increase in hospitalisation.

"It is flu season and we should protect the vulnerable population. We will see a similar fall or rise in seasonal illnesses and we need to be prepared," he stressed.

Dr Suresh Kumar, medical director of the state-run LNJP Hospital, said, "There are eight patients currently in our hospital and one of them is on ventilator support while others

are on oxygen support. The age group ranges from 25 to 64. Fifty per cent have comorbidities and the rest don't. All of them are doubly vaccinated barring one."

"This strain overcomes vaccination. It spreads faster but it produces mild illness. Only in some cases, it is severe, mostly in those who have comorbidities. Most of the patients are those who have had previous infections."

When asked if a peak can be expected, he said, "Any virus has a cycle of four to six weeks. It is a new variant so we can't say that a peak will come soon but it was the trend in previous waves that cases used to start declining after reaching the peak in four to six weeks."

The senior doctor at the LNJP Hospital, the Delhi government's largest hospital which has been the mainstay of its fight against the pandemic

since its outbreaks here in March 2020, said, "New variants keep coming as the virus evolves."

A senior doctor at Delhi government-run Rajiv Gandhi Super Speciality Hospital said, "We have no Covid patient admitted at our hospital, but we are all prepared to handle the situation."

She said that patients in Delhi are being admitted at LNJP Hospital as of now to keep them at one facility.

"If needed later, we are also ready. Isolation room has already been set up at our hospital," the doctor said.

Doctors were unanimous in advising people to mask up and avoid public gatherings.

Dr Richa Sareen, consultant of pulmonology at Fortis hospital here, said there is a need to exercise caution but without panicking.

The rise in Covid cases is led by the new variant. But, XBB.1.16 is a variant of Omicron, and so there shouldn't be much to worry as, most of us have developed antibodies over time, especially after the last wave driven by Omicron," she said.

However, people should wear masks in crowded places, like markets and movie theatres, and not be complacent.

Extra caution should be exercised by those who are immunocompromised or have co-morbidities, she said.

Experts also urged people to take their booster dose against Covid, if they haven't got it already. Dr Jugal Kishore, head of the medicine department at the Centre-run Safdarjung Hospital here, had last week said that Covid has now become "similar to influenza" where the virus undergoes changes every year and infects people.

Free JEE, NEET coaching for DMVS students: Atishi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Students of Delhi Model Virtual School (DMVS) will get free Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) and National Eligibility Entrance Test (NEET) coaching from its upcoming session, Delhi Education Minister Atishi said on Sunday.

Holding a review meeting with the officials of the flagship project, the Delhi minister provided several suggestions and directed the officials to prepare a five-year action plan for the virtual school.

"Delhi's education model is being applauded across the world and this is the reason why children across the coun-



ties are willing to become part of it. Our government's DMVS is working to connect them to us," Atishi said.

She said the government's aim is to make quality education more accessible and inclusive so that students from all states can become a part of it. "DMVS has all the advan-

tages of a physical institution but is virtual and is affiliated with DBSE. Today, students from 13 states and Union Territories, including Delhi, are studying here, and this year our focus is to expand its reach. Our goal is to ensure that quality education is easily available to everyone, regardless of their location," she said.

In the upcoming academic session of the DMVS, students will have access to free IIT-JEE and NEET coaching virtually.

The virtual school will also offer students job-oriented courses like coding, digital media and design, finance and accounting, along with short-term and advanced courses designed by industry experts.

Youth stabbed to death following scuffle in Capital

New Delhi: A delivery executive was stabbed to death while his three relatives sustained injuries in an alleged attack by their neighbours following a scuffle here, police said on Sunday. The incident took place on Saturday evening in central Delhi's Anand Parbat area, they said.

While returning from work, Karan (22), got into an argument with some people near his house in Prem Nagar over a petty issue following which he was attacked with sticks. As his family members intervened, they too were thrashed, according to the police complaint. During the melee, Karan was stabbed more than 10 times by the attackers, said a family member. The injured were taken to a hospital where Karan succumbed to injuries. **Staff Reporter**

AIIMS mulls roping in Govt agency, PSU for procurement of medical equipment

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AIIMS administration here has constituted a committee to engage a government agency or a PSU for procurement of medical equipment to help expedite procurements and free the staff, including faculty members, from procurement-related activities.

The ten-member committee will examine the benefits and modalities of engaging a government agency or PSU as a procurement support agency, according to an office memorandum issued recently.

Making observations on the issue of procurement, AIIMS Director Dr M Srinivas said stores and procurement are usually handled by the same personnel, which is not in line with good governance practices.

Often, outsourced staff is handling procurement, which is not appropriate. The store cadre is limited in strength due to which there is frequent unmet demand for stores and procurement personnel from various Centres and Departments, he was quoted as saying in the office memorandum.

In many areas, as an interim arrangement, procurement work is being handled by administrative cadre staff who are not formally trained in procurement matters, he said.



There are no biomedical engineers or similar technical staff in the store cadre to support the procurement of complex medical equipment in line with the current best practices globally.

"Due to shortage of technical and trained personnel, clinical faculty are spending a lot of time in procurement-related activities which is in turn affecting their time available for patient care, teaching and research," the AIIMS director said.

The administration was also informed that in certain cases, procurements have been pending for two years due to shortage of procurement resources in some departments and stores.

Noting that the Ministry of Health has engaged a PSU as 'Procurement Support Agency' for three Central government hospitals in Delhi, the memorandum said there is a possibility to engage a PSA for facilitating procurements in main hospital, centres and departments at AIIMS, New Delhi.

"This can help expedite procurements as the PSA shall be contractually bound by strict timelines and shall also improve core storekeeping functions by freeing the existing staff from procurement-related activities and consequently shall also lead to relieving of all outsourced staff from stores and procurement related functions," the AIIMS director said.

2020 Delhi riots: Court orders framing of charges against 5 for rioting, arson

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A court here has ordered framing charges of rioting and arson against five people for allegedly setting ablaze a mosque during the 2020 northeast Delhi riots, saying their identification through a video cannot be termed illegal or inadmissible in evidence at this stage.

Additional Sessions Judge Pulastya Pramachala was hearing a case against Ankit, Sourabh Sharma, Rohit, Rahul Kumar and Sachin, who were accused of being part of a riotous mob that torched Allah Wali Masjid at Shahid Bhagat

Singh Colony here in February 2020.

"Identification of the accused through video cannot be termed as illegal or inadmissible in evidence. The same would require to be appreciated on the basis of the overall situation behind such identification and this exercise can be done only after the trial," the judge said.

ASJ Pramachala also rejected the ground of discharge sought in the absence of a test identification parade (TIP), saying TIP is a matter of prudence and an additional safeguard for the prosecution's case and its absence cannot be used by the accused



for seeking discharge.

"I find that accused persons...(are) liable to be tried for offences punishable under sections 147 (rioting), 148

(rioting, armed with a deadly weapon), 427 (punishment for committing mischief and thereby causing loss or damage to the amount of Rs fifty

or upwards), 435 (Mischief by fire or explosive substance with intent to cause damage to an amount of 100 rupees or upwards), 436 (mischief by fire or explosive substance with intent to destroy house, etc.) and 450 (house-trespass in order to the committing of any offence punishable with imprisonment for life) of the Indian Penal Code," the court said in its order passed on March 31. The judge also put on trial all accused persons for the offences of being a part of an unlawful assembly and disobedience to an order promulgated by a public servant.

"The common object of this mob is well apparent from the evidence i.e., to destroy the mosque," the judge said.

Noting that the statement of a witness that Rohit was instigating others to set ablaze the mosque and other houses, the judge additionally put him on trial for the offence of abetment.

According to the evidence before the court, the accused persons were identified as part of the riotous mob that vandalised and set ablaze the mosque on February 24 and 25, 2020, the judge said.

The riots in northeast Delhi had left 53 people dead and more than 700 injured.

Consumer grievances' redressal made easy

Now upload products pics, bills via app

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Consumers in Delhi can now upload the pictures of a product, bill and other items via a new app to lodge a complaint on legal violations committed by a shop or an establishment with the city's weights and measures department.

The app -- "Maaptol Grievance" -- has recently been developed and is available on Google Playstore. The app aims to facilitate the online registration and time-bound redressal of consumer grievances related to the Legal Metrology Act and the rules framed thereunder, officials said on Sunday.

The complainant has to mention in the relevant fields of the software application his or her name and mobile number and the complete name and address of the shop or establishment where a violation of the Legal Metrology Act, 2009 and the rules framed thereunder has been found, they said.

In relevant cases, the complainant may upload photographs of the product related to the complaint and the bill, a senior official added. The application will ask a complainant or consumer if he or



she is at the establishment. If the complainant is at the establishment, the system shall trace the location of the establishment via Google, he said.

The grievances lodged on the app "shall be attended by the Weights and Measures Department, Delhi government in a time-bound manner, within two working days (48 hours)", according to an official statement.

Any consumer who finds a violation with regard to goods being sold or distributed by weight, measure or number, or any shortcoming in the mandatory declarations on packaged goods and commodities according to the provisions of the Legal Metrology Act, 2009 and the rules made thereunder can use the app for lodging a complaint with the weights and measures department.

Broad categories of grievances related to goods or products being sold by retail shops or establishments can be registered on the app by a consumer or a complainant, including a deficiency in the mandatory declarations by the manufacturer or the packer or the importer on packaged goods, and overcharging.

IPCW students lament increased surveillance under new principal, seek resignation, hold protests



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hundreds of students at H.D.U.'s Indraprastha College for Women have held multiple demonstrations in the last few days, demanding the resignation of the newly-appointed principal over security lapses during the recent annual fest and alleged authoritarian steps.

The recent "saffronisation" of the college has only added to the anger of the students who have also claimed increased surveillance and curtailment of freedom of speech ever since Poonam Kumria took charge as the head of the century-old institute on February 21.

PTI talked with the protesting students, who said that they have noticed a "huge difference" in the way the college is operating under Kumria.

According to students, the college's boundary walls have been painted saffron, the same colour has also been added to its logo and guests being invited to the college events are controversial figures.

They are also irked over the "authoritarian" manner in which the administration is operating and reacting to the protests demanding women's safety.

The college principal did not respond to calls and texts from PTI seeking a response to the allegations.

Earlier, students registered their discontent through social media. They did not resort to demonstration until the March 28 incident when some "unknown" men allegedly trespassed, shouted slogans and harassed women students during the annual 'Shruti' festival at the college.

Fugitive convicted in narcotics case held from Indo-Bangla border: Delhi Police

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police's Crime Branch has arrested a fugitive convicted in a narcotics case from the Indo-Bangladesh border, officials said on Sunday.

Jafar Ali (45), who hails from a village in West Bengal's Cooch Behar district, was trying to cross the border to evade arrest, they added.

Ali was convicted in a case lodged by the Crime Branch under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, the officials said.

A Crime Branch team apprehended Ali and his asso-



ciates with 142 kg of weed (marijuana) from north Delhi's Burari in 2010. Subsequently, the NDPS case was lodged and a court sentenced Ali to 15 years of rigorous imprisonment, police said.

In 2020, Ali was granted emergency parole, which was

extended from time to time till February 27, 2021 and even after the expiry of his extended parole, he did not surrender and was absconding, according to police officials.

Special Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Ravindra Singh Yadav said acting on information, the Crime Branch team went to Sahebganj in Cooch Behar's Dinhatra to arrest Ali. Sensing police presence, the fugitive fled his native place with a plan to cross the Indo-Bangladesh border, he was arrested from Kuserhat, Dinhatra, about 500 metres from the border.

Mercury drops below 15 deg C in city, light rain likely today

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi recorded a low of 14.9 degrees Celsius, four notches below the season's average, even as parts of the capital are likely to receive light rainfall and thundershowers on Monday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

The city's maximum temperature on Sunday settled at 30.3 degrees Celsius, which is three notches below the season's average for this time of the year, the weather department said.

Mercedes hits wall after driver loses control due to rain-led waterlogging

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 35-year-old woman allegedly lost control of her Mercedes-Benz which crashed into a wall after the car skidded into a waterlogged part in south Delhi's Neb Sarai area, police said on Sunday.

The incident took place on Saturday night when it was raining heavily, leading to traf-

fic snarls and waterlogging in many areas across the national capital.

According to police, the woman was returning to her house in Sanik Farm after visiting a relative's place. On the way back home, she lost control of her car as the vehicle slipped into a waterlogged area due to heavy rainfall and ended up hitting a wall.

Teen killed in head-on collision between two-wheeler, crane in Keshavpuram

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 15-year-old boy was killed and his friend injured after their two-wheeler head-on collided with a crane northwest of Delhi's Keshavpuram area, police said on Sunday.

The incident happened near a restaurant on the carriageway towards Inderlok at midnight, they said.



According to police, Arib and his friend Irfan (18) had gone out for a joyride post dinner on a scooter but they met with an accident.

The crane was heading back after completing its work assigned by an agency, they said.

The crane driver fled the spot leaving the two boys injured on the road, a senior police officer said.

They were taken to a nearby hospital where Arib was declared dead while Irfan is under treatment, he said.

A case has been registered under sections 279 (rash driving), 337 (causing hurt by act endangering life) or personal safety of others) and 304 A (causing death by negligence) of the Indian Penal Code, police said.

The accused driver has been identified and efforts are being taken to nab him, they said.

Unseasonal rain damages crops

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Unseasonal rains, thunderstorms and hailstorms in large parts of India over the past few days have impacted standing crops, particularly wheat, mustard, tomato and mangoes across large swathes of agricultural land.

According to estimated figures, more than 5.75 lakh hectare in three states—Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan till March 31.

The assessment of standing crops damage in Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar and West Bengal are yet to be done or underway. The unseasonal rains and hailstorm have led to soaring prices in wholesale and retail markets in large parts of the country.

Sources said the Centre is yet to release official figures on



the estimate of damaged crops and the financial losses suffered by farmers as the state governments have yet to assess the damages so far. The Ministry of Agriculture is likely to hold a meeting on Monday with state governments the extent of damage caused to wheat and other rabi crops because of the fresh spell of untimely rains received in the last two to three days. The untimely rains are expected to continue for a few more days.

As per estimated data, in

Uttar Pradesh, over 35,000 hectare of wheat crop has been damaged by the recent untimely rains which impacted over 1.50 lakh farmers, according to the information provided by the office of Relief Commissioner of Uttar Pradesh. Most of the damage has been reported from nine districts of the state including Agra, Bareilly, Chandauli, Hamirpur, Jhansi, Lalitpur, Prayagraj, Unnao and Varanasi. The figure is added till March 31. The crops damaged in April will be assessed soon.

At least 10 to 20 per cent crops have been impacted/damaged in Mandsaur, Neemuch Bhopal, Ujjain, Ratlam and Raisen, Shajapur, Sehore, Narmadapuram, Agar-Malwa, Barwani and Guna in March.

In Rajasthan too, about 3.88 lakh hectare of wheat

crop out of total sown area of 29.65 lakh hectare has been impacted due to the untimely rainfall.

Besides wheat, mustard, gram, barley and other vegetable crops have been impacted in Rajasthan. About 1.54 lakh hectare and 1.29 lakh hectare of mustard and gram crops, respectively, have been damaged due to rains in the state, sources added.

Punjab and Haryana have directed the officials concerned to carry out a special 'girdawari' (revenue loss survey) to assess the crop loss. Besides unseasonal rains and thunderstorms, a rare and powerful tornado ripped through farm belts, including Fazilka, in Punjab last week, damaging wheat and chilli at large. There are reports of damage to wheat in an estimated 400,000-500,000 hectares in the state.

'Misuse' of central probe agencies: SC to hear plea of 14 parties led by Cong on April 5

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Wednesday a plea filed by 14 parties, led by the Congress, alleging arbitrary use of central probe agencies against opposition leaders and seeking guidelines for the future.

According to the list of business uploaded on the apex court website, the plea of opposition parties would be heard on April 5 by a three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud.

Justices P S Narasimha and J B Pardiwala are also part of the bench.



The joint plea was mentioned for urgent hearing on March 24 by senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi.

"I am asking for the guidelines for the future. This is a remarkable convergence of 14 parties against the misuse of the agencies, both CBI and ED," Singhvi had said, and claimed that 95 per cent cases of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED) are against the leaders of opposition parties.

The senior lawyer referred to the rise in the number of cases filed by the CBI and ED after the NDA government came to power in 2014.

'Govt must clarify': Cong after man held for stealing data of about 67 cr people, bodies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday sought clarification from the government over the theft of personal data of nearly 67 crore individuals and organisations, asserting that this was an attack on the privacy and security of Indians.

The Congress' assertion came after the Cyberabad Police on Saturday said they arrested a person who was allegedly involved in stealing, holding and selling of personal and confidential data of 66.9 crore individuals and organisations belonging to 24 states and eight metropolitan cities.

Tagging a media report on the case, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said in a

tweet in Hindi, "How and why was personal information of 67 crore people of India stolen? Who stole the data of the army and how?"

This is an attack on the privacy and security of Indians and this is unacceptable to us. The government should immediately clarify on this matter," Ramesh said.

A press release from the police said the accused, Vinay Bhardwaj, was found possessing data of students of edu-tech organisations and also holds consumer/customer data of major organisations like GST, Road transport organisations of various states, major e-commerce portals, social media platforms and fintech companies.

Draft Bills in simple language to allow layman to understand them: Par panel

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bills should be drafted in a language which helps a layman understand them and reasons for bringing the proposed legislation, a Parliamentary panel has recommended.

The department-related parliamentary standing committee on law and personnel also said that currently all the bills that are being drafted by the Legislative Department in the Union Law Ministry can be understood either by the intelligentsia of the country or the people having legal acumen or knowledge.

"For a layman to understand the bills which are presented to Parliament is very difficult. The Committee, therefore, would like to recommend that the bills should be drafted in such a simple language so that even a common man can also understand about the proposed objective and implications of the bill like the Digital Personal Data Protection Bill, 2022 and Indian Telecommunication Bill, 2022 recently brought by the government," the committee



chaired by BJP's Sushil Kumar Modi said.

"The key mandate of the Legislative Department is to vet crucial government documents and help draft various ministries draft ordinances and bills so that they can hold good during parliamentary and judicial scrutiny.

The department is also the nodal agency to deal with issues related to the Election Commission, including appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners. It also deals with Representation of the People Act 1950 and 1951 and related electoral rules.

Tharoor for smaller party to lead Opp alliance in 2024

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Welcoming the recent 'wave of Opposition unity', Lok Sabha MP Shashi Tharoor on Sunday said the Congress will 'de facto' be the fulcrum around which other parties converge, but asserted that if he were in the party leadership, he would not "crow about it" and encourage one of the smaller outfits to play the role of convenor of an alliance to take on the BJP in the 2024 general election.

In an interview with PTI, Tharoor said Rahul Gandhi's disqualification from Lok Sabha following his conviction in a 2019 defamation case has generated a "surprising wave of Opposition unity" with many parties having begun to feel the



truth of the adage -- "united we stand, divided we fall".

The former Union minister also said if most of the Opposition parties have now found a new reason to come together and stop dividing each other's vote, the BJP might find it much harder to win a majority in the 2024 elections.

Asked about Congress leader Digvijaya Singh's thank

you Germany' tweet after that country took note of Gandhi's disqualification, Tharoor said he would have advised his senior party colleague not to say what he did.

"The international attention - and the negative press for India - should not surprise Mr (Narendra) Modi and his government. Doubts about the democratic credentials of this government have been growing for some years, as is evident from the global media," he said.

"Still, I would have advised my highly respected senior colleague and friend not to say what he did. It has always been an article of faith for the Congress party that we do not require or accept any foreign tutelage after 200 years of subjection to colonial rule,"

Tharoor stressed. That pride is deeply ingrained in every Indian, he said, asserting that we are perfectly capable of solving our own problems.

"I am confident the people of India will vote for democracy and the right to determine who rules them," the MP from Thiruvananthapuram said.

On Gandhi's disqualification and the ensuing display of Opposition unity, Tharoor said the judgment has generated a "surprising and welcome wave of Opposition unity", as regional parties traditionally opposed to the Congress in their states - AAP in Delhi, TMC in West Bengal, Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh, Bharat Rashtra Samithi in Telangana, CPIM in Kerala - have come out in his support.

"Many have begun to feel the truth of the adage 'united we stand, divided we fall'; if they don't back Rahul now, they could be picked off one by one themselves, by a 'vengeful' government," he said.

If the Surat court verdict gives India a more united Opposition, it could be bad news for a ruling party that won the 2019 elections with just 37 per cent of the vote but more than 60 per cent of the Lok Sabha seats, he contended.

"The rest of the votes went to 35 victorious parties, all represented in the current Parliament; if most of them have now found a new reason to come together and stop dividing each other's vote, the BJP might find it much harder to win a majority in 2024," Tharoor asserted.

Vice-Admiral SJ Singh takes charge as Vice-Chief of Navy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Vice Admiral Sanjay Jasjit Singh has taken charge as the Vice Chief of Naval Staff.

On assumption, Sanjay Jasjit Singh paid homage to the bravehearts at the National War Memorial and reviewed the Guard of Honour at South Block, New Delhi on Sunday.

He is a graduate of the National Defence Academy (NDA), Pune, and was commissioned in 1986 in the Executive Branch of the Indian Navy, Nay officials said here.

In his career spanning 37 years, Jasjit Singh has served on most class of ships of the Indian Navy and has held a range of command, training and staff appointments, including Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (CSNCO), Flag Officer Sea Training, Flag Officer Commanding Western Fleet, Commandant Naval War College, and Contoller Personnel Services. Prior to taking over as the Vice Chief of Naval Staff, he was Deputy Chief of Integrated Defence Staff (Operations).

He holds MSc and MPhil in Defence and Strategic Studies from Madras University, MA in Defence Studies from Kings College, London, and MA (History), MPhil (Pol) and PhD (Arts) from Mumbai University.

In recognition of his dis-

tinguished service, the Flag Officer was awarded the Nao Sena Medal in 2009, and Ati Vishisht Seva Medal (AVSM) in 2020.

Army Chief Gen Pande leaves for Oz



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Australia will review the entire spectrum of their bilateral defence ties during Army Chief General Manoj Pande's four-day visit there commencing Monday.

He left for Australia on Sunday. He will meet senior military leadership of Australia with an aim of enhancing India's defence cooperation between the Armed Forces of the two nations. Giving details about his schedule, army officials said here on Sunday, Pande will interact with a host of senior military dignitaries from different services of the Australian Defence Forces.

He will call on the Chief of the Defence Force of Australia, the senior most Defence Officer of the nation.

Modi to inaugurate CBI's diamond jubilee celebrations today

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the diamond jubilee celebrations of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) at Vigyan Bhawan here on Monday.

During the programme, an investiture ceremony for recipients of President's Police Medal for Distinguished Service and Gold Medal for Best Investigating Officers of the CBI will be held wherein he will present medals to the recipients, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said in a statement.

The Prime Minister will also inaugurate the newly constructed office complexes of the CBI in Shillong, Pune and Nagpur.

To mark the occasion, Modi will release a postage stamp and a commemorative coin marking the diamond jubilee celebration year of the CBI.

The Prime Minister will also launch the agency's Twitter handle.

The CBI made its maiden appearance on Twitter in October last year during the General Assembly of Interpol when a handle with the coveted blue tick was launched to propagate information related to the event.

The CBI is the National Central Bureau for representation to the Interpol.

The CBI was established by a resolution of the Union Home Ministry dated April 1, 1963.

'NCLAT order in Android matter will resonate globally on abuse of dominance theme'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Appellate tribunal NCLAT's ruling in the Google matter will open the market for "free innovation" and will resonate as part of the global theme on abuse of dominance, Additional Solicitor General N Venkataraman has said.

Venkataraman, who led the legal battle on behalf of the Competition Commission of India (CCI) against Google in the Android matter, also asserted that the six directions of the regulator that were upheld by the NCLAT cover almost 99 per cent of the remedies re-



commended to address the unfair business ways.

"When abuse of dominance goes, it allows for free and fair market play for scientific development and innovation. There is more choice for startups, OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) and consumers. The status quo bias

will go. The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) order has set the foundation for the twin vision of Make In India and startup growth," Venkataraman told PTI in an interview here.

Ruling on Google's appeal against the CCI's order in October 2022, the NCLAT upheld the Rs 1,338 crore penalty on the Internet major for abusing its dominant position in the Android ecosystem as well as six remedies recommended by the fair trade regulator while four remedies were rejected.

Besides, the judgement will be a good match and will figure as an important development of competition law even globally. "This judgement will resonate as part of the global theme on abuse of dominance," Venkataraman said.

He also said the ruling will certainly sync with the vision of Startup, Standup, Make In India or AatmaNirbhar Bharat.

Amid reports that the NCLAT came as a partial relief for Google, Venkataraman said that out of the ten remedies, six were upheld by the appellate tribunal and that accounts for



98 per cent of the remedies.

"Today, they (Google) cannot pick and choose. That practice is gone... Therefore, an assumption that the CCI order has been upset, has been reshaped, it may not be a right understanding of the judgement," he said.

In its 189-page order, the NCLAT upheld six remedies suggested by the regulator, including that Google should allow users during the initial device setup to choose their default search engine and that OEMs cannot be forced to pre-install a bouquet of its apps.

sounds, with only low-frequency noises being heard. In contrast, incubators have many high-frequency noises and abrupt sounds, which can be harmful to babies. Despite recommended noise limits being in place, they are often exceeded, particularly when handling or opening incubators.

Dr. Matthias Bertsch from the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, a co-author of the study, explained: "Our study focused on various real-life noises and their levels as well as on their temporal characteristics, with two main purposes.

"Firstly, describing the NICU and incubator environment; secondly, providing awareness by presenting interactive material of real-life situations."

Common fund for Project Tiger, Project Elephant starting this financial year



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has merged the funds for two of the major animal conservation schemes in India — Project Tiger and Project Elephant — and states will be asked to send a common annual plan of operations starting this financial year, officials have said.

India is celebrating the completion of 50 years of Project Tiger and 30 years of Project Elephant this year.

The administrative setup for Project Tiger and Project Elephant will continue as it is. Only the funds will be provided under a common head. There will be only one Annual Plan of Operations for the two schemes against two APOs earlier, they said.

The decision will allow effective integration and efficient utilisation of resources, smoothen the process of disbursement of funds, save time and prevent duplicacy, a senior official in the environment ministry said.

"Eighty per cent of the area covered under two schemes is common. Overlapping happens due to the presence of tigers and elephants in the same habitats," one of the officials quoted above told PTI.

Govt may consider 0.3% fee to maintain UPI payment system, ensure financial viability: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government may consider a 0.3 per cent uniform digital payment facilitation fee to fund the infrastructure required for such transactions and also to ensure financial viability of the UPI payment system, suggested a study by IIT Bombay.

The facilitation fee of 0.3 per cent can generate around Rs 5,000 crore in 2023-24, said the study titled 'Charges for PPI-based UPI payments — The Deception'.

The study, which analyses the impact of the decision of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) to introduce interchange fee

on payments through mobile wallets, argued that the payments received by merchants should remain 'unpolluted' whether they are from UPI directly or through prepaid e-wallets.

The NPCI, with effect from April 1, 2023 introduced an interchange fee of 1.1 per cent on transaction amount for usage of prepaid payment instruments for making payments through UPI to merchants. These will apply on prepaid wallet-based UPI merchant transactions.

Rather than thrusting the operational expenses onto the merchants and creating a disparity, it should be borne by the prepaid wallet user, there-



by never introducing a situation similar to passive smoking.

This will keep all UPI-based payments received by merchants unpolluted and unburdened of merchant discount rate (MDR).

According to the IIT

Against this backdrop, the study made a case for introducing 0.3 per cent facilitation fee on digital payments which could generate as much as Rs 5,000 crore in fiscal 2023-24.

However, as per the present law no bank or system provider who operates UPI (unified payments interface) shall impose, whether directly or indirectly, any charge upon a person making or receiving a payment by using UPI as a mode of payment.

So bank account transaction and payment on same wallet is free as of now.

On more than one occasion, the banks and system providers had tried to interpret the UPI-Law in a way that

suited them. The players in the payment system are exploiting the merchants and all consumers by integrating an avoidable layer of cost to the pure payment system that exists in plain vanilla UPI, it said.

The thrust of prepaid wallet merchant discount rate (MDR) onto the merchants is so strong that it has become much easier for the merchants to succumb to the same and continue with their focused business prospects by considering such costs as overheads (thus building the same into the selling price), it said.

This inherently raises the purchase price for all consumers and thus hurts the

consumers more as they ultimately bear the convoluted cost of such payment system extravaganza, it added.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her latest Budget speech said "the economy has become a lot more formalised as reflected in the EPFO membership more than doubling to 27 crore, and 7,400 crore digital payments of Rs 126 lakh crore through UPI in 2022".

As per the report authored by Ashish Das, the government and RBI have been bearing significant costs on printing and management of currency.

Over the past few years they have spent, it said on an

average, Rs 5,400 crore annually on currency printing alone and even more on currency management.

The expenditure towards UPI may be much lower and could even curtail the expenditure on currency, it said, adding, a reduction in cash-cost burden must partly get channelized for furthering the UPI ecosystem.

Moving towards a solution, it said just like RBI in their books of account provisions for the cost of currency printing and management, it should also provision for bearing the costs associated with the management of the P2P and the offline P2M UPI infrastructure.

Rishra hit by fresh violence in Bengal

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Barely two days after the Shibpur communal riots in Howrah district on the Ramnavami day fresh violence broke out at Rishra barely 25 kms away from Shibpur.

Clashes broke out between two communities when a Ramnavami procession led by BJP's national vice president Dilip Ghosh was attacked at Rishra also in Howrah district.

Several vehicles were torched, bombs hurled and bricks pelted from both sides leaving several persons from both sides injured police said adding rapid action force was promptly deployed in the area.

Ghosh who was quickly whisked away by the central forces said, "Bombs were lobbed in front of my car and the police remained a spectator... Even now I can hear bombs exploding everywhere."

He said that women and



children taking part in the "sobha yatra" (procession) were targeted by a mob that came from nowhere and attacked from all sides.

"Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is just sitting idle and is allowing this to happen... Had she taken action in Shibpur today's incident would not have happened," Ghosh said adding despite police permission the administration did not care to make adequate

arrangements.

TMC Rajya Sabha MP Shantanu Sen reacted to Ghosh's allegations saying, "BJP which is losing toehold in Bengal is trying to gain back relevance igniting communal riots... But they will never succeed... The question is where was the need to take out a sobha yatra two days after Ramnavami and why they chose a particular route for this purpose?"

Kazipara, Shibpur limp back to normalcy after clashes

PTI ■ HOWRAH

Life in Howrah's Shibpur and Kazipara area, which witnessed clashes during a Ramnavami procession, is limping back to normalcy, a senior police officer said.

Markets were open and vehicles plied on roads on Sunday, even as prohibitory order was still in force, the police officer said.

Rapid Action Force (RAF) personnel conducted route marches for area domination as state CID officers continued their probe into Thursday's vandalism, the police officer said.

A decision to revoke the suspension of internet services in and around the area will be taken after evaluating the situation, he said.

"Things are normal and there was no incident of law and order concern in the last 24 hours. However, we will continue with the prohibitory order and a decision on lifting of internet service suspension will be taken later. Police



deployment will continue for the time being. We will not take any chance," the IPS officer told PTI. On Thursday evening, clashes broke out between two groups when a Ram Navami procession was passing through Kazipara in Howrah town.

Several shops were ransacked during the violence while a number of cars, including a few police vehicles, were set on fire.

Police personnel deployed in the area were pelted with stones on Friday afternoon following which prohibitory orders were imposed in the area and internet services were

suspended.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday alleged that the BJP and other right-wing organisations were behind the violence in Howrah's Kazipara area during a procession on Ram Navami.

The BJP denied the allegations of Banerjee and instead demanded an NIA probe into the matter.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday spoke to West Bengal Governor C V Ananda Bose over the violence during a Ram Navami procession in Howrah and took stock of the situation.

Shinde leads Savarkar Gaurav Yatra, slams Rahul, hails Modi

PTI ■ THANE

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Sunday led the 'Savarkar Gaurav Yatra' in his hometown Thane in which hundreds of people took part to honour late Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar.

The Bharatiya Janata Party and Shinde-led Shiv Sena had last month announced that Savarkar Gaurav Yatras would be taken out in each district of Maharashtra to honour Savarkar's contribution to the country and to counter Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's criticism against him.

On Sunday, the yatra participants, wearing saffron caps with 'Mi Savarkar' (I am Savarkar) and other messages written on them, paid floral tributes to Savarkar at the Ram Ganesh Gadkari Rangayatan auditorium in Thane city from where the yatra commenced.

On the culmination of the rally, addressing a gathering, Shinde slammed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for his repeated attacks on Savarkar and said insults to freedom

fighters was akin to insulting the nation. People are angry to see some forces trying to malign Hindutva by attacking Savarkar, Shinde said.

"We have noticed citizens expressing disappointment over some people consistently insulting Savarkar. An insult of Savarkar is the insult of every Indian. I openly condemn people like Rahul Gandhi for his tirade against Savarkar. I dare anyone to live a day in the Cellular Jail the way Savarkar was jailed," Shinde said.

Without taking names, he also swiped at Shiv Sena (UBT) Uddhav Thackeray.

"Balasaheb Thackeray had hit the effigy of Mani Shankar Aiyar once (for such remarks). Unfortunately, some people who claim Balasaheb Thackeray's legacy are now sitting with those (Congress) Rahul Gandhi) who have consistently attacked Savarkar," Shinde said.

Praising Narendra Modi, the chief minister said Hindutva was seen as an aggression against minorities, but the prime minister had brought back its glory post 2014.



Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde with supporters during the Savarkar Gaurav Yatra, organised by BJP and Shiv Sena, in Thane on Sunday

Kargil War hero dies in road accident near Leh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Subedar Major Tsewang Murop, a Kargil war hero and Vir Chakra awardee, died in a road accident near Leh on Saturday night, Army officials said.

Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande and all ranks of the Indian Army expressed condolences on the demise of Subedar Major Murop.

"Kargil war hero Subedar Major Tsewang Murop, Vir Chakra, lost his life in a road accident last night near Leh," said an Army official.

Commander of the Army's Leh-based Fire and Fury Corps Lt Gen Rashim Bali met



Murop's family, including his father Naib Subedar (retd) Chhering Mutup, and conveyed condolences on behalf of the Army.

Murop's father is an Ashok Chakra awardee.

The exact nature of the accident is not immediately known.

Shooting stones disrupt traffic on Jammu-Srinagar NH Commuters stranded

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

A large number of commuters travelling on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway were left stranded for several hours after random shooting stones near the recently opened T-5 tunnel disrupted the smooth flow of traffic on Sunday.

According to ground reports an army convoy was passing through one of the most vulnerable stretches near Panthyal in Ramban district when shooting stones started falling on the highway forcing the commuters to halt inside the tunnel.

Only two weeks ago the National Highways Authority of India had launched the 880 metre long T-5 tunnel bypassing the vulnerable stretch. Taking note of the first such episode



along the route Ramban Deputy Commissioner Mussarat Islam has asked the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to get the vulnerable zone technically assessed so that immediate protection measures are taken to protect the lives of passengers travelling on the highway - linking Kashmir with rest of the country.

In a communication to the NHAI, the Ramban deputy commissioner said the massive shooting stone activity near the mouth of South Portal of Tunnel T-5 (Tube 1) poses a grave risk to the commuters if no remedial measures are immediately taken.

"You are advised to get the vulnerable zone technically assessed so that immediate protection measures are taken to protect the lives of passengers travelling on the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway (now NH-44) as well as Tunnel T-5," Islam said.

He said the Panthyal stretch on NH-44 has brought huge respite to the travellers and also helped in better regulation of traffic in absence of jams.

Cong's second list of candidates after April 4 meeting, says Siddaramaiah

PTI ■ MYSURU

Senior Congress leader Siddaramaiah on Sunday said the second list of candidates for the May 10 Karnataka Assembly polls is likely to be announced after the crucial party meet on April 4.

Reiterating that the party high command has to take a call regarding his contesting from the second constituency of Kolar, the former Chief Minister said, it may be decided at the party's Central Election Committee meeting on April 4.

"Day-after-tomorrow there is a Central Election Committee meeting, after the meeting the second list will be released," Siddaramaiah said.

Responding to a reporter's question about him contesting from Kolar too, he said, "it has to be decided by the high command, they will decide day-after-tomorrow."



Congress had already announced its first list of 124 candidates on March 25, and is yet to announce the candidates for 100 more segments.

The party has fielded Siddaramaiah from his home turf of Varuna in Mysuru district in the first list, following which the Leader of Opposition in the state Assembly has expressed his intention to contest from the second seat of Kolar too, subject to approval of the high command.

According to reports, the Karnataka unit of the Congress has finalised single names for 52 Assembly constituencies in

the second list, and the Central Election Committee headed by AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge is likely to take a final call.

Noting that a candidate emerging victorious or losing is in the hands of the voters, the Congress Legislature Party leader, confident of his victory in Varuna said, irrespective of who the opponent candidate is, "I will not go to the constituency for campaigning other than for filing the nomination."

He said his son and the sitting Congress MLA from Varuna Yathindra Siddaramaiah will take care of his campaigning in the constituency, while he will be touring the state campaigning for the party.

There were speculations that state BJP strongman B S Yediyurappa's younger son B Y Vijayendra is likely to take on Siddaramaiah from Varuna.

Free electricity, jobs for all unemployed if AAP forms Govt in Assam: Kejriwal

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday promised free electricity and jobs for all youths in Assam if his Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is voted to power in the Northeastern state.

He also claimed the AAP government changed the face of Delhi in seven years, and that "nothing but dirty politics" took place in Assam, even though BJP has been in power in the state for the same duration.

AAP governments in Delhi and Punjab are giving free electricity to their states, and it will be the same in Assam, too, if the party forms government, Kejriwal said at a rally here.

He promised jobs for all unemployed youths of Assam if AAP is voted to power, adding that the party has given employment to 12 lakh people in Delhi in seven years, and 28,000 people in one year in



Punjab. Kejriwal also assured of providing piped water to all households of Guwahati within a year of the AAP government in the state.

"AAP came to power in Delhi in 2015 and the BJP here in 2016. Today, we have changed the face of Delhi. What has Himanta babu (Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma) done for the state in seven years? Nothing, only dirty politics," Kejriwal alleged.

Taking a jibe at Sarma for the private school being run by his wife, the Delhi CM said, "In a state where the CM's wife operates a private school, how can you expect the government to improve government schools?"

ISRO successfully achieves autonomous landing of space vehicle

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Indian Space Research Organisation on Sunday successfully conducted the Reusable Launch Vehicle Autonomous Landing Mission (RLV LEM).

The test was conducted at the Aeronautical Test Range (ATR), Chitradurga, Karnataka, the national agency headquartered here said.

"With that, ISRO successfully achieved the autonomous landing of a space vehicle", it said in a statement.

"With LEX, the dream of an Indian Reusable Launch Vehicle arrives one step closer to reality", ISRO said. In a first in the world, a winged body has been carried to an altitude of 4.5 km by a helicopter and released for carrying out an autonomous landing on a runway. RLV is essentially a space plane with a low



lift to drag ratio requiring an approach at high glide angles that necessitated a landing at high velocities of 350 kmph.

The RLV took off at 7:10 am IST by a Chinook Helicopter of the Indian Air Force (IAF) as an underslung load and flew to a height of 4.5 km (above Mean Sea Level).

Once the predetermined pillbox parameters were attained, based on the RLV's Mission Management Computer command, the RLV was released in mid-air, at a down range of 4.6 km.

'Examining' funds misuse in Kovind's visit to Kaziranga: Assam Govt

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The Assam Government on Sunday said it has directed an additional chief secretary to "examine" the alleged diversion of funds under tiger conservation and other projects to the visit of former President Ram Nath Kovind and his family to Kaziranga National Park.

Speaking to PTI, Environment and Forest Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary said the additional chief secretary of the forest and environment department Ravi Shankar Prasad has been directed to look after the allegation following a reply to a social activist under the Right to Information Act.

Patowary, however, declined to share further details and said other information will be shared once Prasad gives his opinion.

Woman Right-wing activist booked for 'hate speech', 50 detained after communal clash in Gujarat's Una

PTI ■ GIR SOMNATH

Police have registered a first information report (FIR) against a right-wing woman activist for her alleged hate speech and detained more than 50 people on the charge of rioting following a communal clash at Una town in Gujarat's Gir Somnath that left two persons injured, an official said on Sunday.

The communal clash erupted in a sensitive area of Una town on Saturday night with two groups hurling stones at each other amid tension caused by the speech of one Kajal Hindustani at a 'Hindu Sammelan' organised on the occasion of Ram Navami on Thursday, in which she allegedly targeted a minority community.

Man transporting cattle killed by cow vigilantes in K'taka

PTI ■ RAMANAGARA

A man was allegedly beaten to death and his two associates were assaulted by a group of cow vigilantes accusing them of transporting cattle illegally at Sathanur here, police sources said on Sunday.

According to sources, the incident took place on Friday night when the deceased Idrees Pasha and his two associates were transporting cattle.

AP techie burned to death over brother's alleged extra-marital affair; three accused on run

PTI ■ TIRUPATI

A 35-year-old software engineer was burned to death for attempting to resolve a dispute arising out of an alleged extra-marital affair that his brother was entangled in.

Nagaraju, who was working from home at Brahmanapalli village in Veduru Kuppam mandal of Chittoor District was set ablaze

in his own car allegedly by three people, namely Ripinjaya, Chanakya Pratap and Gopinath Reddy.

"Nagaraju's brother Purushottam is accused of having an extra-marital affair with Ripinjaya's wife, which led to disputes between them. To sort out these issues amicably, Nagaraju was mediating through Reddy," a police official said on Sunday.

Another case booked against suspended Telangana BJP MLA

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

A case has been registered against suspended BJP MLA T Raja Singh and others over alleged intent to provoke breach of peace, in connection with a speech that he delivered during a procession held as part of Ram Navami festival on March 30, Hyderabad Police said on Sunday.

The FIR has been registered against Raja Singh and others at Shahinayathgunj Police Station.

'Govt preparing law for adventure tourism safety'

PTI ■ SILIGURI

The government is coming out with a law for adventure tourism safety which will have provisions for constitution of state level safety bodies, penalties for violations and a requisite insurance scheme, a senior official said on Sunday.

The draft model law -- Adventure Tourism (Monitoring and Regulation Act) -- has been distributed to states and feedbacks have been filed by six states so far, the tourism ministry official said.

The states include Punjab, Uttarakhand and Tripura, he said. "Tourism is a state subject but through this legislation the Centre wants to give direction to the states to follow safety practices," he said.

Explaining the various facets of the draft, the official said it includes various provisions of constitution of adventure tourism safety division, penalties for violations and a requisite insurance.

The draft contains provision of the "Constitution of Adventure Tourism Safety Division" under the Directorate of Tourism by the state government.

It also has provisions for an "Annual Safety Audit and Physical Inspection" of the Adventure Activity Service Providers (land/water/air) and the setting up of mechanism by the Directorate of Tourism.

Under institutional framework, the draft also gives powers to the government to declare any area in the state to be an Adventure Tourism Area for the purpose of development, promotion, regulation and management of Adventure Tourism and related infrastructure and services.

J&K to adopt Kerala's 'Nadakkavu' model of modernising Govt schools

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Jammu and Kashmir government will soon adopt Kerala's 'Nadakkavu model' of modernising the government schools in the union territory.

The J&K government has signed an MoU with Kozhikode-based Faizal and

Shabna Foundation, which had introduced the Nadakkavu model. Over 1,200 government schools, mainly in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, have adopted the model within 10 years since its inception.

The model has also been introduced in a few schools in West Africa. "It will be first introduced in the Government Higher Secondary School for

Girls in Kothibagh, Srinagar. The objective is to establish the school as a centre of educational excellence that can serve as a blueprint for other schools throughout Jammu & Kashmir," the Foundation said in a release on Sunday.

Under the agreement, the Foundation will provide funding for the project and assume responsibility for its imple-

mentation including the holistic development of the school.

"The goal is to bring about excellence at all levels, providing equitable education especially for those from the bottom of the pyramid so that each child can come up to the potential they are capable of. The Foundation will also collaborate with esteemed Indian and

international institutions to conduct training programmes for the school's teaching staff and students," global head of the Foundation, Joseph Sebastian said.

The Faizal and Shabana Foundation was founded in 2007 by a UAE-based Keralite industrialist couple, Faizal E Kottikollon and his wife Shabana Faizal.

With the aim of promoting ordinary schools to international standards through multiple interventions, the couple modernised the infrastructure and uplifted the educational standard of the 130-year old Government Vocational Higher Secondary School for Girls at Nadakkavu in Kozhikode district in 2013, spending ₹ 20 crore.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Medieval methods

In their interrogation, our cops still depend heavily on torture, the brunt of which is borne by the poor

Our political masters continue to boast about progress made in the country—almost trying to take the credit for it—even though whatever good that happens is because of people and in spite of our leaders. For politicians have failed across the country in improving the police system; this results in enormous pain and misery to those who are at the bottom of the pyramid. Consider the case of a tribal girl from the village of Jopnala in Madhya Pradesh's Chhindwara district, Kanchan Uike, who went missing in June 2014 when she was 14 years old. On March 12, 2021, the then sub-divisional officer of police (SDOP), Santosh Deheria, submitted a 42-page charge-sheet to the judicial magistrate, asserting that she was murdered by her 54-year-old father Sannu Uike and her 18-year-old brother Sunny. The two men confessed to the "crime." The police even recovered a body, claiming it to be Kanchan's. Last week, however, she returned home, a mother of two children. She wasn't even aware that her father and brother were accused of her murder. SDOP Deheria offered a lame excuse: "The accused did confess. I do not know why they lied." Sannu Uike explained the 'why' to a newspaper reporter: "The police thrashed us to confess to a crime we never committed. We only signed the confession papers to protect ourselves from further torture. If they were to dig some more in that field, they will recover more bones because that is where we have always buried our dead."



It is unfortunate that after 75 years of Independence, investigation and interrogation continue to be carried out in the same manner as it was during British rule, with little regard to human rights and dignity, especially when the accused are the poor. It keeps happening all the time. In December last year, a case came to light in Uttar Pradesh where a young man was convicted of the rape and murder of a girl who was alive. In August 2022, there were reports that a young Dalit man was ruthlessly thrashed in a police station in Udaipur. A few days ago, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin ordered the suspension of an IPS officer who was accused of removing the teeth of six men who were arrested for their alleged involvement in an assault case. Assistant Superintendent of Police Balveer Singh is also accused of crushing the testicles of a man. One wonders if this is the 21st century in which India is aspiring to become a global power and emerge as a developed country, or the Mughal period when ordinary people were at the mercy of despotic officers and often subjected to brutal torture. Politicians of all parties wax lyrical about Dalits, tribals, etc.; they pretend that their hearts bleed for the unfortunate souls of the poor and they work ceaselessly to improve their lot. Unfortunately, our leaders' sincerity or endeavour has failed to improve policing in the country. Unsurprisingly, the poor continue to fear cops.

PICTALK



Devotees attend the annual car festival of Lord Srikanteshwara at the temple town of Nanjangud, Mysuru

PTI

AI is the future of interior design

AI is transforming the interior design industry. It is providing designers with new tools to enhance their creativity and productivity

From manually drawing design plans and layouts of space to working on software for the same task, interior design has come a long way, and now, with the advent of newer technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and data analytics, even working on software has become a convenient task. After incorporating itself in almost every sector, AI is here to leave a mark on the Interior design sector as well.

Imagination and creativity have always been the driving forces behind the interior design industry. However, as more recent technologies like artificial intelligence and data analytics have developed, designers can now use the strength of data-driven insights to boost their creativity. These technologies can enable designers to automate monotonous processes, produce design concepts fast, and obtain insights into client behaviour and preferences. These technologies are revolutionising the sector by giving designers additional tools to enhance their work's quality, effectiveness, and efficiency.



Here are a few contributions of technology that can help designers:

Changing the office landscape:

AI's ability to quickly develop design concepts is one of interior design's most important advantages. Using AI algorithms, designers can create various possibilities depending on criteria such as budget, available space, and style. This allows designers to focus on more important project areas, such as customer engagement and feedback, while saving significant time. For instance, AI algorithms can assist designers in locating unused regions and making recommendations for how to enhance them. This enhances the design's overall aesthetic appeal and the space's functionality.

Sensor-based entry exit: Incorporating AI in interior design today offers fea-

tures like facial recognition and sensor-based entry exit benefit, which can grant authorised people access to certain spaces. These face-recognition motion-sensitive cameras enable entry and exit without human intervention. These systems can detect unusual activity, alert potential intruders even from blurred backgrounds, and improve security.

Data Analytics:

Another technology that is revolutionising the interior design sector is data analytics. Design professionals can learn more about consumer behaviour, preferences, and trends using data analytics technologies. By studying this data, designers can create better design solutions that are suited to their client's needs. Data analytics can also assist designers in identifying market trends. As a result, designers may remain ahead of the curve and produce original and current ideas by researching market data. In the field of interior design, where trends can change quickly, this is especially crucial.

Sustainable designs: One of the significant

benefits of AI is sustainable interior design. AI algorithms may examine data from sensors and other smart appliances to find patterns in energy usage and pinpoint areas for improvement. For example, one can save energy and reduce utility costs by modifying lighting, heating, and ventilation systems. AI-powered tools are also assisting designers in producing sustainable designs. AI algorithms may also evaluate the layout of buildings and suggest how to maximise energy efficiency, for example, by utilising passive heating and cooling systems or adding natural light.

There is an inevitable trend of the internet era in interior design with an ever-closer integration of AI. As a result, the smart home has now become a family member. It also offers green and sustainable home space from an environmental standpoint. Designers can develop specialised solutions that meet their client's needs by utilising the power of AI.

(The writer is the managing director and CEO of Eleganz Interiors)



SAMMEER PAKVASA

Disrespecting India's sovereignty

The comments from the US Govt on an internal matter of India are uncalled for. India is an old democracy and knows how to deal with its internal issues



PRAFULL GORADIA

It is not unfortunate that the governments of the USA and Germany have commented on the compaction of Rahul Gandhi by a court of law in Surat, followed by his being disqualified from Parliament's membership? Crossing international borders to connect on happenings in another country is inappropriate diplomacy, to say the least. Not minding one's business is misbehaviour. To do this internationally is a violation of another country's sovereignty.

Germany is a very young democracy that took birth only after World War I, which is when the Weimar Republic came into being, before being shoved under by the Nazis. But American democracy is about two and a half centuries old. For the US State Department to make such a mistake is unforgivable, more so when its current President is going out of his way to laud India as an indispensable ally in Asia.

The first principle of democracy is to have deference for the views and feelings of others. Without this, democracy cannot endure. Democracy in modern times began when Runnymede, King John of England in 1215 AD signed the Magna Carta, establishing the concept of rule of law.

This meant that all citizens are equal before the law, which also means one citizen does not interfere in the affairs of another, unjustifiably. By the same token, one nation ought not to interfere in the affairs of another. This, in turn, means each country must respect the sovereignty of another. Otherwise, it is tantamount to opening a bottle having the scent of war. The victory in World War II showered hubris on the American establishment; they felt qualified to dictate policy to the world. In 1953, the independent Iranian government asked the Anlo-Iranian to audit their books through local auditors. The UK as well as the USA were offended by this order of the Iranian state and engineered a toppling of the nationalist government of Mohammed Mossadegh. The Western powers replaced him with the regime of Iran's monarchy of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. This regime had to survive solely on Anglo-



American support till 1979 when the Ayatollah Khomeini Revolution took place.

The next American intervention was in 1983 under President Ronald Reagan, under the pretext of protecting American nationals against a Marxist regime on that Caribbean Island. The USA has also intervened militarily in Korea and Vietnam to prevent the spread of communism. It intervened twice in Iraq in 1991 and then in 2003, overthrowing Saddam Hussein, another nationalist leader in the Arab world who had defied the Americans.

One can praise the United Kingdom for having systematically developed internal democracy. But when it came to the outside world, London adopted double standards. It treated Asia and Africa as free playing fields of its imperialist designs, which led to its rise as well as fall. Britain's leaders saw no wrong in invading, ruling and exploiting other countries with gay abandon. The results of this double standard are there for everyone to see today.

In contrast, is Germany. Not that it did not want any colonies but it failed to capture and hold any except Tanganyika for a while. Yet it achieved enough to become today the fourth largest econ-



THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF DEMOCRACY IS TO HAVE DEFERENCE FOR THE VIEWS AND FEELINGS OF OTHERS. WITHOUT THIS, DEMOCRACY CANNOT ENDURE

omy in the world. In great contrast, India has kept away from imperialistic adventures. It has itself been a victim of imperial adventures from the invasion of Mohammad bin Qasim in 712 AD to its independence from imperial Britain in 1947. Yet, it continues to stand on its own as the world's fifth-largest economy and the fastest-growing one.

India has known democracy since ancient times. Before the series of foreign invasions, there were several republics in ancient India; notably, the Sakyas, Koliyas, Vaishali, Ghratvikas, Mallas, Bhagyas, Kalamas and so on. However, what comes to mind the most is the very ancient Shurasena (on the federacy of Mathura and later Dwaraka, whose president, an elected one at that, was none other than Lord Krishna).

That Krishna was a historical figure is no longer in doubt. Dr Shobha Mukherji, who taught at Lucknow University, entitled *The Republican Trends in Ancient India*, published by Munshiram Manoharlal (1969), has substantiated the historicity of Krishna millennia ago. Dr Mukherji has traced the history of ancient Indian republics that co-existed with large, straddling

empires though not always happily, and that of the Shurasena Confederacy, as the Yadava republic was known. Republican Trends in Ancient India has ample historical references to the existence of smaller, self-governing republics in Krishna's time and the later periods of Indian history. Krishna's leadership of his people and the existence of the Andhakas and Vrishnis (Krishna's sub-tribe) after his era are historical facts too, borne out by research in this book, which also provides a glimpse into the republican ideas on governance and statecraft.

It is difficult to overlook American history and President James Monroe's Monroe Doctrine. This theory declared that the New World or the Americas was an American garden, which could be tended only by the USA. No country from the Old World, i.e., Europe, should interfere. If and when repairs were required to the fences of any part of the garden, meaning any country in the New World, it was America's right to do so.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'IMPACT PLAYER' IS WELCOME

Sir — The "Impact player" (rule) introduced by BCCI in IPL T20 cricket - 2023 is balanced. Though it implies a team has 12 players, actually playing will be only 11. A substitute can not just field but can also bat and ball. We request the ICC and BCCI to coordinate well and introduce the same in international matches too, (at least on injury) ... in all the (3) formats (Tests, ODI, T20).

A substitute just for finding does not sound balanced. (That indirectly implies "playing only 10" by a team for batting and bowling, when a player gets injured). In IPL, A team will have 5 substitutes to choose from with the condition that all 5 have to be Indian and the substitution can only be made before the start of innings/ at the end of an over/ when a wicket falls.

PV Srinivasa Sreelekha | Secunderabad

TRUMP INDICTED

Sir — It refers to "Trump indicted for hush money to a porn star". It is an unprecedented legal case that has the potential to change the American political landscape, as Donald Trump has become the first former US President to be indicted. It is an unsaid law in the USA that even former Presidents are accorded the same level of immunity as incumbents, but then Trump is no ordinary former President, he has not faded into twilight after his first term, rather he is eyeing a second term in 2024.

Since the prosecutor in this hush money case is a Democrat and black so all kinds of political blame would be charged against the lawyer by Trump and his supporters. But the problem with Trump is even if he navigates through this crisis, a few other cases of subverting 2020 elections, and financial fraud are in the process to be filed against him. One thing is certain this indictment will test American democracy as it faces its biggest challenge since Watergate in 1972. President Nixon then

Rahul did not remove Savarkar tweet



As per the report, the Twitter user shared a post claiming Rahul Gandhi deleted his tweets on Savarkar after his grandson Ranjit Savarkar threatened to file an FIR against the Congress leader. In its investigation, the fact checks by the PTI desk found that Gandhi did not delete posts on Savarkar on his Twitter handle. The claim shared in the social media post was false and fake. The claim was made amid Gandhi facing a backlash from several political parties and leaders over his recent

remarks against Savarkar. After being sentenced to two years in jail by a Surat court for his "Modi surname" remark, Rahul Gandhi had said: "My name is not Savarkar. My name is Gandhi."

And the Gandhis don't apologize." Savarkar's grandson Ranjit on March 27 lashed out at the Congress leader, saying that he would file an FIR against him for making baseless remarks and defaming his grandfather if he didn't apologize. The Desk then checked Rahul Gandhi's Twitter activities on a website named Social Blade. Social Blade gives all users access to our public database, which, using advanced technology, can provide you with global analytics for any content creator on a platform like Twitter. While scanning the website, the Desk found that Rahul Gandhi's total tweet count went up between March 27 (the day Ranjit Savarkar threatened to file an FIR) and Mar 30 (the day of publishing this article) three tweets. This Twitter report in the social circle was fake, bogus and false.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

chose to quit; Trump is anything but Nixon.

Bal Govind | Noida

SEDITION LAW STRUCK DOWN

Sir — The good news from neighbouring Pakistan is that the Lahore High Court on Thursday struck down the provisions of Section 124A of the Pakistan Penal Code, also known as the "sedition law". According to the sedition law, it was criminal act to criticize the government and the state. It was contrary to the fundamental rights of citizens protected in the constitution. In India, the term "sedition" was removed from the Constitution when it was adopted on November 26, 1949 and Article 19 (1) (a) guaranteed absolute freedom of speech and expression.

But regarding 124 A, no one from the government corridor dared to end

it. Because this is the government weapon that is used against opponents, critics, and dissidents and the government plays the game of strengthening its hold on power. Just like the British used to play before 1947.

When the matter reached our Supreme Court, it ordered the Indian authorities in May last year to temporarily refrain from using the sedition law and stop all pending trials, appeals and proceedings. This means the court did not abolish this law, but paused it operation temporarily and kept it on hold. Can't this inhuman and humiliating law be repealed in India like the Lahore High Court did?

Jayanthi Subramaniam | Coimbatore

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE WITH URGENCY

The poor people have to suffer the most as they are more vulnerable to climate change



BISHAL KUMAR SAHA

The world is in grave danger of exceeding the accepted threshold of global warming. The target of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels is only a few tenths of a degree away. It implies that the world will surpass the target within a decade. According to the recently released report of IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), it is still possible to stay within 1.5 degrees Celsius, but it all depends on government actions in the upcoming few years to keep greenhouse gas emissions within permissible limits so that temperatures fall back to safe levels, instead of rising alarmingly. The study places a strong emphasis on human efforts to deal with the situation. It says just as human activity has warmed the atmosphere, in the same way, it's human action that can bring temperatures down. It signifies the target of reducing carbon pollution and fossil fuel usage by approximately two-thirds by 2035 to keep greenhouse emissions under certain limits. This means that by 2040, rich countries must end their dependency on



coal, oil and gas and, in parallel, need to switch towards renewable alternatives of energy that are not only eco-friendly but also economically viable to use. The efforts made by IPCC scientists have worked out in enlightening the world about the fact that climate change affects more than just temperature rise, ice melt and sea level rise; in addition, it causes human catastrophes and makes life on earth intolerable due to water crisis, food insecurity, increased mortality rates, higher disease transmission and displaced population.

The damage is severe, and the poor people have to suffer the most as they have limited resources to protect themselves from the adverse effects of climate change. Almost half of humanity is now constrained to live in the extremely harsh conditions of climate change. It would be fatal to consider the report lightly and neglect it as a pedagogical exercise. Even if it may seem challenging to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, taking an ostrich-like approach and acting as though little harm would result would be catastrophic for humanity. Rather, it only speeds up the process of destruction. It is immensely significant that every nation, irrespective of its socio-economic stature, must shoulder its part of the responsibility for collectively mitigating greenhouse emissions.

This can be achieved by lowering the use of fossil fuels to a certain level, which accounts for 80 per cent of CO2 emissions. The world witnesses covid catastrophe, global warming, climate change and many other adversities which are more than enough to consider the need to redefine the parameters of development by protecting human and environmental security on top of every other aspect. The core objective of every global leader in several summits and conferences should be to focus on maintaining ecological balance, adaptability and environmental health rather than making economic wealth.

The developed countries have ample money and advanced technology to stop the planet from burning up, yet climate financing has been woefully insufficient. As per estimates of the IPCC, the investment made to deal with climate change mitigation and adaptation is three to six times less than the need to achieve the goal of limiting temperature rises to 1.5 degrees C. Investment of trillions of dollars is required to keep the planet inhabitable for not only humans but also for the coexistence of biodiversity.

(The writer is a postgraduate from the Central University of Punjab with a keen interest in the environment and sustainable development)

Wildlife management needs new approach



VK BAHUGUNA

In the recent times, there have been many challenges in managing the wildlife. A fresh innovative approach is required to manage the life on the planet



India supports a great variety of wildlife though it has only 2.2 per cent of the world's geographic area. It has more than 7% of the world's mammal population and around 12.5 per cent of the Bird population. We have around 92,000 species of faunal biodiversity of which insects are alone more than 61,000 species. There are still huge numbers of faunas yet to be discovered and listed. Indian forests are thus unmatched in the variety of wildlife and the recent introduction of the Cheetah (which went extinct in the early fifties due to indiscriminate hunting) from Africa last year completes the uniqueness of our variety in wildlife as no country has the same amount of rich variety both in terms of flora and fauna.

India have the majestic lions, tigers, leopards and elephants, gaurs, and rhinoceros as the gigantic wild sheep of the Himalayas, the swamp deer, the spotted deer, the four-horned antelope, the Indian antelope or black-buck, we have crocodiles and gharials and dolphins. In the desert area, we have the great Indian bustard and snow leopard in cold desert areas to mention the richness of our wildlife.

This variety of richness in our wildlife is primarily due to the diverse landscapes and rich natural forests found in different agro-climatic conditions and the role played by the strength of our civilization, religious beliefs and culture which recognizes the right of life for all animals and plants so much so that majority of Gods in Hindu religions are associated with animals in one form or the other. The protection and conservation of wildlife was given due importance despite the rising population leading to the stabilization of the life support systems in ecosystems in the wild.

For protection and conservation, we have the Wildlife Protection Act 1972, Indian Forest Act 1927, Forest Conservation Act 1980 and the



WE NEED TO MEET THE TARGETS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION ALONG WITH GENERATING INCOME FOR THE LOCAL FOREST-DEPENDENT PEOPLE AS WELL AS FOR THE GOVERNMENT

(The writer is the former Director-General of ICFRE, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change)

Environment Protection Act 1986. India has a network of 998 Protected Areas including 106 National Parks, 567 Wildlife Sanctuaries, 105 Conservation Reserves and 220 Community Reserves covering a total of 1,736 million ha of the geographical area of the country constituting approximately 5.28% of the geographic area. Notwithstanding this positive framework of success and management, there have been increasing conflicts and serious management challenges reported which need to be tackled for better future management and stability of life-sustaining resources.

However, no organizations or systems can live on their laurels and the Indian Forests and wildlife conservation is also at a cross road now amid threat from climate change, smugglers and poachers, unregulated tourism, site-specific deforestation, population pressure and demand for land for developmental purposes, particularly for mining as the forest and mineral map of India overlap.

Classical forest management does not stand manipulation. However the habitat management has replaced it which lays more stress on micro and macro habitat management for all kinds of flora and fauna in a given piece of forest land.

In the past, all good foresters and wildlife managers were the best territorial habitat managers who evolved the management environment for each animal like Tigers or Elephants or all kinds of predatory or prey animals.

As time passed forester's jobs increased and there was a need for more specialization and diversifi-

cation of activities. Now foresters need to shift focus from big cats and elephants to other wild forms like beetles, butterflies etc to conserve and use these genetic resources for our health and other benefits.

Since now there is more diversification in the forest department's job profile, we need to do justice to the different wings we have created. It needs money along with the will to do so. But with little planning forest have enough that can be used for its own sustainability. For example, Europe and other Western nations like the USA have been selling their landscape beauty efficiently to garner jobs as well as revenue through tourism activities. In India, though we have diverse landscape and unmatched beauty, we are yet to achieve anything substantial to market our landscape beauty and the variety of wildlife though there are a few good examples of Eco-tourism sites like Jungle and Lodges Corporation in Karnataka and a few wildlife spots like Kanha, Corbett etc. but a lot is desired to be done.

Then there is a need to promote agro-forestry in a big way so that we not only meet the national target of achieving forest and tree cover over 33 per cent of our landmass and also meet the international commitments of mitigation of Climate change in bringing more areas under tree cover. Similarly, ecotourism and medicinal plants have a vast potential for rural income generation especially for enhancing the income of farmers.

The forest administration controls over 23 % of our geograph-

ical area and we need to meet the targets of environmental conservation along with generating income for the local forest-dependent rural people/ tribal as well as for the government. There is a need to review the functioning of the forest and wildlife sector with an open mind and take bold steps for reforms. The Indian Forest Service (IFS) should be revamped and the forest officers should be trusted and given full responsibility at the policy levels to man the forestry sector activities.

At the government of India level, the Forest and Wildlife Secretary should be an IFS officer by designating DG Forests as Secretary. This is a long pending decision buried in the files and the Prime Minister needs to take initiative for this. There should be six wings at the Centre as well as in the States i.e. Forest, Wildlife, Tribal interface, Agro-forestry, Ecotourism and Non-Timber Forest Products to focus on each segment to generate wealth and strengthen ecosystems.

These suggestion may look radical but it is the need of the time. If implemented with perseverance, decisive thrust at the top level and in a planned manner the results will be great.

In bureaucracy, indecisiveness prevails which hampers the innovative approach.

A classic example is the failure of the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) to meet the objectives for which it was created with great fanfare by Mr TN Seshan a visionary Secretary. It is yet to be converted as a department on the pattern of ICAR and CSIR as envisaged in the Cabinet approval in 1991.

Make water and sanitation the top priority

Access to water and sanitation is a human right. A well-managed water cycle is essential for the success of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

In 2015, the world committed to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 as part of the 2030 Agenda - the promise that everyone would have safely managed water and sanitation by 2030. Right now, we are seriously off-track. Across the world, billions of people are still living without safely managed water and sanitation. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 is to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030. Achieving SDG 6 is integral to the success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims to end extreme poverty and protect the planet.

Water and sanitation flow through every aspect of sus-



SUNIL GOYAL



DIMPLE KHOKHAR

(Sunil Goyal is a Professor, Dean and Chairman of - the Board of Studies, Dr BR Ambedkar University of Social Sciences, MP and Dimple Khokhar is a Research Scholar)

tainable development. Access to these essential services is a human right. A well-managed water cycle is critical to human society and the integrity of the natural environment. Access to water and sanitation is a human right. A well-managed water cycle underpins progress across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly regarding hunger, gender equity, health, education, livelihoods, sustainability and ecosystems.

Water is also at the heart of adaptation to climate change. Without proper water governance, there is likely to be increased competition for water between sectors and an escalation of water crises of various kinds, triggering emergencies in a range of

water-dependent sectors. The physical world of water is closely bound up with the socio-political world, with water often a key factor in managing risks such as famine, epidemics, inequalities and political instability.

Globally 3.6 billion people lack access to safely managed sanitation services. The World Bank helps countries address the sanitation challenges: ending open defecation, improving service delivery, and closing the loop from access to sanitation facilities to sustainable management of wastewater. Almost 8% of the global population practices open defecation. Despite significant gains - 2.4 billion people gained access to improved toilets or latrines between

2000 and 2020 - sanitation was one of the most off-track Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) globally.

Today, 1.7 billion people still lack even basic services. Among those, 580 million shared improved sanitation facilities with other households, counted as "limited" services and 616 million used "unimproved" facilities. The data reveal pronounced disparities, with two-thirds of people who still lacked even basic services living in rural areas. Nearly half of them lived in sub-Saharan Africa. The world missed the MDG target for sanitation by almost 700 million people.

In addition to the challenges of providing many millions of rural households

with adequate sanitation, the world continues to urbanize, and cities and small towns will increasingly bear the burden of poor sanitation - with an estimated 57% of urban dwellers lacking access to toilets that provide a full sanitation service, 16% of urban dwellers lacking access to basic sanitation services, and almost 100 million urban residents practising open defecation.

The benefits of tackling the challenges of sanitation are manifold. Improved sanitation leads to lower disease burden, improved nutrition, reduced stunting, improved quality of life, increased attendance of girls at school, healthier living environments, better environmental stewardship, increased job oppor-

tunities and wages, improved competitiveness of cities, and economic and social gains to society more broadly.

Ending open defecation can save children's lives by reducing disease transmission, stunting, and undernutrition, which are important for childhood cognitive development and future economic productivity. A lack of sanitation also holds back economic growth. The economic losses are mainly driven by premature deaths, the cost of health care, and lost time and productivity finding access to sanitation facilities. It must be our top priority to achieve SDG 6. The policy decisions to make water accessible to all and provide sanitation can go a long way in alleviating poverty in rural areas. Though

the World Bank Group (WBG) has been addressing water and sanitation issues globally with large-scale finance and technical assistance to countries across the world, it is for the countries to take a lead now. With its impact on so many aspects of human and economic development, sanitation will be one of the key drivers to ending extreme poverty by 2030. It is time to take innovative approaches to help meet the sanitation challenges of ending open defecation and improving service delivery. Another tenet of the strategy to expand access to sanitation - in both urban and rural locations - is the recognition that private sector participation will be key in helping us meet the needs of all citizens.

War-crimes warrant against Putin could complicate Ukraine peace

AP ■ THE HAGUE

An international arrest warrant for President Vladimir Putin raises the prospect of the man whose country invaded Ukraine facing justice, but it complicates efforts to end that war in peace talks. Both justice and peace appear to be only remote possibilities today, and the conflicting relationship between the two is a quandary at the heart of a March 17 decision by the International Criminal Court to seek the Russian leader's arrest.



Putin sitting in a Hague courtroom seems now, other leaders have faced justice in international courts. Former Serbian strongman Slobodan Milosevic, a driving force behind the Balkan wars of the 1990s, went on trial for war crimes, including geno-

cide, at a United Nations tribunal in The Hague after he lost power. He died in his cell in 2006 before a verdict could be reached.

Serbia, which wants European Union membership but has maintained close ties to Russia, is one of the countries that has criticised the ICC's action. The warrants "will have bad political consequences" and create "a great reluctance to talk about peace (and) about truth" in Ukraine, populist Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic said.

Others see consequences for Putin, and for anyone judged guilty of war crimes, as the primary desired outcome of international action. "There will be no escape for the perpetrator and his henchmen," European Union leader Ursula von der Leyen said on Friday in a speech to mark the one-year anniversary of the liberation of Bucha, the Ukraine

town that saw some of the worst atrocities in the war. "War criminals will be held accountable for their deeds." Hungary did not join the other 26 EU members in signing a resolution in support of the ICC warrant for Putin. The government's chief of staff, Gergely Gulyas, said Hungarian authorities would not arrest Putin if he were to enter the country.

He called the warrants "not the most fortunate because they lead toward escalation and not toward peace." Putin appears to have a strong grip on power, and some analysts suspect the warrant hanging over him could provide an incentive to prolong the fighting. "The arrest warrant for Putin might undermine efforts to reach a peace deal in Ukraine," Krcmaric, an associate professor at Northwestern University, said.

Ukrainian official offers plan for a Crimea without Russia

AP ■ KYIV

A top Ukrainian official on Sunday outlined a series of steps the government in Kyiv would take after the country reclaims control of Crimea, including dismantling the strategic bridge that links the Black Sea peninsula to Russia. Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, published the plan as Ukraine's military prepares for a spring counteroffensive in hopes of making new, decisive gains after more than 13 months of war to end Russia's full-scale invasion. Moscow annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, but most of the world does not recognize it as Russian territory. The peninsula's future status will be a key feature in any negotiations on ending the current fighting.

The Kremlin has demanded that Ukraine recognise Russia's sovereignty over Crimea and acknowledge other land gains made by Moscow as a condition for peace. Kyiv has ruled out any peace talks with Moscow until Russian troops leave all occupied territories, including Crimea.

Danilov suggested prosecuting Ukrainians who worked for the Moscow-appointed administration in Crimea, adding that some would face criminal charges and others would lose government pensions be banned from public jobs.

All Russian citizens who moved to Crimea after 2014 should be expelled, and all real estate deals made under Russian rule nullified, Danilov wrote on Facebook. As part of the plan, he also called for dismantling a 19-kilometer (12-mile) bridge that Russia built to Crimea. A truck bomb severely damaged the bridge, Europe's longest, in October. Moscow blamed Ukrainian military intelligence for the attack.

Russia has repaired the damaged section of the bridge and restored the flow of supplies to Crimea, which has served as a key hub for the Russian military during the war. Ukraine did not claim responsibility for the bomb, but Ukrainian officials had repeatedly threatened to strike the bridge in the past. Danilov also argued for renaming the city of Sevastopol, which has been the main base for the Russian Black Sea

Fleet since the 19th century. He said it could be called Object No. 6 before the Ukrainian parliaments chooses another name, suggesting Akhtiar after a village that once stood where the city is now. The Moscow-appointed head of Sevastopol, Mikhail Razvozhayev, shrugged off Danilov's plan as "sick."

"It would be wrong to seriously treat comments by sick people. They must be cured, and that's what our military is doing now," Razvozhayev told the Russian state news agency Tass. Danilov published his plan as Ukrainian troops prepared to use newly supplied Western weapons, including dozens of battle tanks, to break through Russian defenses and reclaim occupied areas in a counteroffensive expected as early as this month. Russian troops are trying to capture the key Ukrainian stronghold of Bakhmut as part of their efforts to take all of Donetsk province, which is part of Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland of the Donbas. The 8-month campaign for Bakhmut is the longest and potentially deadliest battle of the war.

Finns vote in tight election; young leader seeks re-poll

AP ■ HELSINKI

Three parties were expected to be in a tight race as Finland held its general election on Sunday, with Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Social Democrats fighting to secure a second term running the government. Over 2,400 candidates from 22 parties were vying for the 200 seats in the Nordic country's parliament, the Eduskunta. Some 40 per cent of eligible voters cast their ballots in advance. Marin, who at age 37 is one of Europe's youngest leaders, has received praise for her cabinet's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and for her prominent role, along with President Sauli Niinisto, in advocating for Finland's successful application to join NATO. Her vocal support of Ukraine in the last year has increased her international visibility. "Of course we hope that the Social Democrats will win this election ... It's so important because we want to stay an open society. We also



want to work together internationally. We want to build a better green sustainable future where people have the same opportunities in life," Marin told the Associated Press while campaigning Saturday in central Helsinki.

Marin remains popular at home but her party's views on the Finnish economy, which emerged as the main campaign theme, were being challenged by two main opponents: the centre-right National Coalition Party led by Petteri Orpo and the right-wing populist The Finns party,

which is led by Riikka Purra. "The most important thing in the next government is to fix our economy, push economic growth, balance public economy. And the second very important issue is to build up NATO-Finland," Orpo told the AP during a campaign event in Espoo, just outside the capital, on Saturday. Riikka Purra stressed that the The Finns would focus on shaping Finland's migration, climate, criminal and energy policies if the populist party become a partner in the next government.

Bajwa pressurised me to develop friendly ties with India: Khan

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's ousted prime minister Imran Khan has claimed that the then Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa had put pressure on him to develop friendly ties with India. Relations between India and Pakistan have often been strained over the Kashmir issue and cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan. However, their ties nose-dived after India abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution, revoking the special status of Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcating the State into two Union Territories on August 5, 2019.

"Gen Bajwa wanted me to develop friendly ties with India. He put pressure on me for this and it was one of the reasons our relationship deteriorated," Khan claimed during an interaction with social media journalists at his Lahore's Zaman Park residence on Saturday evening. He, however, reiterated his stance that Pakistan should only hold peace talks with India provided



New Delhi restores the special status of Jammu and Kashmir.

India has repeatedly told Pakistan that it desires normal neighbourly relations with Islamabad in an environment free of terror, hostility and violence.

The 70-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman further said what Gen (ret.) Bajwa did to Pakistan even an enemy couldn't do. "Bajwa should be held accountable by the army," he said. Khan in the past accused Bajwa of not only toppling his country that laid a foundation of economic disaster but also committing atrocities against him, his party members and journalists.

'Pak to place order for Russian oil next month'

Islamabad (PTI): Cash-strapped Pakistan plans to place its first order for Russian crude oil next month and it will take about four weeks for the commodity to reach the country, Minister of State for Petroleum Musadik Malik said. Pakistan, which is currently grappling with high external debt and a weak local currency, is desperate to purchase cheap crude at discounted rates from Russia. Finance Minister Ishaq Dar last year said that the country was considering buying discounted Russian oil, pointing out that neighbour India had been purchasing oil from Moscow and Islamabad also had a right to explore the possibility, Dawn news reported. Subsequently, Malik travelled to Moscow for talks on issues including oil and gas supplies after which the gov-

ernment announced that it would purchase discounted crude oil, petrol, and diesel from Russia. In December last year, Russia refused to provide Pakistan with a 30 per cent discount on its crude oil after the Pakistani delegation asked for a reduction in price. A Russian delegation in January arrived here for talks to finalise the deal, during which the two sides decided to address all technical issues — insurance, transportation and payment mechanism — to sign an agreement by late March. "After consensus on the technical specifications achieved, the oil and gas trade transaction will be structured in a way it has a mutual economic benefit for both countries," a joint statement issued by the two sides during the three-day meeting then stated.

'Nepal seeks to sign power deal with India during Prachanda's visit'

Kathmandu (PTI): Nepal is keen to sign a 25-year agreement with India on selling its surplus power to the neighbouring country during Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda's expected visit to New Delhi. Though the official date of Prachanda's visit to India is yet to be announced, the Kathmandu Post newspaper, quoting Nepali officials, reported on Sunday that the prime minister is likely to travel to New Delhi after the second week of April.

However, the two sides have yet to announce the dates, it said. "We are preparing a proposal for the Indian side on the 25-year agreement. But a lot also depends on whether the Indian side agrees to include our proposal in the agenda," the report quoted a senior official at the energy ministry as saying. Dinesh Ghimire, secretary at the ministry, said the issue of the long-term inter-governmental agreement was under discussion at the ministry but was yet to be forwarded to Nepal's foreign ministry to make it an agenda item ahead of the prime minister's trip. He said such an agreement can be signed only if the Indian side gives its nod at the bureaucratic level before Prachanda reaches New Delhi, the report said.

Nepal proposed such a deal during the 10th secretary-level meeting of the Joint Steering Committee (JSC) on Energy Cooperation in India in late February. "During the meeting, it was decided that Nepal would make a proposal which India would examine," said Prabal Adhikari, power trade director at the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA), who was also in the Nepali delegation. At the JSC meeting in Mount Abu, Rajasthan in February, Nepal and India inked an agreement to increase the power import and export capacity through the Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur transmission line from 600 megawatts to 800 megawatts. An agreement to import and export 70 to 80 MW of electricity from Tanakpur-Mahendranagar 132 KV (kilovolt) power transmission was also signed between the two sides.

Blinken urges Russia to free US detainees

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged his Russian counterpart, in a rare phone since the Ukraine war, to immediately release a Wall Street Journal reporter who was detained last week as well as another imprisoned American, Paul Whelan, the State Department said Sunday.

In the call with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Blinken conveyed "grave concern" over the Kremlin's detention of journalist Evan Gershkovich on espionage allegations, according to a State Department summary of the call. Blinken called for his immediate release. Blinken also sought the immediate release of Whelan, whom the statement said was wrongfully detained. Whelan, a Michigan corporate security executive, has been imprisoned in Russia since December 2018 on espionage charges that his family and the US government have said are baseless.

UK seeks to contact 3 British men detained in Afghanistan

London (AP) The UK government is seeking to make contact with three British nationals detained by the Taliban in Afghanistan, authorities said on Sunday.

The three men include a charity worker, a thrill-seeking tourist and a third person whose family has asked that he not be identified, according to the Presidium Network, a British charity that works in conflict zones and is representing the families of two of the detainees. The Mail on Sunday newspaper first reported the story.

"We are working hard to secure consular contact with British nationals detained in Afghanistan, and we are supporting families," Britain's Foreign Office said in a statement.

The British government warns against all travel to Afghanistan, saying that there is a heightened risk of terrorism, kidnapping and detention by government authorities. Britain's

ability to provide consular support for detainees is "extremely limited" as the country has no consular officials in the country, according to travel advice updated on March 22.

The Taliban did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Presidium is working on behalf of charity medic Kevin Cornwell, 53, and a British man who manages a hotel for aid workers in the capital, Kabul, said Scott Richards, one of the group's co-founders. Both men have been detained by the Taliban's intelligence service since early January, but Presidium believes they are in good health and being well treated, Richards said.

Afghan security services, possibly acting on a tip, accused Cornwell of having an illegal firearm, Richards said. But Presidium said the Ministry of Interior had issued a license for the weapon, which was stored in a safe and intended only for emergency use, Richards said.

"We call it a misunderstanding, he said. In the course of their work, Presidium officials became aware that a third Briton, the so-called "danger tourist" Miles Routledge, 23, had also been detained. The group does not represent Routledge and has no detailed information about his case, Richards said.

Routledge boasts to his followers online that he travels "to the most dangerous places on Earth for fun." His last tweet was posted on February 27. The Foreign Office didn't confirm the identities of the detainees. British Home Secretary Suella Braverman suggested on Sunday that the government was "in negotiations" regarding the three men, though she offered little detail. "If there are risks to people's safety, if there are British citizens abroad then the UK government is going to do whatever it takes to ensure that they're safe," she said in an interview with Sky News.

Japan protests China's detention of citizen, maritime action

Tokyo (AP): Japan's Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi protested in a meeting on Sunday with his Chinese counterpart the detention of a Japanese national in Beijing and raised "strong concern" about China's escalating military activity near Taiwan and around Japan.

Hayashi is making a two-day visit in China, becoming Japan's first diplomat to make the trip in more than three years as frictions grow between the countries. He was also due to meet Chinese Premier Li Qiang and top diplomat Wang Yi later on Sunday. During his talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang, Hayashi demanded an early release of an employee of the Japanese pharmaceutical company Astellas Pharma, who was detained in Beijing last month over what the Chinese Foreign Ministry described as spying allegations. Neither side has offered further details about the man or the allegations against him.

Hayashi told reporters he also raised "serious concern" about China's increasingly assertive maritime activity in the East and South China seas, and stressed the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.

Hayashi said he told Qin that their countries have the possibility of improved cooperation in economic, cultural and people exchanges, but also face "many problems and serious concerns" and that "Japan-China relations are currently at

an extremely important phase".

The two ministers agreed to work together in achieving "a constructive and stable relationship" as agreed between their leaders in November, Hayashi said. The sides agreed to improve communication in regional security, and welcomed the establishment of a defense hotline last week and the resumption of defense talks, Hayashi said.

Despite close economic and business ties between the two Asian powers, Tokyo and Beijing have been increasingly at odds in recent years as Japan considers China's growing influence in the region a threat to its security and economy. Qin meanwhile warned against Japanese involvement in issues related to Taiwan, the self-ruled island that China claims as its own, saying Tokyo should not interfere and "undermine China's sovereignty in any way", according to a statement from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Using strong language, Qin said "the Taiwan issue is at the core of China's core interests and concerns the political foundation of China-Japan relations." Japan does not formally recognize Taiwan, but has strong unofficial ties with the island. It has been making statements of concern about regional stability in the Taiwan Strait and sent several prominent parliamentary delegations to Taipei.



Transgender and queer youth advocates from Queer Youth Assemble lead a march on Transgender Day of Visibility in Washington, D.C. on this Friday supported by the Human Rights Campaign and joined by more than 1,000 people. AP/PTI

China urges Japan not to back US tech restriction

PTI ■ BEIJING

Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang on Sunday urged his Japanese counterpart Yoshimasa Hayashi not to "help a villain do evil" by backing the US tech restrictions against Beijing as the two ministers held rare talks here amid China's increasing criticism against Tokyo's backing for Washington-led Indo-Pacific strategy.

The United States "used bullying tactics to brutally suppress the Japanese semiconductor industry, and now it is repeating its old tricks against China", Qin told Hayashi. "Japan has suffered that pain, and should not help a villain do evil. The containment will only further stimulate China's determination to

become self-reliant," Qin said, according to the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post.

The talks between the two ministers took place two days after Japan announced it would restrict semiconductor equipment exports from July, following months of lobbying by the US. The two countries should "overcome obstacles and move forward", Qin said, adding that "clique-forming" and containment was "not helpful" to managing conflicts, in an apparent reference to Japan's backing for the Indo-Pacific strategy.

China opposes the Quad comprising the US, India, Japan and Australia, saying that it is aimed to contain its rise. "Peaceful coexistence and friendly cooperation are

the only correct choices for China-Japan relations," he said.

"In the face of contradictions and differences, forming cliques, exerting pressure through rhetoric will not help solve the problem, but will only deepen the estrangement between each other," he said. "(We) hope that Japan will establish a correct understanding of China, show political wisdom and responsibility, and work together with China to strengthen dialogue and communication, and promote practical cooperation," he said. This was the first visit by the Japanese Foreign Minister to China since 2019. China and Japan have a long-festering dispute over uninhabited East China Sea islands controlled by Japan but claimed by China.

Israeli strikes in Syria's Homs province wound 5

Beirut (AP): Israeli airstrikes hit several sites in Syria's Homs province early Sunday, wounding five soldiers, Syrian state media reported. In Iran, state media reported that an Iranian adviser who was wounded in an Israeli strike on Friday died of his wounds.

Since the start of Syria's conflict in March 2011, Iran has been a main supporter of President Bashar Assad's government and has sent advisers since the early days of the war. Sunday's strike marked the ninth time Israel has struck targets in Syria since the beginning of the year, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition-linked war monitor. State news agency SANA, citing military sources, said the strikes targeted sites in the city of Homs and surround-

ing countryside. Syrian air defences intercepted the missiles and shot down some of them, it said. The observatory reported that the missiles targeted Syrian military sites and those of Iran-linked militias, including a research centre.

There was no immediate statement from Israel on the strikes. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not directly mention the strikes at a meeting of his Cabinet on Sunday, but said Israel was acting against foreign threats.

"We are exacting a high price from the regimes that support terror outside Israel's borders," he said.

Netanyahu said that a major domestic crisis over his government's plan to overhaul the judiciary has not affected Israel's ability to strike.

26 dead after tornadoes rake US

AP ■ WYNNE (US)

Storms that dropped possibly dozens of tornadoes killed at least 26 people in small towns and big cities across the South and Midwest, tearing a path through the Arkansas capital, collapsing the roof of a packed concert venue in Illinois, and stunning people throughout the damage's scope.

Confirmed or suspected tornadoes in at least eight states destroyed homes and businesses, splintered trees and laid waste to neighbourhoods across a broad swath of the country. The dead included at least nine in one Tennessee county, four in the small town of Wynne, Arkansas, three in Sullivan, Indiana, and four in Illinois. Other deaths from the storms that hit Friday night into Saturday were reported in Alabama and Mississippi, along with one near Little Rock, Arkansas, where city officials said more than 2,600 buildings were in a tornado's path.

Residents of Wynne, a community of about 8,000



Storms that dropped possibly dozens of tornadoes killed multiple people in small towns and big cities across the South and Midwest, tearing a path through the Arkansas capital, collapsing the roof of a packed concert venue in Illinois, and stunning people throughout the region AP/PTI

people 50 miles (80 kilometres) west of Memphis, Tennessee, woke Saturday to find the high school's roof shredded and its windows blown out. Huge trees lay on the ground, their stumps reduced to nubs. Broken walls, windows and roofs pocked homes and businesses. Debris

lay scattered inside the shells of homes and on lawns: clothing, insulation, toys, splintered furniture, a pickup truck with its windows shattered.

Ashley Macmillan said she, her husband and their children huddled with their dogs in a small bathroom as a tor-

nado passed, "praying and saying goodbye to each other, because we thought we were dead." A falling tree seriously damaged their home, but they were unhurt. "We could feel the house shaking, we could hear loud noises, dishes rattling. And then it just got calm," she

said. Recovery was already underway, with workers using chainsaws and bulldozers to clear the area and utility crews restoring power. Nine people died in Tennessee's McNairy County, east of Memphis, according to Patrick Sheehan, director of the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency.

"The majority of the damage has been done to homes and residential areas," said David Leckner, the mayor of Adamsville. Gov. Bill Lee drove to the county Saturday to tour the destruction and comfort residents. He said the storm capped the "worst" week of his time as governor, coming days after a school shooting in Nashville that killed six people including a family friend whose funeral he and his wife, Maria, attended earlier in the day.

"It's terrible what has happened in this community, this county, this state," Lee said. "But it looks like your community has done what Tennessee communities do, and that is rally and respond."

4 Indians among 8 dead in bid to enter US from Canada

PTI ■ TORONTO

Canadian police have named two of the eight people, including four Indians, whose bodies were found in a marshland area along the US-Canada border, amid an investigation into the circumstances of their deaths. Bodies of eight persons were recovered last week from the marsh on the riverbank near Akwesasne, a community which straddles Quebec, Ontario and New York state. Police say the deceased — believed to be two families of Indian and Romanian descent — were trying to cross into the US from Canada. Among them were two children under the age of three, both Canadian citizens.

On Saturday, police said that four Indian nationals, who they believed were a family attempting to cross into the US, have not been identified. Citing a source with the police in India, the CBC News reported that at least three of them are family members from Gujarat.

The source said the family members include a man in his 50s and a woman and man in their 20s. The age and gender of the fourth Indian national is unknown at this time, the report said. The identities of other people recovered of Indian descent have not been released, pending identification and notification of next of kin, the Montreal Gazette newspaper reported. "The circumstances of their deaths continue to be investigated," the paper added. "However, it is known that these families were attempting to enter the United States illegally from Canada," Akwesasne Mohawk Police said.

Akwesasne officials have named two family members of Romanian descent — including a man holding his two children's passports — who were among eight bodies recovered from the St. Lawrence River, near the Quebec-Ontario border. "One man has been identified as 28-year-old Florin Iordache. Police said he had two Canadian pas-

ports in his possession — one for his two-year-old child and another for his one-year-old infant whose bodies were recovered," the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) reported.

"One woman — Florin's wife and the children's mother — has also been identified as 28-year-old Cristina (Monalisa) Zenaia Iordache," the report said, quoting the Akwesasne Mohawk Police Service statement. Police found the bodies of five adults and one infant in the marshland on Friday. Another infant and an adult woman were located later. One of the children was a Canadian citizen. 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. "Our hearts are with the families of these victims as we try to work through our own grief for precious lives lost in our territory."

New York, city of Trump's dreams, delivers his comeuppance

AP ■ NEW YORK

His name has been plastered on this city's tabloids, bolted to its buildings and cemented to a special breed of brash New York confidence. Now, with Donald Trump due to return to the place that put him on the map, the city he loved is poised to deliver his comeuppance. Rejected by its voters, ostracised by its protesters and now rebuked by its jurors, the people of New York have one more thing to splash Trump's name on: Indictment No. 71543-23.

"He wanted to be in Manhattan. He loved Manhattan. He had a connection to Manhattan," says Barbara Res, a longtime employee of the former president who was a vice president at the Trump Organization. "I don't know that he has accepted it and I don't know that he

'Trump isn't first ex-Prez to face legal trouble'

New York (AP): Donald Trump has made history so many times. The first president without government or military experience. The first to be impeached twice. The first to aggressively challenge the certification of his successor. Now, he adds another: Even as he hopes to return to the White House in 2025, he is the first former president to be indicted. The latest line crossed by Trump challenges again the aura of the American presidency, nurtured in the infallibility of George Washington but made human over and over, through scandals born of greed and the abuse of power, corruption and naivete, sex and lies about sex. Trump is hardly the first president, in or out of office, to face legal trouble. In 1974, Richard Nixon may well have avoided criminal charges on obstruction of justice or bribery, related to the Watergate scandal, only because President Gerald Ford pardoned him just weeks after Nixon resigned the presidency. Bill Clinton's law license in his native Arkansas was suspended for five years after he reached a deal with prosecutors in 2001, at the end of his second term, over allegations that he lied under oath about his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

believes it, but New York turned on him."

None of Trump's romances have lasted longer than his

courtship of New York. No place else could match his blend of ostentatious and outlandish. His love of the city

going unrequited is Shakespearean enough, but Trump took it a step further, rising to the presidency only to become a hometown antihero. Trump was born and raised in Queens to a real estate developer father whose projects were largely in Queens and Brooklyn. But the younger Trump ached to cross the East River and make his name in Manhattan.

He gained a foothold with his transformation of the rundown Commodore Hotel into a glittering Grand Hyatt and ensured a spotlight on himself by appearing at the side of politicians and celebrities, popping up at Studio 54 and other hot spots and coaxing near-constant media coverage. By the greed-is-good 1980s, he was a New York fixture. And in a city that prides itself as the center of the world, Trump saw himself as king.

Bulgarians vote for fifth time in two years

Sofia (Bulgaria): Bulgarians were casting their ballots on Sunday in a general election — the fifth in two years — hoping to end political instability and help overcome the economic woes fueled by a raging war in Ukraine.

Polling stations opened at 7 am (0400 GMT). Initial exit poll results will be announced after polls close at 8 p.m. (1700 GMT) and preliminary results are expected on Monday.

Turnout is expected to be low due to voters' apathy and disillusionment with politicians, who have been repeatedly unable to cobble together a viable government coalition.

Moreover, in the last days before the vote, a wave of bomb threats targeted schools that are hosting polling stations for Sunday's election. Cybersecurity experts attributed the threats to hacker groups engaged in hybrid



Leader of We continue the Change party Kiril Petkov casts his vote at a polling station in Sofia on Sunday AP/PTI

attacks most likely linked to Russia and aimed at creating fear and reducing voter turnout. Traditionally, many Bulgarians share pro-Russia sentiments, which provides fertile soil for aggressive Kremlin propaganda in the poorest European Union member country. The latest opinion

polls suggest that chances for an immediate end to the political stalemate are low. Up to seven groups could muster the 4% threshold to enter a fragmented parliament where populist and pro-Russia parties are likely to increase their representation and promote radical and anti-EU politics. AP

Algerian court jails journalist for 5 years

AP ■ ALGIERS

A court in Algiers on Sunday sentenced a prominent journalist in the North African country to five years in prison with two years suspended and ordered his website and a radio station shut down based on the accusation that they threaten state security.

Ihsane El-Kadi was detained December 23 at his home in the capital, Algiers. He was accused of receiving foreign funding for his outlets.

He has remained in custody since his arrest and appeared in court on Sunday for the verdict, along with a collective of lawyers, defending him, journalists and family members. The court also ordered El-Kadi to pay a fine of 700,000 Algerian dinars (USD 5,200). The media company which owns El-Kadi's website and radio station was ordered dissolved, its assets seized, and a fine of one million Algerian dinars (USD 7,390) was slapped on its owners.

El-Kadi, who was active in Algeria's Hirak pro-democracy protest movement in 2019, appears to be the latest target of an encroaching crackdown on dissenting voices in the North African country.

His outlets were seen by many as outposts of free debate in Algerian media that provided journalists and opposition politicians a platform to point out contradictions or shortfalls in the government's policies.

The case against him is linked to the crowdfunding used to finance his media outlets, Maghreb Emergent and Webradio. The website and radio station operated in Algeria for years but did not have government recognition as official media organizations.

El-Kadi was accused of violating an article in the criminal code targeting anyone who receives funds aimed at "inciting acts susceptible to threaten state security," stability or Algeria's fundamental interests, his lawyers said before the verdict.

Burundi: 13 gold miners killed in flooded pits

Nairobi (Kenya): An official in Burundi says the bodies of 13 gold miners have been recovered from two pits in which they were trapped by flood water. Nicodème Ndahabonyimana, a district administrator in the northwestern province of Cibitoke, said the miners could not be saved after the pits collapsed on Friday night amid torrential rainfall. The bodies of two other miners who were missing and presumed dead have not been recovered, he said, urging artisanal miners to avoid pits during the rainy season. Police and other authorities on Saturday unsuccessfully tried to extract the miners from the pits, flooded with water from the overflowing Rugogo river.

Such mining disasters are frequently reported in Burundi's northwest and northeast, where people mining illegally prefer nighttime work to escape the oversight of authorities. AP

UK to offer public bodies free portraits of King Charles III

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK has unveiled about 8 million-pound funding for its public sector authorities to be able to apply for a free portrait of King Charles III as part of a scheme to celebrate the new reign after Queen Elizabeth II's death last year. The Cabinet Office said councils, courts, schools, police forces, fire and rescue services and other state-funded organisations will be among the public institutions across the length and breadth of the UK to be offered a new official portrait photograph of the 74-year-old monarch, funded by the UK taxpayers.

The announcement this weekend comes ahead of the celebrations planned for the King and Queen Consort Camilla's Coronation at Westminster Abbey in London on May 6. "We have entered a new reign in our history. Now as we unite in preparing for the



In this undated handout image released by Buckingham Palace on April 2, 2023, Britain's King Charles III and Prince William plant a tree to mark the end of The Queen's Green Canopy initiative in the gardens of Sandringham House, in Kings Lynn, England AP/PTI

splendour of the King's Coronation, these new portraits will serve as a visible reminder in buildings up and down the country of the nation's ultimate public servant," Cabinet Office minister Oliver Dowden said on Saturday.

in September last year, are currently on display in many public institutions, and the new portrait of Charles is intended to carry on that tradition.

"This scheme will allow thousands of public institutions across the UK to mark this defining moment in our nation's history with pride," said John Glen, Chief Secretary to the Treasury. "The Coronation of His Majesty the King is an opportunity for the whole country to unite, and these new portraits continue a very British tradition to celebrate this momentous occasion," he said.

The scheme will begin later this year following the Coronation and the release of the official portraits of the King by Buckingham Palace. Those public authorities who are eligible, a list to be released by the palace, will be offered the opportunity to request one free framed portrait once it is released.

Rebounding Pope Francis begins Palm Sunday Mass at Vatican

AP ■ VATICAN CITY

Pope Francis opened the celebration Mass in St. Peter's Square on Palm Sunday, presiding at his first ceremony after his hospital stay for bronchitis. On a cloudy morning, Francis wore a long, ivory-colored coat as he was driven into the square aboard a pope mobile. Ahead of him, scores of prelates and priests and tens of thousands of rank-and-file faithful clutching palm fronds or olive branches filled the square. Francis, 86, received antibiotics administered intravenously during his three-day stay. He last previous appearance on St. Peter's Square was for his regular Wednesday public audience. He was taken to Rome's Gemelli Policlinic that same day after feeling ill. Palm



Pope Francis arrives to celebrate the Palm Sunday's mass in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on Sunday AP

Sunday opens a heavy schedule of Holy Week appointments for him. At the start of the Mass, Francis took his place in a chair before the towering obelisk as a procession of cardinals in bright-red vestments and other faithful moved through the square. His voice sounded strong as he opened the cere-

mony, which observed Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem in the time leading up to his crucifixion, which Christians mark on Good Friday. The Vatican on Saturday said Francis would preside at the Holy Week ceremonies, which culminate with the Easter Sunday Mass in the square on April 9.

Pandemic pounds push 10k US Army soldiers into obesity

AP ■ WASHINGTON

After gaining 30 pounds during the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Daniel Murillo is finally getting back into fighting shape. Early pandemic lockdowns, endless hours on his laptop and heightened stress led Murillo, 27, to reach for cookies and chips in the barracks at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. Gyms were closed, organised exercise was out and Murillo's motivation to work out on his own was low. "I could notice it," said Murillo, who is 5 feet, 5 inches tall and weighed as much as 192 pounds. "The uniform was tighter." Murillo wasn't the only service member dealing with extra weight. New research found that obesity in the U.S. military surged during the pandemic. In the Army alone, nearly 10,000 active duty soldiers developed obesity between February 2019 and June 2021, pushing the rate to nearly a quarter of the troops studied. Increases were seen in the U.S. Navy and the Marines, too.

"The Army and the other services need to focus on how to bring the forces back to fitness," said Tracey Perez Koehlmoos, director of the Center for Health Services Research at the Uniformed Services University in Bethesda, Maryland, who led the research. Overweight and obese troops are more likely to be injured and less likely to endure the physical demands of their profession. The military loses more than 650,000 workdays each year because of extra weight and obesity-related health costs exceed USD 1.5 billion annually for current and former service members and their families, federal research shows.

More recent data won't be available until later this year, said Koehlmoos. But there's no sign that the trend is ending, underscoring longstanding concerns about the readiness of America's fighting forces.

Military leaders have been warning about the impact of obesity on the U.S. military for more than a decade, but the lingering pandemic effects highlight the need for urgent action, said retired



Marine Corps Brigadier General Stephen Cheney, who co-authored a recent report on the problem. "The numbers have not gotten better," Cheney said in a November webinar held by the American Security Project, a nonprofit think tank. "They are just getting worse and worse and worse."

In fiscal year 2022, the Army failed to make its recruiting goal for the first time, falling short by 15,000 recruits, or a quarter of the requirement. That's largely because three-quarters of Americans aged 17 to 24 are not eligible for military service for several rea-

sons, including extra weight. Being overweight is the biggest individual disqualifier, affecting more than 1 in 10 potential recruits, according to the report. "It is devastating. We have a dramatic national security problem," Cheney said.

Extra weight can make it difficult for service members to meet core fitness requirements, which differ depending on the military branch. In the Army, for instance, if soldiers can't pass the Army Combat Fitness Test, a recently updated measure of ability, it could result in probation or end their military careers. Koehlmoos and her team analysed medical records for all active duty Army soldiers in the Military Health System Data Repository, a comprehensive archive. They looked at two periods: before the pandemic, from February 2019 to January 2020, and during the crisis, from September 2020 to June 2021. They excluded soldiers without complete records in both periods and those who were pregnant in the year before or during the study.

Businesses can apply for revocation of GST registration cancellation by Jun 30 after paying taxes, penalty



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has allowed businesses, whose GST registrations were cancelled for non-filing of returns, to apply for revocation of the cancellation by June 30, after paying due taxes, interest and penalty.

The finance ministry has made amendments in the Central GST act specifying that businesses whose registration have been cancelled on or before December 31, 2022, and who have failed to apply

for revocation of cancellation within the specified period can do so by June 30, 2023. However, the application for revocation shall be filed only after furnishing the returns due up to the effective date of cancellation of registration and after payment of any amount due as tax, in terms of such returns, along with any amount payable towards interest, penalty and late fees.

No further extension of time period for filing application for revocation of cancel-

lation of registration shall be available in such cases, as per the finance ministry notification.

This would act as relief for taxpayers since as per law, Goods and Services Tax (GST) payers have only 30 days time to apply for revocation of registration cancellation order.

The GST council, comprising finance ministers of centre and states, had in its previous meeting in February, recommended that for such GST taxpayers whose registration has been cancelled for

non-filing of returns be given amnesty by allowing such persons to file application for revocation within a specified date.

Also, the finance ministry has capped the late fee at Rs 1,000 for the registered persons who fail to furnish the final return in Form GSTR-10 by the due date, provided they furnish the said returns by June 30, 2023.

GSTR-10 is a final return filed by those taxpayers who have decided to cancel its GST registration. As per law, this

return has to be filed within three months of opting for cancellation of registration.

Through another notification, the government has also rationalised late fee for delayed filing of annual return in Form GSTR-9 for FY 2022-23 onwards, for MSME tax payers with turnover up to Rs 20 crore.

Those with an aggregate turnover of up to Rs 5 crore in the said financial year would be charged late fee of Rs 50 per day, subject to a maximum of an amount calculated at 0.04 per cent of his turnover.

Registered persons having an aggregate turnover of between Rs 5 crore to Rs 20 crore in the said financial year would be liable to pay late fee of Rs 100 per day, subject to a maximum of an amount calculated at 0.04 per cent of his turnover.

AMRG & Associates Senior Partner Rajat Mohan said the government has unleashed several amnesty schemes for taxpayers nudging them to comply and file pending GST returns by June 30, 2023.

"Fair amnesty schemes have been provided to composition taxpayers, non-filers of final returns, and taxpayers whose GSTIN has been cancelled. These amnesty schemes would bring defaulting taxpayers into the mainstream and boost tax collections in the long-run," Mohan said.

India's foreign trade set to cross \$1.6 tr mark this fiscal, says GTRI report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's foreign trade is expected to cross the USD 1.6 trillion mark this fiscal despite global economic uncertainties, economic think tank GTRI said in a report.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said the USD 1.6 trillion would be about 48 per cent of India's nominal GDP of USD 3.4 trillion for the fiscal year ending March 2023.

The higher trade-to-GDP ratio also speaks of high trade openness which the country practices, GTRI co-founder Ajay Srivastava said.

According to their analysis of the data by the think tank, the growth rate in the exports of services would be higher than that of goods.

Higher growth rate in services exports compared to the outbound shipments of goods has improved overall performance of India's exports, he said.

India's overall exports of goods and services during April-March 2023 are estimated to reach USD 755 billion, exhibiting a positive growth of 11.6 per cent over the same period last year (April-March 2022).

The report said that India's merchandise exports during the fiscal are likely to increase by about 5 per cent to USD 442 billion. Similarly, services exports are estimated to grow by 22.6 per cent to USD 311.9 billion in 2022-23.

"India's foreign trade (exports and imports of merchandise and services) is estimated to cross USD 1.6 trillion or 48 per cent of India's nominal GDP of USD 3.4 trillion for the fiscal year ending March 2023," it added.

In 2021-22, India's foreign trade stood at USD 1.43 trillion.

Despite sectoral weaknesses, high trade figures underline the emergence of trade as an important component of the Indian economy, it said.

Key sectors which are expected to register healthy growth include basic and processed agriculture products; fish, meat, dairy; petroleum items, chemicals, diamonds, machinery and automobiles.



RBI likely to hike benchmark interest rate by 25 bps on Apr 6

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Under pressure to bring down retail inflation and keep pace with global peers, the Reserve Bank may go in for 25 basis points hike in benchmark interest rate, probably the last in the current monetary tightening cycle that began in May 2022, at the bi-monthly policy to be unveiled on Thursday.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has already increased the repo rate by a total of 250 basis points since May in a bid to contain inflation though it has continued to remain above the central bank's comfort zone of 6 per cent for most of the time.

The two key factors which the RBI Governor headed committee will deliberate intensely while firming up the next monetary policy are -- elevated retail inflation and the recent action taken by central banks of developed nations especially the US Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank and Bank of England.

Having remained below six per cent for two months (November and December 2022), the retail inflation breached the comfort zone warranting action by the Reserve Bank. The Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation was 6.52 per cent in January and 6.44 per cent in February. "I am leaning towards a further and final 0.25 percentage point hike in rates," Chief Economist at Axis Bank Saugata Bhattacharya recently told reporters, adding that the hike will tame the stubbornly high core inflation.

IL&FS Group makes interim distribution payout of ₹29,000 cr to secured creditors

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The IL&FS Group has so far paid back Rs 29,000 crore to the secured creditors, with the latest being an interim pay-out of Rs 920 crore for the Chenani Nashri Tunnelway, a subsidiary of IL&FS Transportation Network.

Chenani Nashri Tunnelway (CNTL) had a secured debt of around Rs 5,500 crore and the interim payout takes the total to Rs 6,019 crore in fiscal 2023.

The interim distribution has been made ahead of the proposed debt restructuring of CNTL and will be followed by the contemplated transfer of the company to the Invit, subject to the outcome of pending legal proceedings and requisite approvals, the company said in an exchange filing over the weekend.

The secured creditors of CNTL who have got the interim distribution include State Bank of India, Canara Bank, Union Bank of India, UCO Bank, Punjab National Bank, J&K Bank, Indian Bank, Indian Overseas Bank, Punjab & Sindh Bank and the asset reconstruction company Acre, the company said.

As of September 2022, the group had paid out Rs 27,000 crore.

IL&FS has already completed interim payout of Rs 623.3 crore for Rapid Metro Gurgaon Ltd (RMGL); Rs 1,273 crore for Rapid Metro Rail Gurgaon South Ltd (RMGSL); and Rs 3,200 crore in IL&FS Financial Services (IFIN) for eligible financial creditors.



Housing sales in Gurugram up 10% in Jan-Mar; sales down 23% in Noida-Greater Noida: Anarock

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi-NCR's prime residential market Gurugram saw a 10 per cent rise in housing sales during January-March, but demand fell in Noida and Greater Noida by 23 per cent, according to Anarock.

Market experts attributed the rise in sales in Gurugram to strong demand for luxury homes.

Sales dropped in Noida-Greater Noida due to lesser launches of new projects and lower demand amid increase in mortgage rates as well as property prices, they added.

Data from real estate consultant Anarock showed that housing sales in Gurugram went up 10 per cent to 9,750 units in January-March from 8,850 units in the year-ago period.

However, Noida-Greater Noida saw a 23 per cent decline in sales to 4,250 units from 5,495 units.

In the rest of Delhi-NCR market like Delhi and Ghaziabad, housing sales fell 30 per cent to 3,160 units from 4,490 units.

Overall in Delhi-NCR, housing sales fell to 17,160

units in January-March from 18,835 units in the year-ago period.

"The underlying cause for this drop seems to be the impacted earnings of the affordable segment home buyers which are yet to reach the pre-COVID levels," Anarock Research Head Prashant Thakur told PTI.

The demand for high-end and luxury units in Gurugram was strong in the first quarter of this calendar year, he added.

Realty firm Krisim Corporation MD Mohit Jain said the demand in Gurugram would remain buoyant.

"Bolstered by strategic location, a spate of infrastructural developments, and a burgeoning millennial population, Gurugram's residential market will continue to attract interests from both end-users and investors alike," Jain said.

Real estate consultant InvestoXpert MD Vishal Raheja said the sales were muted in Noida due to lack of new launches.

However, he hoped Noida-Greater Noida market to revive in this quarter with many launches in pipeline.

Fundraising via REITs, InvITs hits all-time low in FY23 on higher yields on debt, lack of new launches

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Higher yields on bonds, lack of new launches, limited availability and awareness among investors have made emerging investment instruments REITs and InvITs less attractive with fundraising hitting an all-time low at Rs 1,166 crore in 2022-23.

Going forward, a change in the tax rule on distributions classified as repayment could lead to a substantial increase in tax liability as it will be taxed as 'other income' in the hands

of the investor, making the instruments less attractive, Manavi Prabhu, Head Fixed Income, Anand Rathi Shares and Stock Brokers, said.

These assets will have to either generate better underlying yields or will have to reduce the price to ensure that they are more attractive than existing fixed-income investment options, he added.

According to data compiled by Prime Database.Com, a total of Rs 1,166 crore was mobilised by real estate investment trusts (REITs) and infra-



structure investment trusts (InvITs) together in 2022-23.

In comparison, Rs 13,841 crore was raised in 2021-22 through these avenues. Before

that, Rs 33,515 crore was mobilized in 2020-21. Besides, Rs 2,306 crore was collected in 2019-20, Rs 8,847 crore in 2018-19 and Rs 7,283 crore in 2017-18, Prime Database.Com noted.

Apart from listed investment instruments, funds were also raised by unlisted ones and according to Sebi data, a total of Rs 3,764 was raised by unlisted InvITs during April-February 2022-23 and no fund was garnered by listed and unlisted REITs during the period under review.

Petrol, diesel sales rise as agri season picks up



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's fuel demand rose in March as a pick-up in agricultural activity helped reverse a slowdown that was witnessed in the first half of the month, preliminary industry data showed on Sunday.

Fuel sales soared to the highest levels in February on the back of robust demand from the agriculture sector as well as transport picking up after the winter lull. But a seasonal slowdown kicked in during the first half of March.

However, there was a pick-up in the second half, which helped sales rise even month-on-month despite the high base of February. Petrol sales rose 5.1 per cent to 2.65 million tonne in March when compared with the same period of last year. Sales were up 3.4 per cent month-on-month, the data showed.

Diesel, the most consumed fuel in the country, saw demand rise by 2.1 per cent to 6.81 million tonne during March when compared with 6.67 million tonne sales in the same period a year back.

Month-on-month the demand was up 4.5 per cent. In the first half, petrol sales had fallen 1.4 per cent and diesel 10.2 per cent year-on-year. Consumption of petrol in March was 16.2 per cent more than COVID-marred March 2021 and almost 43 per cent more than in the same period of 2020.

Power consumption dips 0.74% to 128 bn units

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's power consumption dipped 0.74 per cent to 127.52 billion units (BU) in March this year for the first time in 31 months, according to government data.

The contraction in power consumption is mainly because of widespread rains due to western disturbances in the country and low temperature in March.

Last contraction in power consumption was recorded in August in 2020, when it declined by over two per cent to 109.21 BU, compared to 111.52 BU in August 2019.

Power consumption had slumped in 2020 due to the impact of lockdown restrictions imposed to curb the spread of deadly coronavirus.

Experts are hopeful that power consumption and demand would grow April onwards, due to further improvement in economic activities as well as rise in temperature.

In March 2022, power consumption stood at 128.47 billion units (BU), higher than the 120.63 BU in the same month of 2021, the data showed.

Electricity consumption in March 2020



stood at 98.95 BU. The peak power demand met stood at 170.16 GW in the pre-pandemic March 2020.

Experts are of the view that the power consumption and demand would log higher growth rates in coming months due to forecasts of higher temperature during this summer season compared to last year.

Peak power demand is expected to touch 229 GW during this summer season as per power ministry estimates.

Stop Vizag Steel Plant disinvestment, BRS leader KT Rama Rao writes to Centre



PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Demanding the Centre not to privatise RINL, the corporate identify of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant in Andhra Pradesh, BRS working president and Minister K T Rama Rao on Sunday wrote an open letter to the Union government requesting it to release Rs 5,000 crore to the steel maker.

KTR said the BRS party vehemently opposes the Centre's move to disinvest it and the party would extend sol-

idarity to the employees' unions who are opposing the disinvestment move.

"The Central government should allocate Rs 5,000 crore to the Vizag Steel Plant as required. There were instances of direct allocation of fund to the plant during the regimes of former Prime Ministers P V Narasimha Rao and Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The Centre can allot Rs 5,000 core as requested by the Vizag Steel Plant and take necessary equity from the company," Rao suggested in the letter.

COAI bats for industrial electricity tariff rates for telecom infra; says cost benefits will spur 5G deployments

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Telcos' body COAI has made a strong plea that the telecom sector be charged industrial tariffs for electricity and not commercial rates, and that power connections be expeditiously provided to telecom infrastructure facilities.

It said doing so was important given the essential nature of services and socio-economic benefits that accrue across multiple sectors from faster 5G deployments.

COAI - whose members include telecom operators like Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel and Vodafone Idea - has also batted for the sector to be provided uninterrupted 24x7 power supply.

"Telecom is an infrastructure industry, but we are still



being charged at commercial rates for power. So we don't get the benefits," SP Kochhar, Director General of Cellular Operators' Association of India (COAI) told PTI.

COAI has demanded that telecom infrastructure be charged at industrial and not commercial rates for electricity. Today, most states provide electricity on commercial tariff rate to telecom industry, placing it in one of the highest

brackets of power tariffs.

While telecom tariffs in India are the lowest, the electricity tariffs are being charged to the industry at substantially high rates under the commercial category, COAI rued.

In most states, the difference between an industrial electricity tariff category and a commercial electricity tariff is significant, leading to an avoidable burden to the overall telecom sector.

DVC sees 'highest' power generation in 75 years at 43.32 bn units in FY'23

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Damodar Valley Corporation achieved the "highest" power generation in its 75 years of existence, with a 6.5-per cent on-year rise in 2022-23 to 43.32 billion units, which mostly came from thermal sources, company officials said.

It also registered a robust 29 per cent growth in power sales to Rs 24,432 crore in 2022-23 over the preceding fiscal, aided by tariff revision and a central scheme, they said.

The plant load factor, too, stood at a record 74.23 per cent as against 68.96 per cent in the 2021-22 fiscal.

"In FY'23, billing was Rs 24,432 crore, which is higher by around Rs 5,461 crore over the previous year. Apart from higher generation, reg-

ulatory approvals of tariff revision and the Union government's Late Payment Surcharge (LPS) scheme also boosted revenue collection," DVC Chairman Ram Naresh Singh told PTI.

DVC Member Finance Arup Sarkar said billing had risen by about 29 per cent and realisation was higher by 23 per cent in FY'23 to Rs 23,413 crore.

The figures are subject to final auditing. Sarkar said DVC ensured uninterrupted power to the industry in 2022-23 despite input supply chain disruptions.

"Amid unprecedented demand, we maintained power supply by blending imported coal to ensure seamless power to the country, which was recouping from the Covid pandemic," he said.

Adani's Dhamra LNG terminal in Odisha receives 1st cargo, to start gas revolution in East

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Adani Group and French company TotalEnergies' newly built Rs 6,000 crore LNG import facility at Dhamra on the Odisha coast has received its first ever shipment of liquefied natural gas - a fuel that will be used to make steel, produce fertilizers and turned into CNG and cooking gas, helping change the landscape of Eastern India.

Qatari ship 'Milaha Ras Laffan' docked at Dhamra Port on April 1 morning, bringing in 2.6 trillion British thermal units of natural gas in its frozen form (LNG) which will be used to commission the facility, officials said.

VICTORY FOR VERSTAPPEN

Red Bull's Max beats Hamilton to win chaotic Australian Grand Prix

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Max Verstappen held off a revived Lewis Hamilton to steer the Red Bull to a chaotic win at the Australian Grand Prix on Sunday and tighten his grip on the world championship.

The world champion began from pole and despite being passed by Mercedes pair George Russell and Hamilton at the start, he kept his cool to win a race red flagged three times, with multiple crashes.

Hamilton came home second ahead of Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso, who made it three podiums from three this year.

"We had a very poor start, lap one I was careful as I had a lot to lose," said Dutchman Verstappen, who won the season-opening race in Bahrain and came second in Jeddah a fortnight ago.

"After that, the pace of the car was quick. With these red flags, I don't know, I don't really understand. It was a bit of a mess but we had good pace and we won, so that's important.

It was a disastrous day for Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, last year's winner, who spun out on the first lap, while Russell's car caught fire on lap 19 and his race too was over.

Victory was Verstappen's maiden win in Melbourne and Red Bull's first in Australia



since Sebastian Vettel's 2011 triumph.

His teammate and winner in Saudi Arabia Sergio Perez sliced through the field to come fifth after qualifying last due to brake issues, behind Lance Stroll in the other Aston Martin.

LATE DRAMA

The Red Bull triumph came despite unbelievable late drama that saw a red flag come out when Verstappen had a comfortable lead from Hamilton and Alonso with two laps left, meaning they had a

bunched restart for an all-out attack to the finish.

But it descended into chaos when Alonso was clipped by Ferrari's Carlos Sainz as they jostled for position and sent into a spin, which caused a flow on effect with multiple other cars coming to grief.

Verstappen claims Hamilton did not follow race rules

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Max Verstappen was Sunday over the moon at a maiden grand prix win in Australia, but claimed Lewis Hamilton failed to follow racing rules when passing him on the opening lap.

The Dutch Red Bull star took the chequered flag after a drama-filled showdown ahead of Mercedes' Hamilton for his second win of the year and first in Melbourne.

He started from pole but was passed by both George Russell and Hamilton as they jostled for position at the start.

His superior Red Bull power eventually brought

him home, but he had a dig at Hamilton nevertheless, complaining that the British seven-time world champion pushed him wide.

"From my side, I just tried to avoid the contact, it's quite clear on the rules what is allowed to do now on the outside, but clearly, it's not followed," he said.

"But that's OK. We had good pace, we passed (Hamilton) anyway but it's something for the next race to take into account."

A revived Hamilton, who finished second for his best result of the year, denied he was in the wrong.

"I thought it was pretty decent. He braked early and

I braked late. I was fully up to his side and I think we both left space for each other," he said.

"I didn't run him off the road, he didn't turn in on me. We didn't touch and that's racing."

Despite the early close call, Verstappen was able to regain the lead and once he did never looked threatened, despite the race being red flagged three times, including with two laps to go.

"Of course, I was very happy to get the win but I think the race towards the end was a bit of a mess with all the calls," he said of the red-flag issues. "It left a lot of drivers confused."

Sainz was given a five-second penalty, eventually finishing 12th, and the race stopped again.

It resumed after a lengthy delay for single lap behind a safety car -- with no overtaking allowed -- in the order of the previous start with only 12 cars left.

"I didn't expect to be second so I'm super grateful for it," said seven-time world champi-

on Hamilton.

"I'm driving as best I can and working as hard as I can but still, considering we've been down on performance and in straight pace, for us to be up there fighting with Aston is amazing."

On a fine day, Lando Norris in a McLaren was sixth, Niko Hulkenberg in the Haas seventh and rookie Oscar Piastri, in the other McLaren, an encouraging

eighth on his home circuit.

'ROLLERCOASTER OF EMOTIONS'

Alpha Romeo's Zhou Guanyu came ninth and AlphaTauri's Yuki Tsunoda 10th.

"We had a rollercoaster of emotions today, many things going on at the beginning, and the last half an hour," said Spanish veteran Alonso.

"Mercedes were very fast and Lewis did an incredible job -- I could not match the pace, but we'll take P3."

With Red Bull's undeniable speed advantage, it was crucial for Russell and Hamilton to get a strong start.

And they did just that with both scorching past a tentative Verstappen on the first corner before Leclerc spun at Turn 3 and the safety car came out.

They resumed with Hamilton pressing Russell before the safety car was deployed again on lap seven when Williams' Alexander Albon lost control, leaving gravel on the track, with a red flag eventually needed.

They got underway again from a standing start with Hamilton initially keeping Verstappen at bay.

But it only a matter of time before the Dutchman made his move and he surged into the lead on lap 12.

Once more a safety car was needed when Russell's car broke down, but Verstappen was in charge now and pulling clear.

By the halfway mark, he was seven seconds ahead with the battle seemingly all about who came second between Hamilton and Alonso.

But there was more drama when Kevin Magnussen lost the rear tyre of his Haas and the red flag came out again at the death.



Kvitova defeats Rybakina for 30th WTA title

AP ■ MIAMI

Petra Kvitova drew on all her experience to claim her 30th WTA singles title with a straight sets Miami Open victory over Elena Rybakina on Saturday.

Czech Kvitova, appearing in her first Miami final at the age of 33, triumphed 7-6 (16/14) 6-2 at Hard Rock Stadium, a victory which will return the two-time Wimbledon champion to the top 10 in the world rankings.

Rybakina came into the final on a career-best 13-match winning streak after winning the title at Indian Wells and was looking for the rare "Sunshine Double" of both WTA 1000 events.

Kvitova, who has now won 30 of 41 career finals, said the tie-break, which saw each player have five set points, had turned the contest in her direction.

"That was deciding the whole match for sure. I think it was the longest one I ever played in my life. Nothing is easy hanging out with Elena," she said.

"(She hit) so many aces at the beginning of the tie-break, I was like oh my God, I couldn't even play, so it was

a little difficult," added Kvitova, who now has nine WTA 1000 titles.

Rybakina is part of a talented new generation on the WTA Tour, along with world number one Iga Swiatek of Poland and Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka, but Kvitova said she had been able to draw on her greater experience.

"I think it has played a good role in my mind. I have played so many finals. I know I can play well in a final, no matter who I am facing. So mentally that was important for me to know that," she said.

"Of course this means a lot, that at my age I can still win big tournaments, the young ones are coming up all the time, it's tough to face them all the time, it's very tiring," added the Czech.

Kvitova won 78 percent of her service points (52 of 67) and finished with 29 winners to 14 unforced errors.

Rybakina fired 12 aces in the match and became the first player since Serena Williams at 2016 Wimbledon to hit 10 or more aces in six consecutive matches in a single tournament.

Sindhu loses in Madrid Spain Masters final

PTI ■ MADRID

Two-time Olympic medallist P V Sindhu of India was completely routed by Indonesia's Gregoria Mariska Tunjung in a lop-sided women's singles title clash at the Madrid Spain Masters Super 300 badminton tournament here on a mistake-filled Sunday.

Sindhu, who had slipped out of the elite top 10 after a series of early exits following her return from a five-month long injury lay-off, looked completely clueless during her 8-21 8-21 demolition at the hands of world number 12 Tunjung at Centro Deportivo Municipal Gallur.

Despite coming into the finals with a dominating 7-0 lead over the 23-year-old Indonesian, Sindhu looked a pale shadow of her old self as an opportunity to seal her first crown in eight months slipped out of her hands.

Nevertheless, the final finish will give her some confidence in a crucial year which will see the Paris Olympic qualification process start next month.

Sindhu, a former world champion, last won a title at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham in August 2022, while her last world tour crown came at the Singapore Open in July last year.

The 27-year-old from Hyderabad, who currently trains under Vidhi Chaudhary following the exit of Korea's Park Tae Sang, entered the final after coming into the tournament following a failed bid to defend her title at the Swiss Open.

During the week the Indian showed flashes of her brilliance as she didn't drop a game en route to the final.

However, on Sunday Sindhu couldn't match the tactical acumen and sharpness of Tunjung, a former junior world champion, who was part of the



Indonesian women's team which won the 2022 Asia Team Championships.

Tunjung tried to put the shuttle on Sindhu's forehand corner and then draw her to the net. It worked as the Indonesian led 5-1 early on.

Sindhu tried to make a comeback, narrowing the lead to 5-7 but Tunjung's precision and angled returns helped her to move to 10-5 before she sealed a five-point lead at the mid-game interval.

While Sindhu made a series of misjudgement at the backline, Tunjung stayed a step ahead with her deceptive strokes and ability to produce winners.

In a jiffy, the Indonesian was 19-6 up with another fabulous shot and grabbed 12 game points with another body smash after charging at the net.

Tunjung sealed the first game in just 11 minutes after Sindhu went to the net.

Sindhu was made to run around the court by Tunjung, who dictated the pace with her flurry of strokes.

The Indian had no answers to Tunjung's superior strokeplay as she lagged 1-6 in the second game. The one-way traffic continued as the Indonesian looked in sensational form with her smooth defensive skills.

Another wristy play at the net helped Tunjung to enter the break with a huge 11-3 lead.

The Indonesian resumed with another excellent winner.

Tunjung peppered Sindhu with some jaw-dropping angled returns to march to 16-4 in a flash before moving to 19-6.

The young Indonesian grabbed 12 championships point and sealed it in style when Sindhu committed another net error to record her maiden world tour title.

AP ■ MILAN

Inter Milan slumped to a 1-0 home defeat by Fiorentina on Saturday as Giacomo Bonaventura's second-half goal dealt a blow to their hopes of qualifying for the Champions League from Serie A.

Simone Inzaghi's Inter, who will face Benfica in this season's Champions League quarter-finals, remain in third place.

But they are only two points clear of AC Milan and fifth-placed Atalanta who saw off Cremonese 3-1 earlier Saturday, with Roma one point further behind ahead of their game against Sampdoria on Sunday.

Juventus notched a seventh win in eight league matches by beating Verona 1-0 to keep their Champions League bid alive despite a 15-point deduction.

Juve sit four points off the top four in seventh spot.

Inter, who won the title two seasons ago, have now lost three successive matches in

Inter suffer Fiorentina defeat, Juve boost top-four hopes



Serie A and four of their last five.

The hosts dominated for long periods at the San Siro but struggled to find a breakthrough as Henrikh

Mkhitarian and Romelu Lukaku both went close in the first half.

"I think the only thing we are missing is goals," Mkhitarian told DAZN.

"We haven't scored in three games and once again tonight we could've scored three or four in the first half alone to finish the game."

Inter should have forged ahead five minutes after the restart, but Lukaku somehow failed to get proper contact on Alessandro Bastoni's low cross while standing three yards out from an open net.

He was made to pay less than three minutes later, as Bonaventura nodded in from close range after Inter goalkeeper Andre Onana had saved Arthur Cabral's initial header.

Inter never seriously threatened an equaliser as Fiorentina extended their winning streak in the top flight to five games, moving within seven points of the European places.



Bayern put four past Dortmund

AP ■ MUNICH

Bayern Munich went back to the top of the Bundesliga on Saturday, defeating Borussia Dortmund 4-2 at home to give Thomas Tuchel a winning start as coach of the Bavarian giants.

A shocking own goal from Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel, as well as two trademark poacher's finishes from Thomas Mueller had Bayern 3-0 up by the 25th minute.

Kingsley Coman added a fourth shortly after half-time to send Bayern two points clear of the visitors despite two late consolation goals.

Dortmund came into the match in the unfamiliar position of first place, one point ahead of Bayern, who fired coach Julian Nagelsmann in favour of Tuchel last week.

Tuchel, who won a German Cup title during a two-year stint in charge of Dortmund, only had one training session with Bayern

but it was Kobel who gifted them a flying start in the 13th minute.

The 'keeper, who returned after a five-week injury layoff, charged out of his box to try and clear Dayot Upamecano's long pass, but could only make the faintest of contacts with the ball before watching helplessly as it rolled into the net.

Mueller scored from a corner just five minutes later and pounced when Kobel spilled Leroy Sane's shot five minutes after that.

Unlike earlier in the season when Dortmund came from 2-0 down to draw 2-2 at home with Bayern, there would be no miracle comeback this time around, with Coman sliding the ball under Kobel early in the second half.

Emre Can converted a consolation penalty after Serge Gnabry fouled Jude Bellingham in the box, while Dutch forward Donyell Malen added a second for Dortmund in the last minute of normal time.

Lewandowski hits brace in Barca cruise

AP ■ ELCHE

Robert Lewandowski struck twice as Barcelona moved 15 points clear at the top of La Liga with a comfortable 4-0 win at Elche on Saturday.

Earlier Lucas Ocampos and Youssef En-Nesyri struck to earn new Sevilla coach Jose Luis Mendilibar a crucial 2-0 victory over relegation rivals Cadiz in his first game in charge.

Barca's Polish forward Lewandowski has endured a small dip in form recently but was back to his lethal best to continue the Catalans' procession towards their first title since 2019.

Ansu Fati also scored for the first time since October in

the league and Ferran Torres rounded out the comfortable win, as Xavi was able to start some reserve players ahead of Wednesday's Copa del Rey semi-final clash with Real Madrid.

Elche, playing under new coach Sebastian Beccacece for the first time, are bottom of the table and never seemed likely to trouble the runaway league leaders. Champions Madrid, second, host Real Valladolid on Sunday.

"We'll see what Madrid do tomorrow, (but) if we win our games, we will be champions," Eric Garcia told Movistar.

"The coach told us all at the start of the season, everyone is important.

"We have an important



game on Wednesday and he was able to rest some players."

Barca coach Xavi took the chance to experiment by

deploying Garcia in Sergio Busquets' usual pivot role, and made several other changes to his usual side.

Torres and Fati started on the flanks, the latter having made headlines this week after his father complained about the Barca number 10's lack of minutes.

Lewandowski broke the deadlock after 20 minutes with his first goal in four league matches, scuffing a finish into the ground, with the ball looping over a defender and into the net.

The Polish international and the top goalscorer in the league grabbed his 16th and 17th strikes of the campaign -- he has 27 across all competitions.

Barcelona should have increased their lead in the first half but Lewandowski nodded over and Jules Kounde had an

effort cleared off the line.

Gavi pulled the strings and Garcia was solid in midfield as Barca secured a 20th clean sheet of the season in the top flight.

Fati stretched Barcelona's advantage 10 minutes into the second half, driving forward from the halfway line and drilling into the bottom corner.

Lewandowski pounced again after Gavi won the ball back for the third and then set up Torres, who drifted inside and slotted home the fourth.

Xavi handed midfielder Aleix Garrido, 19, his debut in the final stages.

Elche are 14 points from safety with 11 matches remaining.



RR crush Sunrisers by 72 runs

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Rajasthan Royals crushed Sunrisers Hyderabad by a massive 72-run margin in a one-sided match to start their 2023 Indian Premier League campaign on a winning note here on Sunday.

Half-centuries from openers Jos Buttler (54) and Yashasvi Jaiswal (54) and captain Sanju Samson (55) propelled Rajasthan Royals to a huge 203 for 5 batting first, and then Trent Boult (4-1-21-2) and Yuzvendra Chahal (4-0-17-4) ran through SRH's batting line-up, sharing six wickets between them to seal the game in emphatic style.

Chasing 204, SRH could manage a meagre 131 for 8 in 20 overs as Jason Holder, playing against his former franchise, returned with figures of 3-0-16-1 while Ravichandran Ashwin recorded 4-0-27-1.

Mayank Agarwal's 27 (23 balls, 3x4s) was the only bright spot for SRH in the top order while debutant Harry Brook, playing his first IPL game, managed 13 (21 balls, 1x4s) before he was cleaned up by Chahal.

Boult rocked SRH twice in the first over, cleaning up Abhishek Sharma (0) in the third ball and a brilliant catch on his left on first slip by Holder saw Rahul Tripathi walking back for a two-ball duck.

SRH never recovered from the poor start as rampant RR kept making inroads.

Brook fell in the seventh over while Holder got rid of Washington Sundar (1) in the ninth.

In the 10th over, while Ashwin had Glenn Phillips (8) caught by KM Asif, Chahal ended Agarwal's resistance in the next over to seal the game in favour of his side.

SRH's impact substitute Adbul Samad remained unbeaten on a run-a-ball 32 while RR's Navdeep Saini bowled two expensive overs for 34 runs, giving away 23 in the final over of the game.



Earlier, last year's runner-up side RR made a rollicking start, amassing 203 for five, ripping apart the Bhuvneshwar Kumar-led SRH in their own backyard to pile up season's highest total yet.

In the process, they also became the first team to breach the 200-run mark.

One of the consistent performers in the IPL for RR over the last few years, Buttler made a sensational start stroking his way to a 22-ball 54 with seven fours and three sixes until his assault was ended by SRH debutant Fazalhaq Farooqi.

Buttler started with a six off Bhuvneshwar in the third over and smacked four boundaries off T Natarajan in the fifth over to make it a perfect start for the

Royals, after SRH stand-in skipper Bhuvneshwar opted to bowl.

Buttler hit three more fours in the next over from Afghanistan's Farooqi before the left-armed cleaned him up to end the opening stand for 85 that came off just 35 balls.

RR's 85 for one was over all the sixth highest total for any team in the powerplay while it was also their highest score in the first six overs in IPL history.

The dismissal, however, had no effect on RR's charge as their skipper Samson teamed up with Jaiswal to add 54 runs for the second wicket, with the team crossing the 100-run mark in the eighth over.

RR, though, lost some

steam with regular fall of wickets and it took them the penultimate ball of the innings to get past the 200-mark.

If Buttler was ruthless at one end, Jaiswal successfully transitioned his domestic circuit form into making a strong opening to IPL 2023 with ease.

The left-handed batter brought up his overall fourth fifty in the competition, finishing at 54 off 37 balls with nine hits to the fence.

Farooqi got the second wicket for SRH in the 13th over with Abhishek Sharma taking a fine catch to dismiss Jaiswal. Overall, RR enjoyed a successful outing with the bat with captain Samson hitting 55 from 31 balls (3x4s, 4x6s).

If RR's top three made

merry with the bat, the young Devdutt Padikkal (2) had no answer to Umran Malik's 149.2 kmp/h thunderbolt -- in the first delivery of the 15th over -- that sent his off-stump flying.

Riyen Parag (7) perished early while Shimron Hetmyer (22 not out) from 16 balls, 1x4s, 1x6s) took them past 200.

With four of their six bowlers giving away more than 10 runs an over, SRH's stand-in captain for the game Bhuvneshwar (3-0-36-0) would certainly have revisited his decision to bowl first.

Natarajan finished with 3-0-23-2 while Farooqi took 2/41 from his four overs.

England's Adil Rashid was wicketless but bowled a controlled spell of 4-0-33-0.

Kohli, Faf steer RCB to victory against MI

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Virat Kohli and Faf du Plessis dished out a chasing master-class with a 148-run opening partnership as Royal Challengers Bangalore made a sensational start to their IPL campaign with a comprehensive eight-wicket demolition of Mumbai Indians here on Sunday.

Sent into bat, Tilak Varma smashed a scintillating 84 off 46 balls to single-handedly power MI to 171 for seven but Kohli and du Plessis made mockery of the total, slamming twin fifties as RCB romped home with as many as 22 balls to spare.

Chasing 172, Kohli (82 not out) and Du Plessis (73) produced an exhibition of sublime stroke-making, plundering 10 boundaries and as many maximums during their near flawless 89-ball stand.

After du Plessis perished in the 15th over, Kohli completed the job, hitting a four and six off Arshad Khan to knock off the winning runs to hand MI their 11th consecutive defeat in their first match of the season.

MI brought in Jason Behrendorff in place of Suryakumar Yadav as their impact player but it didn't work as he and his new-ball partner Arshad was taken to the cleaners by Kohli and du Plessis, racking up 30 in three overs.

If Behrendorff was smacked for successive sixes by du Plessis, Kohli blasted a four and six off Jofra Archer after being dropped by the bowler in the first ball.

Veteran spinner Piyush Chawla was then introduced but du Plessis sent him across the extra cover, while Kohli pulled one across the mid-wicket off Archer as RCB scored 53 in six overs.

Cameron Green was then taken apart with du Plessis



hitting two fours and a maximum. The skipper repeated the treatment to Hrithik Shokeen with two maximums to reach his fifty. Kohli then whacked Chawla over long-on to bring up the team hundred before reaching his individual fifty in the 12th over.

Jason Behrendorff bled 16 runs in the next with du Plessis cracking a six and a four. Kohli then pulled Archer over deep square leg as runs kept coming thick and fast.

MI picked up du Plessis and Dinesh Kartik (0) in the 16th over but it was too late as Glenn Maxwell (12 not out off 3 balls) and Kohli finished off things in style.

Earlier, MI had a poor start but Varma, coming off a successful last season, held the innings together with a sensational knock.

RCB bowlers had reduced MI to 20 for three in 5.2 overs but Varma added 50 and 48 with Nehal Wadhwa (21) and Arshad Khan (15 not out) for the fifth and eighth wickets respectively.

The 20-year-old decorated his knock with nine boundaries and four sixes.

Ishan Kishan smashed two fours before being removed by Mohammed Siraj with an outswinger, while Cameron Green was dismissed by Reece Topley, who

took his first IPL wicket.

Rohit got a life when Siraj and Dinesh Kartik collided while going for the catch in the fifth over. However, the India skipper couldn't capitalise as Akash Deep induced an edge to reduce MI to 20 for 3 in 5.2 overs.

Varma then came to bat and slammed a big hit over long-on to take MI to 29 for three in the powerplay.

In the eighth over, Topley left the field after suffering a shoulder injury while diving to stop a boundary off Varma's bat.

Suryakumar Yadav, who has been in poor form, too perished after a start, hitting straight to Shahbaz Ahmed.

However, Varma continued to bat with confidence, reverse-sweeping Michael Bracewell for a four before hitting a six and four off Maxwell as 16 runs came off the 12th over. Wadhwa produced back-to-back maximums off Karn Sharma but the bowler had him caught by Kohli as MI slumped to 99 for five. There was lot of expectations from Tim David but Karn Sharma cleaned him up when he tried to go for a big hit. Varma clobbered Harshal for two sixes and a four in the last over as 48 runs came in last 17 balls.



GT's Williamson ruled out of IPL

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Kane Williamson, the Gujarat Titans batter, has been ruled out of the Indian Premier League owing to a knee injury, the franchise said on Sunday.

The New Zealand batting mainstay sustained the injury during the season opener against Chennai Super Kings here last Friday.

Williamson sustained the injury to his right knee while attempting a catch during the opening match at the Narendra Modi Stadium.

"It is sad to lose Kane to injury so early in the tournament. We wish him a speedy recovery, with the hope of seeing him in action very soon," said GT's director of cricket, Vikram Solanki, in a press release.

head home to New Zealand for further assessment, the defending champions said in the press release.

Gujarat Titans will finalise a replacement for the right-handed batter and an announcement will be made in due course.

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.

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.

Back in their den, Chennai eye first win against LSG

PTI ■ CHENNAI

After losing their opening match, Chennai Super Kings will return to their den -- the MA Chidambaram stadium -- for the first home match of the season against Lucknow Super Giants here on Monday and aim to pick up a win.

When Mahendra Singh Dhoni leads his team here, the four-time champion will, without a doubt, receive a rapturous welcome as CSK return to the Chepauk after nearly four years.

Despite a superb knock from the classy Ruturaj Gaikwad, the rest of the batters could not capitalise and help CSK post a big total. The team's fans will be hoping that the strong batting line-up rises to the occasion.

Gaikwad toyed with the Gujarat Titans bowlers and made batting look easy. His exit slowed things down and CSK could only make a modest score, which was chased down by the defending champions.

England superstar Ben Stokes, bought for Rs 16.25 crore, would be eager to show his worth in the team's opening home game and set the pace for the long season ahead.

If the batters' inability to force the pace in the middle overs is a cause for concern, the



bowling could be a bigger problem.

The Titans batting line-up could not be restricted and skipper Dhoni would be expecting an improved show from the bowlers.

Dhoni, who uncorked a couple of big hits against Josh Little in Ahmedabad, would be hoping the batters do better and don't leave much for him at the

fag end. He would be looking to open the points tally in front of an adoring Chepauk crowd but that would require a hugely improved performance.

The comforting factor for CSK would be the return to familiar conditions at the Chidambaram stadium, where the spinners are expected to have a big say as seen in the India-

Australia third ODI played here 10 days ago.

Ravindra Jadeja and Mitchell Santner did not have much of an impact in the season opener, and they will be hoping to step up in Monday's game.

Also, CSK could play an additional spinner in the XI. With Sri Lankan spinner Maheesh Theekshana not available for the team's first three games, it would be interesting to see who is picked to bolster the spin bowling department.

Coach Stephen Fleming said after the defeat to the Titans that the team was a "bit match underdone" and CSK would be expected to pick up steam as the tournament progresses.

Up against the four-time champions are the KL Rahul-led LSG, who must have been buoyed by the comprehensive win over Delhi Capitals on Saturday night.

Kyle Mayers launched a furious assault at the top for the Super Giants and his performance would be crucial on a wicket not so conducive for over-the-top aggression.

Skipper Rahul, who has been under scrutiny in recent times for an extended run of below-par scores, Nicholas Pooras and Marcus Stoinis would be the other key batters for LSG.



Fielding was really sloppy, bowlers gave away far too many sixes: Ponting

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Delhi Capitals chief coach Chris Ponting expressed his extreme displeasure with the "really sloppy" fielding and poor execution by his bowlers in the team's 50-run defeat to Lucknow Super Giants in an IPL match here.

Delhi Capitals bowlers gave away 16 sixes and spilled the catch of LSG opener Kyle Mayers, as the team, led by David Warner, had a disappointing start to their 2023 season. Mayers' 73 off 38 balls studded with seven sixes was the cornerstone of LSG's massive 193 for six. Player of the Match Mark Wood then bowled a fiery spell, returning figures of 5/14, as DC were restricted to 143 for nine.

Ponting, the former Australian skipper, added LSG

scored more runs than he expected, chiefly because of the profligacy of his bowlers.

"To be totally honest, I think they (LSG) got more runs than we probably expected. Our fielding after the first four overs was really sloppy, a couple of chances went down, misfields," said Ponting in the post-match press conference.

"One of the chances that went down was (that of) Mayers. He went on a run after that, which put us behind in the game a little bit," conceded Ponting.

"The thing with giving chances in IPL cricket, giving very good players a second opportunity (can be catastrophic). And he (Mayers) cashed in pretty much from that moment. He hit everything on the middle. He attacked our spin, which he played really well.

Sri Lanka beat NZ in Super Over in 1st T20I

AP ■ AUCKLAND

Sri Lanka won the first T20I in a Super Over on Sunday after New Zealand tailender Ish Sodhi hit a six from the last ball of the 20th over to send the match into a tiebreaker.

The Sri Lankans made an imposing 196-5 batting first and New Zealand came to the last regular over needing 13 runs to win, six to tie.

Sodhi averages 9.6 in T20Is and had the huge responsibility of facing the last ball from Sri Lanka captain Dasun Shanaka, who had bowled an outstanding over.



The delivery was full and angled into leg stump; Sodhi, with a swooping motion of bat, hoisted it over midwicket and

into the stand for six, lifting New Zealand to 196-8 and sending the match to the Super Over.

New Zealand chose Daryl

Mitchell, its top-scorer with 66, Jimmy Neesham and Mark Chapman as its batters while Sri Lanka called on Maheesh Theekshana to bowl. Neesham was also one of its chosen batters when it lost to England in the World Cup final at Lord's four years ago.

Mitchell took a single from the first ball, the second was a wide and Neesham was out to the third ball. Chapman hit a two, then a four and was bowled from the last ball as New Zealand managed only 8-2.

Kusal Mendis and Charith Asalanka were Sri Lanka's champions, chosen to bat and Jimmy

Neesham to bowl. Asalanka was its top scorer with 67 from 41 balls which included six sixes, making him the ideal man for the Super Over.

Mendis took a single from the first ball, then Asalanka clubbed a six which passed through Chapman's hands on the boundary. Asalanka ramped the next ball to Sri Lanka reached 11-0 to clinch the a thrilling win. In an additional dramatic note, the match ended in light rain. "It was a very nervous game and very exciting," Asalanka said. "The two teams were playing very nicely and at the end it was our day.

I think I have shown my worth: Mayers

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Lucknow Super Giants new recruit Kyle Mayers says he has "shown his worth" after firing the opening salvo for his team with a scintillating 38-ball 73 in his very first IPL outing.

His blazing knock set the platform for LSG's formidable total of 193 for six against Delhi Capitals on Saturday, before English speedster Mark Wood (5/14) blew away the opposition batters with his express pace at the Ekana International Cricket Stadium.

I did that," Mayers told reporters after his exploits on debut.

Included in the absence of South African star Quinton de Kock, the left-hander from Barbados was slow to start with, but opened up to launch a brutal assault once the Delhi Capitals introduced spin.

"It was a new surface. None of our teammates knew how this surface would play. We try to assess as quickly as possible. It was a slow start as we were trying to understand how the